

CUE

Technical Theatre Review 23

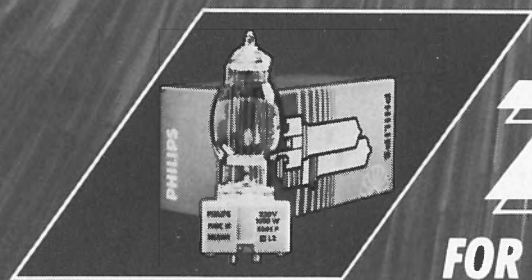
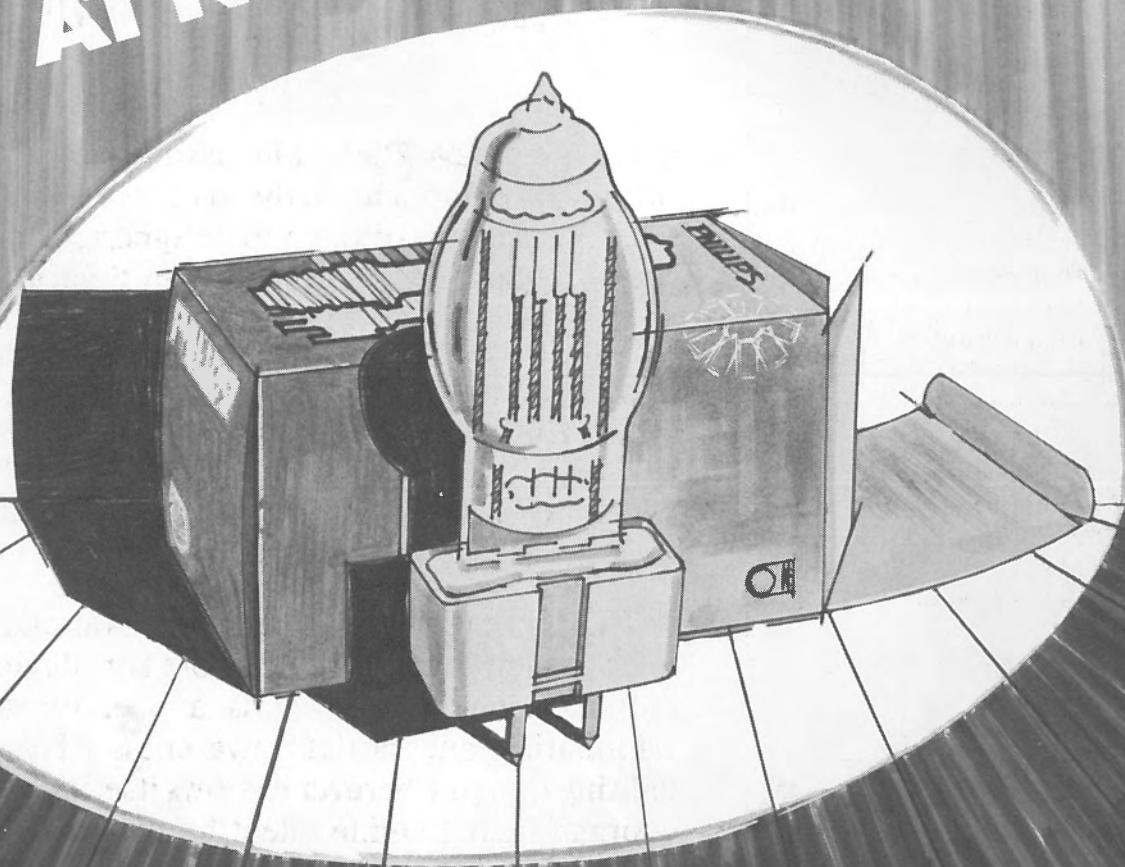
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John Blundall has done more than anyone to achieve a high regard and international respect for the British puppet theatre. In this issue he discusses his experiments in performances accompanied by live orchestra and singers. Our cover picture shows his two puppet characters of great charm and individuality for Mozart's pastoral story of *Bastien and Bastienne*.

CONTENTS

Music and the Puppet Theatre	
<i>John M. Blundall</i>	4
The Curtains!!! Conference	
<i>John Hutchinson</i>	6
A Transformation 'seen'	
<i>David Wilmore</i>	8
Stage Design	
<i>David Fingleton</i>	11
Television Lighting Training	12
A Theatrical Tourist in Belgium	
<i>Francis Reid</i>	13
Books	15
The New Tyne Theatre	
<i>Iain Mackintosh</i>	16
Heading Towards New Horizons	
<i>Anthony McCall</i>	17
Putting the Clock Back	
<i>Iain Mackintosh</i>	20
British Theatre Designs for PQ83	23
Product News	23
Between Cues	24

Cue is an independent magazine published bi-monthly by Twynam Publishing Ltd.

Available on subscription
UK £10.50 per annum (6 issues)
Europe and Overseas £13.00

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James Twynam (Managing)
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Jeremy Twynam

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

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The patronage of subsidy

On another page David Fingleton observes that it is the subsidised companies in the main who can afford to attract the services of our top designers, among them of course a small and select group of lighting designers.

Now this state of affairs is not only one more way in which commercial theatre is disadvantaged in competing for audiences; more importantly it means that opportunities for new talent to reach the big time are fewer if these subsidies are only used to chase the same well-known scenographers.

This is not to decry those designers already at the top, or as criticism of administrators for playing safe with public money. Rather it is a plea for a more discriminating and critical awareness of good set and lighting design wherever it shows itself. And then to encourage such genuine talent by making accessible the more creatively and financially rewarding commissions which subsidy makes possible. Although the artistic significance and validity of the scenographers work is not always determined by the means available to the theatre, just a little judicious patronage goes a long way to bringing out that enterprising spirit which every management must want for his performance.

Music and the Puppet Theatre

JOHN M. BLUNDALL

In the United Kingdom as in many other countries the puppet theatre is the theatre of the child. In Asia and the Far East the audience for the puppet play consists of adults. The puppet theatre provides an important means of preserving the international heritage of folk and fairytale, a means of communicating the finest ideas and ideals of mankind and has, historically, been fundamental in preserving oral traditions and transmitting news and religious and other teachings. In other words the puppet theatre is a fundamental classroom for art and social education.

Puppets are the direct descendents of a great and noble family of images – images made in the likeness of gods and heroes – images fundamental to a tradition responsible for the development of mankind and the theatre. A theatre of symbol and metaphor, a theatre which uses abstract and symbolic forms to produce a unique and sophisticated form of theatrical expression which is the synthesis of the applied arts, music, literature and a whole range of theatrical skills and disciplines. A theatre of great imaginative qualities where the impossible is made possible, and the improbable made probable, with relative simplicity and ease.

The puppet theatre is a unique relationship between pictorial representation, acting style and musical expression, the acting style governed by the technique and technology of the puppet. The puppet theatre has often

been referred to as the designers' theatre. The designer in the puppet theatre must visualise the gestures and general movement of the puppet and the production. The puppet forces the actor to follow a system of movement, movement dictated by the design style, the construction of the puppet, and the materials from which it is made. The puppet performance has to be approached from the visual point of view; the laws of aesthetics which govern the fine arts govern the puppet theatre, and the close collaboration between the principal creators in the puppet theatre is essential to create a total unity. An ideal situation exists where a true aesthetic harmony is created by one individual designing, constructing and painting puppets and set-

tings, and directing the work.

In many parts of the world dance and the puppet theatre are the two major growth areas in theatrical expression, both animation theatre, both graphic and poetic. Throughout the history of the puppet theatre music has played an important part, certain forms now termed "classical puppet theatre" are totally reliant on musical accompaniment. The Javanese, Balinese, Japanese Bunraku and the Chinese puppet play rely on instrumental and vocal forms. There have been and still are notable instances where important composers have created works to be performed by puppets. Haydn wrote puppet operas for performances in the puppet theatre of the Prince of



John Blundall's front cloth for Nutcracker



La Boîte a Joujoux, performance at the Queen Elizabeth Hall with Simon Rattle and the London Sinfonietta



A puppet called Petrushka

Esterhazy. Debussy, Smetana and others followed the tradition. Penderecki created exceptional works for puppet theatre in Poland, which included operas. There are countless other composers who created important works inspired by puppets and ideally suited to interpretation by puppets. The Hungarian National Puppet Theatre has established an international reputation for its productions which interpret the works of major composers like Bartok, Kodaly, Ligetti, Britten, Tchaikovsky and others, and there can be few, if any, more inspired productions of Stravinsky's *Petrushka* than the one presented by this theatre using puppets and masks.

There have been numerous examples of performances where singers, actors and musicians have performed below stage level, with their puppet counterparts performing above – this was frequently the case before the widespread availability of recorded music. The Salzburg Marionettes and Podrecca's Piccoli Theatre from Rome were two of the most notable puppet theatres to perform full-length operas with live accompaniment of singers and musicians – though their later international tours were undertaken with recorded versions. In the United States and New Zealand full-length operas are performed using puppets and commercial recordings. Normally the productions are realistic miniature versions of the real thing. There have also been a number of Variety and Vaudeville puppeteers who have presented operatic pieces, sometimes straight interpretations, sometimes parodies. There are also many puppeteers who rely on recordings of popular artistes to mime to, rarely giving much thought to imaginative interpretation of the pieces – the term "dolly wagglers" is often given to this type of performer. In the United States there are frequent performances given by puppeteers alongside full-scale orchestras, these usually consist of visual interpretations of symphonic works. In the United Kingdom there have also been performances of

musical works performed by puppets or those where puppets have been used alongside other performers. One recent example has been Harrison Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*.

Music and the puppet theatre are both forms of expression easily accessible to children and adults, and in both cases people of all ages derive pleasure and enlightenment from these forms in different ways according to their levels of perception. The adult audience and the puppet theatre is a subject of continuous discussion amongst puppeteers. There are few puppet theatres anywhere able to survive on a regular programme of work specially created for the adult audience, and where efforts are made to produce programmes for adults, the support is often very disappointing and rarely justifies the work and expense involved in creating the work. In recent years there has been a growing interest amongst students for puppet theatre on various levels, particularly for experimental forms of multi-media performance using masks and puppets of many types, there are also a growing number of students in art and theatre schools committing their efforts and ideas to the development of projects utilising puppets and masks, often with strong emphasis on powerful imagery and the use of improvised music and vocal accompaniment.

What is often noticeable is the high percentage of adults attending puppet performances for children who are not themselves accompanying children, suggesting that in puppet theatre the adult finds an unpretentious form of entertainment and expression which retains all the magic and imagination of the best creative theatre. Thus by combining music and puppets we have been able to develop a theatrical language capable of communicating an exceptional range of ideas which has created for puppet theatre a more critically aware audience.

A music theatre using puppets and masks, whilst appealing to adults is also educating

young audiences by consistently introducing them to imaginative musical interpretations.

Music theatre should not strain towards reality nor should it simply present puppet singers and dancers with music only as background. Rather should it translate musical works into the language of the puppet theatre, using the visual imagery of "singing pictures and coloured tunes" to symbolise and abstract the spirit and essence of characters and situations.

Opera is perhaps the least accessible form of theatre to a wide public. It has always had a reputation for attracting a certain class of audience for its live performance – though its audience for recorded performance is greater. Having watched the performance of opera in this country and abroad I have often been struck by the lack of truth and depth of character, as well as the lack of spirit and style which the music and subject matter demanded, this often led to the closing of eyes and allowing the imagination to take over.

Twenty-five years ago I made a first experiment by interpreting part of the opera *Pagliacci* using a stylised puppet and unit setting as part of a variety performance, it turned out to be one of the most successful items in our repertoire. Some fifteen years later we produced Mozart's *Bastien and Bastienne* using three-foot-high rod puppets, each one operated by three actors to each figure to the accompaniment of live singers and orchestra situated at the side of the stage. There was no attempt to create a miniature realistic version of a human version. The attempt was to preserve the spirit and style of Mozart's work, with simplicity and directness. The result was a resounding success with the audience of both children and adults, also with the music critics who remarked on the ability of the puppet to project a truth and depth of character not possible by the live singer. The puppet theatre is able to exaggerate poetic sentiment without becoming sentimental and create grotesque characters and situations without exaggerated caricature. An interesting result of this particular experiment was the enthusiasm of the singers and the orchestra for further experiment in this field.

In 1982 Simon Rattle asked us to collaborate with him on a performance of Debussy's *La Boîte à Joujou*. Debussy originally prepared the work for performance by children or puppets. Our interpretation of the piece remained faithful to Debussy's original concept, though it is possible to create a very interesting piece of social comment if the metaphor in Andre Helle's introduction is interpreted that way. The piece was finally performed as part of a concert given at the Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, and part of the South Bank Summer Music Festival, with fifty-two members of the London Sinfonietta. The performance was a great success with both the audience of mainly adults and the critics.

Other experiments have included several different interpretations of Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, Stravinsky's *Petrushka*, an interpretation which won international acclaim, an interpretation of Mozart's *Les*



John Blundall's interpretation of *The Two Magic Oxen* by Gyorgy Ranki

Petits Riens using the Narcissus myth, *The Two Magic Oxen* by the Hungarian composer Gyorgy Ranki. Ranki has composed much music for the puppet theatre, notably the Hungarian National Puppet Theatre where his musical version of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is a particular favourite. Ranki was a student of Kodaly and is one of the finest contemporary composers in Hungary, producing work for the opera, ballet, film, puppet theatre and other concert music. Ranki, like Stravinsky, produces music ideally suited for translation into the visual dream of the puppet theatre.

It is unlikely that many operas could be

successfully translated into work ideally suited to the puppet theatre, but there is little doubt that the puppet theatre offers great potential for exploitation in terms of a form of music theatre utilising a remarkable range of visual imagery to give added depth and meaning to a wide range of subject matter. There is unlimited scope for the collaboration of artists of all disciplines who would be prepared to give more serious consideration to a much neglected form of theatrical expression. There have been attempts to stage operas with puppets as a means of introducing children to opera. *Hansel and Gretel* is one subject attempted. It failed due to the

fact that all effort was made to produce a realistic miniature version of the full-scale work. The success of all future efforts to exploit the puppet and the mask in music theatre will rest in a proper interpretation of the work in puppet terms, be it an existing work or one to appear in the future. The unique language of the puppet theatre must be fully and carefully considered and intelligent use made of its true potential. If this is done the adult will respond and the child be helped in developing an early appreciation of opera and music theatre in all its forms, whether using puppets and masks or in more conventional presentations.

The Curtains!!! Conference

Leicester Polytechnic, 15th-16th April 1983

JOHN HUTCHINSON

When the advance publicity for the recent *Curtains!!!* Conference first appeared several months ago, it promised a three-day agenda with major contributions from many of the most eminent authorities working in the area of theatre conservation and restoration.

In addition, it was to serve as a national forum in order that the experience of notable theatre historians, consultants and architects might be made available for the benefit of others having a personal or professional interest in old theatres and their preservation.

It was particularly disappointing therefore to receive a letter late in March stating that owing to the small number of applications from those wishing to attend the first two days, the conference was to be greatly reduced in both its scope and the time allocated for contributions. To prune a three-day programme to a little less than a day and a half, and remove from the agenda several of the previously advertised speakers entailed a serious risk that the major themes which the conference was set up to discuss would no longer be dealt with in any coherent or purposeful fashion.

It is a tribute to the organisers that the conference survived this savage surgery and that those attending were able to participate in a rewarding and enjoyable event.

As the delegates gathered on the Friday afternoon, they were treated to a preliminary viewing of three exhibitions which are currently showing at the Polytechnic Gallery. In addition to the *Curtains!!!* exhibition, with which many may now be familiar, there was on display a regional review of theatres consisting of an extensive series of photographs by Edward Bottle together with a comprehensive display of models, photographs

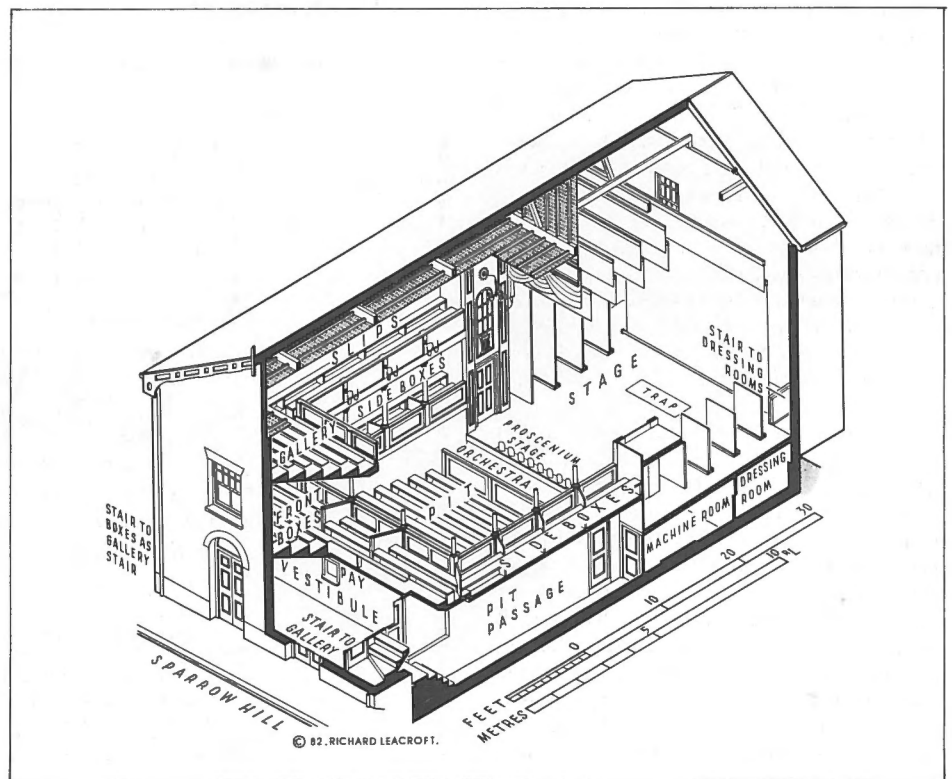
and projections of Leicestershire theatres prepared by Richard Leacroft, whose graphically incisive and highly detailed isometric projections of these buildings are essential study material for anyone wishing to learn about the development of English theatre. His drawing of the Sparrow Hill Theatre is illustrated.

For those who have the opportunity, this exhibition must be visited while it is still on

public view.

The remainder of the first day was taken up by a visit to the Theatre Royal, Nottingham, to see what turned out to be a lacklustre production by English Opera North of *Don Giovanni*. As this was a conference dealing with the roots of theatre tradition, the delegates were dispatched to seats in the back row of the gallery!

Before this main fare, there were two very



pleasant *hors d'oeuvres* in the shape of a visit to two former Nottingham music halls, and conducted tour of both the theatre and the new adjoining concert hall by Robin Derham, an associate of the architectural practice, Renton, Howard, Wood, Levin & Partners.

It is extraordinary that a music hall can still survive in a city centre for nearly three-quarters of a century after it fell into disuse. Such a building is now being restored in Nottingham and will shortly re-open as a nightclub. All the main features of the auditorium are still intact after many years of use as a warehouse and shop store, including elaborately decorated column capitals and balustrades.

If it were amazing to find one such survivor, credulity was strained to breaking point when the party was led through the nearby Yate's Wine Lodge where a second such hall remains almost unscathed, serving now as a busy, well-maintained wine bar.

The conference began business in earnest the following day. Owing to the reduction in the time allocation, the aim had been to compress as much as possible of the original programme into the one day now available.

The opening salvo – no other metaphor is appropriate – was fired by **Francis Reid**. Succinctly and wittily he depicted the decline of touring repertory theatre that has occurred over the last thirty years. The theatre buildings he saw as a contributory factor in this decline. To witness acting performances of comparable quality to much touring rep, the armchair in the living room was always available to watch *Crossroads* on the television, and this was greatly to be preferred to the poor sightlines, draughtiness and discomfort experienced by the patrons of the cheaper seats in many late Victorian and Edwardian theatres. A romantic view of the past would not conceal the unfortunate legacy of the fundamentally commercial motives which prompted the building of these theatres. Frank Matcham was not excluded from this general condemnation. Describing him as a "human computer", adept at packing the largest number of audience into the smallest possible space, Francis Reid went on to demand a critical evaluation of those theatres remaining and if the necessary improvements to sightlines, audience comfort and the acoustical clarity of the auditorium were not obtainable or only to be gained at the cost of taking great liberties with the original fabric, then the whole conservation exercise could be called into question.

After this contentious beginning, it was perhaps unfortunate that the next contribution was a delightful, though highly diversionary, tour round Buxton, conducted from the security of the conference room by **Derek Sugden**. By the time the audience had mentally returned to the specific question of theatre restoration (the Buxton tour ended with a series of slides showing the progress and end result of the refurbishment of the Buxton Opera House), the sharply posed questions of the first speaker had faded from the mind, and thereafter were never adequately dealt with.

Following the pleasant diversion, **Terence Rees** instigated a soaring flight into fantasy with a summary of the results of many hours of research in the Patents Office. There were few people in the audience, I suspect, who were aware that a patent existed for a machine which enabled elephants to perform somersaults. Even fewer will easily forget the self-supporting opera glasses, counter-weighted behind the ears of course, and having the additional security of being firmly lashed to the wearer's hat.

To many of the delegates, the prospect of hearing **Richard Leacroft** expound on the results of his exhaustive and painstaking research into local theatres, accompanied by slides of his own photographs and magnificent drawings, would in itself have been considered as worth the fee for the entire conference. In short, the assembly were treated to a lucid and detailed exposition of the heritage of Leicestershire theatre architecture which has now largely been destroyed, but at least is preserved for future generations in this wealth of pictorial material.

John Earl had what he himself admitted to be the unenviable task of following Richard Leacroft. He did so with a graphic account of an extraordinary and unique private theatre which is part of the mental hospital at Normansfield. The conservation problems encountered in this instance were the very opposite of those which are normally all too familiar. Whereas the majority of old theatres requiring restoration were disdained, neglected and underused, in this instance the building was highly regarded and in constant occupation for a wide range of activities. This meant that decorative panels and other enrichments were being worn away as a result of the intensity of use and the exuberance of the inmates.

Ian Mackintosh followed the tea interval with a tantalisingly brief illustrated commentary on some American theatres which he had visited over the past year.

The last word belonged to **David Wilmore** who despite having suffered the disastrous loss of over three-hundred irreplaceable slides depicting the restoration of the stage machinery at the Tyne Theatre, managed to bring home the extent and impact of this achievement by showing a video recording of part of the 1981 pantomime *Aladdin*, the first to be performed on the restored stage and featuring a traditional "transformation scene".

This particular labour must be considered one of the great successes of the recently awakened interest in theatre archaeology. Not only has a prime example of Victorian stagecraft been restored to working order, but unchallengeable proof has been provided that the general public will still respond to the presentation of live spectacle and fantasy despite the apparent appropriation of this genre by *ET* and *Star Wars*.

It has already been stated that the first contributor plunged headlong into a potentially controversial argument about uncritical conservation. This is hardly surprising. It is inevitable that this subject is bound to generate intense debate. The pity is that such debate was largely absent at this forum and this omission must be largely put down to lack of time.

Perhaps the *Curtains!!!* committee, having been entitled to draw a certain satisfaction from the success of this first conference, might be persuaded to sponsor a second following a similar one and a half-day format, but structured in a way that opens the proceedings to a much wider range of questioning and contributions from the delegates.

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A TRANSFORMATION 'SEEN'

Restoration of the wooden substage machinery at the Tyne Theatre and Opera House

DAVID WILMORE

On a cold, dark and damp December afternoon in 1977 I paid my first visit to the Tyne Theatre with a view to hiring the building for "University Theatricals". At that time the theatre had just been leased from Stoll-Moss by a charitable trust dedicated to renovating and running the building as a theatre once more. In 1919 it had been taken over by Oswald Stoll and run as a cinema until its closure in 1974 with the rather dubious double-bill of *World without Shame* and *Danish Bed and Board*. By 1977 the auditorium had been redecorated, and looked resplendent in its new colours of grey and gold as I entered for the first time on my "grand tour". From here we departed to the stage, where I noticed many trap doors upon the gimletted stage, while up in the darkness some 65 feet above our head was the grid. From here we left the stage, and descended a wooden staircase the treads of which were worn and the safety somewhat debatable. Passing through a door at the bottom we entered a dimly lit Mezzanine floor, where I beheld a veritable forest of indeterminable timbers. This first sight of the substage machinery will always be engraved on my memory, for although I was not exactly sure what I was looking at, my intuition told me that it was very important.

During the ensuing months I began to

research the history and development of Victorian timber stage machinery, and then, as if by chance during the early days of the summer of '79, I happened to mention to the theatre's chairman, Jack Dixon, that I was looking for some vacation work, and within a few days he asked me to come and supervise the renovation of the stage machinery.

The project was funded by the Manpower Services Commission and was initially for 12 months, although it actually lasted 2½ years. During the theatre's life as a cinema the stage, mezzanine floor and cellar had been completely out of use and the machinery had luckily been almost mothballed, and surrounded with the accumulated rubbish of almost 60 years. It was therefore very important to differentiate between rubbish and artefacts which would either be required for the restoration or placed into the theatre's archives. Consequently we embarked upon a meticulous examination process which was to continue for some 18 months in parallel with the actual restoration of the machinery. Apart from all the pieces of machinery which were recovered from the "dig" many other interesting artefacts were discovered – coins, a large collection of nineteenth-century beer bottles (empty!) which were presumably deposited in the cellar after having been

drained by thirsty stage carpenters (times don't change!). Also several programmes were found, and on one occasion human bones! This is attributable to the fact that the theatre was built both on the site of a burial ground and Hadrian's Wall.

The background history of the stage machinery at the theatre is poorly documented. *The Era*¹ on the opening of the theatre in September 1867 said, "The stage is also a marvel of completeness and ingenuity, and is furnished with all the latest and most approved stage accessories. The work of this part of the house has been done by Mr W. Day of Liverpool, and will add greatly to his renown. This gentleman has had great experience in this particular line of business, not the least important of his undertakings having been the laying down of the stage of the Royal Polytechnic London where he was engaged for five years". A month earlier *The Builder*² reported that "a new stage has been laid down at the Theatre Royal Newcastle by Mr Day of the Prince of Wales Theatre, Liverpool." Clearly Mr W. Day was very busy in Newcastle in 1867, and was undoubtedly a specialist in the art which we were now attempting to rediscover, that of the Victorian stage machinist.

An initial inspection of the stage showed that there were three hinged trap-doors located just upstage of the footlight trough, closely followed by a carpet cut which according to Sachs³ was "to enable the stage cloth or carpet upon the stage to be removed without any of the stage hands or flunkeys appearing before the audience."

Moving further upstage we come to two corner traps located in their traditional stage left and right positions. These are both flanked by staircase traps which allow the performer to walk from the mezzanine floor up onto the stage. Next we come to the grave trap located in a centre stage position. This is a platform which can be raised from mezzanine floor level to stage level by means of a winch which is assisted by counterweighting and a drum and shaft mechanism which provides mechanical advantage. After the grave trap there are a series of traps which stretch the full width of the proscenium opening (28 feet), the "cuts" and "bridges". They are arranged in a sequence of two cuts and one bridge, this being repeated four times and giving a total of eight cuts and four bridges. The cuts are designed to open up a gap in the stage which runs parallel to the proscenium opening and measures 28 ft 2 in long by 11 in

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wide. They allow the passage of scenery from cellar/mezzanine level to stage level, the scenery being fixed onto a mechanism called a sloat which moves up through the stage as the existing stage is drawn off under the wing space at either side. There are two sloats positioned in every cut and they are operated by means of a winch located on the stage right mezzanine floor.

The bridges are simply large platforms which can be lowered into the cellar, where scenery or actors can be loaded and winched up to stage level with the assistance of counterweights and a drum and shaft. The large 6-foot diameter drum has a metal cable wound around it which is attached to a winch located on the stage left mezzanine floor. Two cables, wound in contrary directions are fed off the shaft/spindle of the drum and travel via various pulleys to either end of the bridge platform. The counterweighting and mechanical advantage make it possible for one man to raise up a chorus line of girls to stage level as the floor sections are drawn off to either side under the fixed floor of the wings.

Although it was possible to identify all the machinery and how it worked, a large amount of restoration was necessary to the substage supports before the actual restoration of the machinery could begin. The structural problems had not been caused by wet-rot, dry-rot or wood-boring insects, but by wood-stealing carpenters! It seems that over the years the substage had been a spontaneous source of cheap timber for any work needing to be carried out in other parts of the theatre. In all, some 28 major structural 7 x 4 in timbers had been removed, and a host of smaller supports.

Once all the structural repairs had been carried out we could then begin on the restoration of the machinery itself, and at

this point several important decisions had to be made. Although we were carrying out a faithful historical restoration, we were also intending to use it as a piece of working machinery in a working theatre which was subject to H.M. Factory Inspectorate. Consequently, several modifications had to be made such as the addition of handrails and kicking-boards, built of timber, and still in keeping with the whole installation.

Although it was considered important to use the same style and techniques of carpentry to rebuild the machinery it was not essential nor desirable to use identical types of timber. The main body of the machinery was made of pitch pine, this would have been both expensive and difficult to obtain in the sizes required, and so we used an ordinary white pine which thus made it easy to differentiate from the redder pitch pine.

The restoration of the machinery began with the reconstruction of all the winches

which operated the bridges. These are located on the stage left area of the mezzanine floor and also incorporate a second roller which draws the stage left half of the floor sections off under the wings. A series of single roller winches were also built to draw off the stage right half of the bridge floor sections.

All four of the bridge platforms were in a poor condition. No 1 bridge (downstage) had been badly pillaged being the nearest to the cellar access ladders, the drum and shaft of No 2 bridge had collapsed, No 3 bridge had completely collapsed at one end and plunged into the cellar while the stage right end was still suspended at mezzanine level, and No 4 bridge required new foundations, and new bearings for the drum and shaft. Once this had all been repaired the machinery was beginning to "take shape" but our greatest problem was yet to come — the operation of the floor sections. Many of



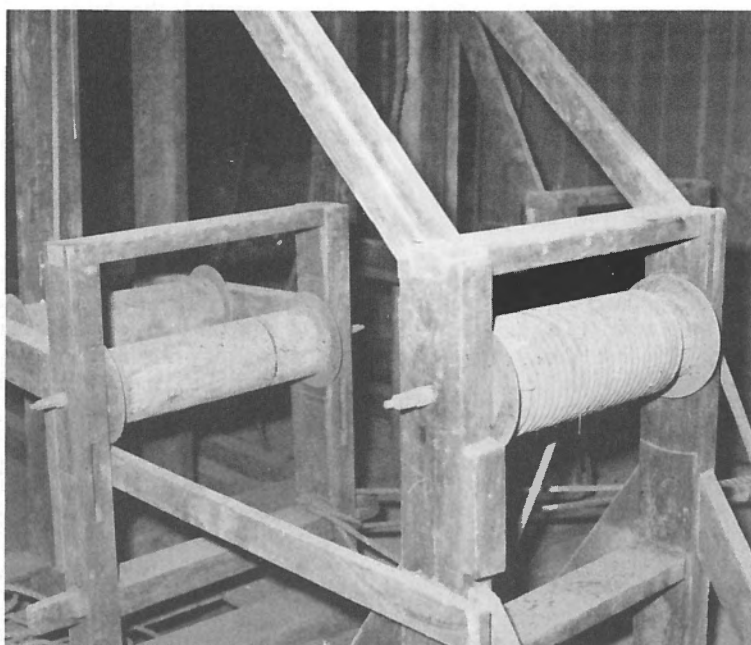
'Those magnificent men of the flying machines' — The Tyne Theatre fly staff 1901 (David Wilmore collection)



(Left) Bridge winches after restoration, stage left mezzanine floor (photo David Wilmore)



(Right) Sloat winches after restoration, stage right mezzanine floor (photo David Wilmore)



Bridge winches before restoration (photo Tyne & Wear County Council)



The No. 2 Bridge drum and shaft in collapsed state (photo Tyne & Wear County Council)

the paddles or levers which supported the floor sections of both the bridges and cuts were missing. The handles themselves were made of ash and had been turned on a lathe. As luck would have it we found an old carpenter who had his own lathe at home and so the reconstruction of the paddles was relatively easy, it was the sliding of the floor sections which caused the problem.

When all the floor sections were lifted out and the grime of over 60 years removed, they would not slide in their runners, and for a time we were puzzled. Eventually, however, we came to the conclusion that it was the result of two things. Firstly, the theatre had a very poor heating system which was only used on spasmodic occasions. Consequently the timber was expanding and contracting as well as warping with the constant changes in

temperature and humidity. Secondly, the upright beams of the the substage had taken on a cant towards the auditorium which was nipping all the floor sections.

This cant is something inherent in this particular type of wooden stage. M. J. Moynet⁴ in *L'Envers du Théâtre* said of the problem, "This system of wooden framework does not make a very stable whole since its elements cannot be connected by permanent bracing, because of the necessity of letting large objects pass through without encountering obstacles. This inconvenience has been remedied by means of a great number of moveable iron hooks (crochets) that are unhooked when a manoeuvre is made. These maintain, after a fashion, the spacing between the frames. I say after a fashion because the masses of people who

move on the floor all the time, the scenery mounted in the substage that temporarily prevents the use of hooks, and a great many other things always cause the whole arrangement to lean towards the auditorium."

The Tyne Theatre machinery possesses these hooks or crochets which are located on the joists at mezzanine level and just below stage level, but many were missing, and when copies were made and fixed in place the upright beams of the substage became rigid and the whole structure moved back towards the vertical. Yet it was still not as rigid as one would have liked. However, only three of the sixteen sloats were in position on the substage framework, a further ten were found in the cellar which meant that three were missing. It was necessary to build these completely from scratch, although we were able to find all the necessary metalwork from the cellar excavations. The presence of bolt holes on the substage joists told us where the sloats had originally been positioned and so it was fairly easy to reposition them. Having done this we found that the sloats gave the stage the additional support we had been looking for.

Having restored all the smaller traps the project was complete and we were left with the question, "would it all work?". Throughout the project many people had visited the theatre, some interested, some sceptical – with criticisms such as, "obsolete, a fire hazard, labour intensive" etc. etc. – but let's think about this – how many theatres can you name in Great Britain capable of bringing up through the stage a three-dimensional set, 14 ft in height, stretching the full width of the proscenium opening?

In the nineteenth century theatres had large fly-towers, where vast quantities of scenery could be flown, but they also had deep cellars from which came anything and everything. Perhaps we should ask ourselves why we don't make more use of substage machinery today. The Tyne Theatre substage machinery can once more summon up its demons from Hades, without having to summon a wizard of hydraulics and an even greater magician to assemble the necessary funds.

At present only half of the full potential has been realised for above the stage are gannies for grooves, a Victorian counterweight system, thunderun, drum and shaft mechanisms, a flying machine, and Act Drop mechanism and paint frame all awaiting restoration . . . but that's another story in itself!

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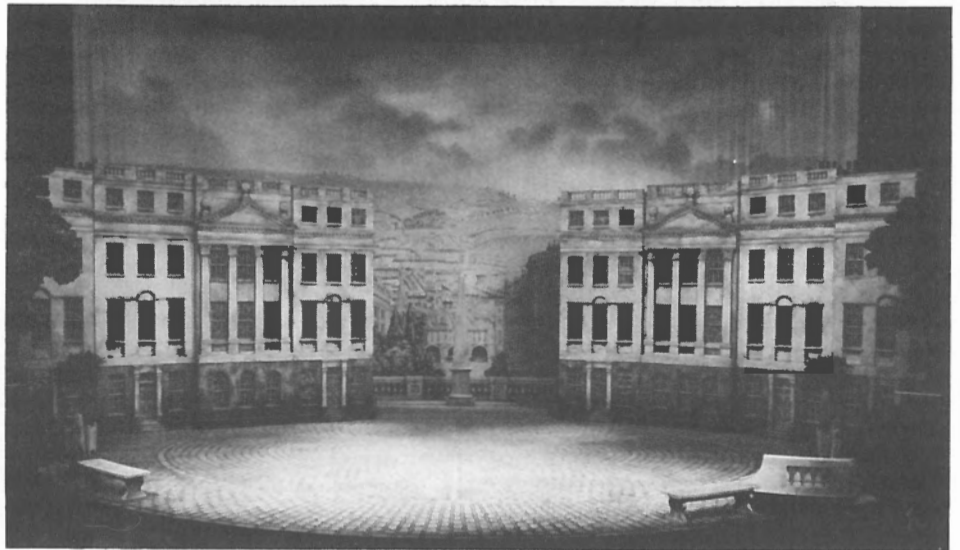
STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

It seems a sad fact of theatrical life that the most rewarding work in design is to be found in our subsidised companies. Aside from big West End musicals, commercial managements all too rarely have the budgets, or the courage, to offer really enterprising design, and it is thus with our national theatre, opera, and dance companies that designers have the opportunities to create the best work of which they are capable. There have in the past couple of months been examples of such work, as well as occasions when standards have fallen sadly far below that and left me with the feeling not only that opportunities had been missed, but also that public money had been wasted.

Design at its very best was to be found at the Coliseum in March with English National Opera's production of Dvorak's rarely performed opera *Rusalka*. Here director David Pountney and designer Stefanos Lazaridis had removed composer and librettist's treatment of the *Little Mermaid/On-dine* story from its usual setting of woods and water, and instead had set it as an adolescent dream, or pubescent fantasy, in a Victorian nursery. This gave Lazaridis the opportunity to present some of the most strikingly imaginative designs I have seen from him, or indeed any operatic production, for a long time. He relied on surrealism in general, and Magritte in particular, to give us a nursery which transformed by means of sliding flats, in an instant into the realm of a fairy prince. The moment when the nursery wall slides away to reveal a surrealist moonlit sky at the end of Act I had stunning theatricality and beauty, and another master stroke came in the second act when *Rusalka*'s isolation from the real world was expressed by placing her in an eerie perspex cube on the Coliseum's revolve. Lazaridis' superb stage pictures were fully complemented by Nick Chelton's highly expressive, utterly precise lighting to give us a memorable example of creative design which helped to put the work across, rather than merely decorating it.

Another example of such strength, though on a far smaller scale, came from Bob Crowley's designs for Kent Opera's production, by Adrian Noble, of *Don Giovanni*. The scheme here was to do it all by curtains, dress the characters in black and white, and to add the occasional set-piece, such as an unforgettable group of statuary for the graveyard scene, to achieve with the utmost economy some really memorable theatrical images. If only Crowley's other recent work in the theatre had been at this high level, but sadly I found his designs both for the National Theatre's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Taming of the Shrew* disappoint-



John Gunter's settings for John Wood's production of *The Rivals* quite simply recreated eighteenth-century Bath on stage at the National Theatre. (photo Zoë Dominic)

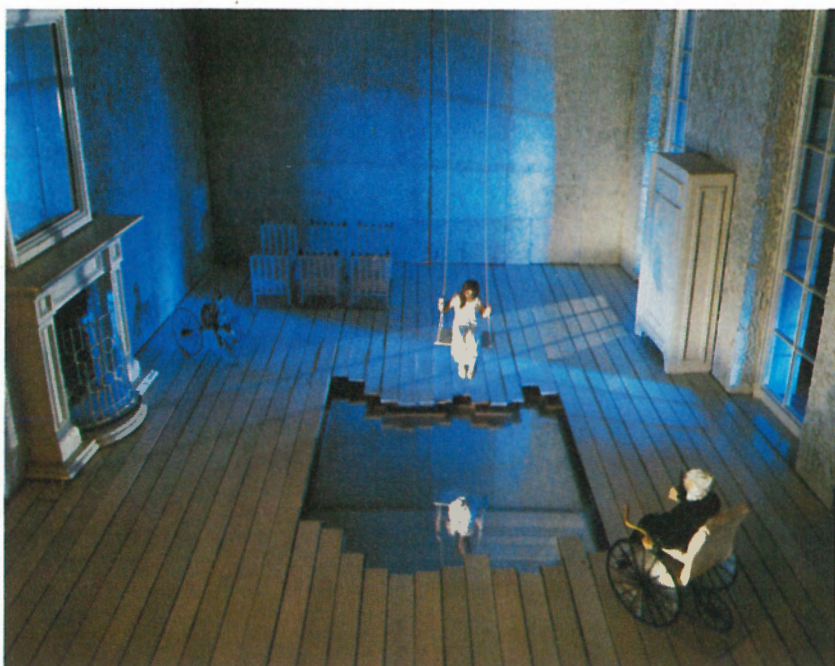
ing. The former had clearly not been helped by the National's bizarre decision to transfer it from the Cottesloe to the Lyttelton theatre, where, in an attempt to recreate the promenade atmosphere, the stage had been sunk to floor level so that we could neither see nor hear what was happening, and Crowley's somewhat vestigial settings and Deirdre Clancy's costumes were thus quite lost. At the Barbican the RSC's production of *The Shrew*, directed by Barry Kyle, was positively anarchic, and on a slatted wooden



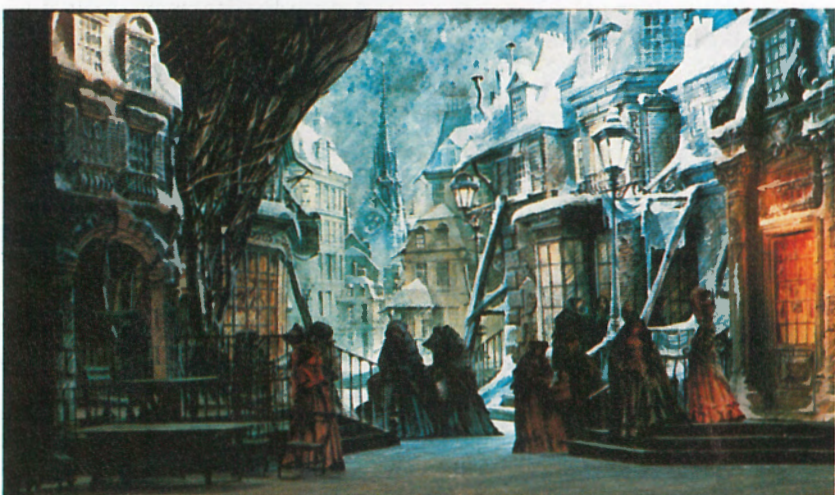
Bob Crowley's design for the graveyard scene in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* - a memorable theatrical image from Kent Opera's production (photo Roger de Wolf)

set Crowley offered a bewildering disunity of style. There was everything from Shakespearean mechanicals to Edwardian blazers and boaters, icecream sundaes, a bicycle made for four, and a pink fluffy kermit suspended above Bianca at her Latin lesson. It had the benefit of wit, I suppose, but could hardly be described as design. Nor could Chris Dyer's attempt to recreate the City of London in 1610 on the Barbican's stage for the RSC's production of Middleton and Dekker's *The Roaring Girl*. This again placed a fussy wooden set on the Barbican's open hexagonal stage, and loaded it with a mass of distracting detail in Barry Kyle's restless and raucous production. RSC design at its strongest was to be found in Terry Hands' production of *Much Ado About Nothing* for which Ralph Koltai had supplied an unabashedly high-tech, immaculately stylish, powerfully atmospheric setting. This was a uni-set plan using perspex screens on which shadowy trees were projected, and behind which a stylised sun set memorably over Messina in a haunting final scene. To complement the screens Koltai had added a mirrored floor which exquisitely reflected the opulent colours of Alexander Reid's precise mid-seventeenth century costumes. The contrast between these and the stylised setting was ably abetted by the lighting, by Hands himself and Clive Morris, and the total effect was to achieve an amazing intimacy within this large theatre.

Virtuoso design was also to be found on the National's huge Olivier stage, from John Gunter, who fully made amends for his messy and disorganised setting of *Lorenzaccio* by offering settings for John Wood's production of *The Rivals* which will remain long in my memory. Gunter quite simply



Stefanos Lazaridis' model of set for English National Opera production of Dvorak's Rusalka (photo Clive Barda)



John Pascoe's model of set for Northern Ireland Opera Trust's La Bohème at the Grand Opera House, Belfast.

recreated Sheridan's late eighteenth-century Bath upon the stage. There were colonnaded terraces with a beautifully modelled townscape behind them, and a glorious cyclorama of Bath's hills behind that. When an interior was required sections of the colonnade detached themselves, revolved, and offered exquisitely accurately furnished rooms through whose windows one could still see, in proper perspective, the townscape. This was truly virtuoso design, splendidly complemented by Bruce Snyder's precise and characterful costumes and Robert Bryan's highly realistic lighting plan. When one sees the Olivier used to this effect one appreciates what an asset the National Theatre can be.

Moving from London to Belfast, it was heartening to discover what a magnificent work of restoration has been done on Matcham's gloriously extravagant Grand Opera

House, which first opened in 1895. The orientally inspired auditorium, with its curling elephants' trunks, is not only extremely pretty but also has admirable sightlines and acoustics, both of which were put to excellent use in the Northern Ireland Opera Trust's admirable production of Puccini's *La Bohème*. This was both directed and designed by the extremely able young designer John Pascoe whose exquisitely painted settings had a beauty and authenticity which, combined with the architecture of the theatre itself, left the impression that one was watching the opera at the time of its composition: it had its première in Turin just six weeks after the Grand Opera House opened in Belfast. Scenery painting is in danger of becoming a lost art and it was heartening to find it in such confident and skilful hands. I only hope that this admirable production will now have the chance to be seen again elsewhere.

Television Lighting Training

There is a world-wide problem in training the television lighting director, by the very nature of the work. Few books are available and most training processes are unimaginative and not comprehensive.

Last September, in conjunction with the BBC Training Centre at Evesham, which has the best lighting training facilities in the world, the Society of Television Lighting Directors mounted an International Seminar – "Training the Lighting Director". Two seminars were run in parallel for practitioner and non-practitioner. One of the highlights of the weekend was the first lecture on Basic Lighting Techniques given by Alan Birmingham, then senior lecturer with the BBC.

Following approaches by several broadcasting organisations the society has now recorded a condensed version of Alan's lecture on video-cassette. After establishing the need for lighting by demonstrating the difference between illumination and lighting, Alan discusses hard/soft sources; keying angle, modelling, texture, technical requirements, sufficient light, colour temperature, contrast ratio, multi camera techniques; artistic considerations; basic portraiture, lighting the presenter.

These cassettes will be invaluable to those organisations unable to provide formal lighting training for the increasing number of staff called upon to light simple situations and will provide a solid grounding on which to build for those who wish to develop the craft further.

"An Introduction to Basic Television Lighting" is available on VHS, Beta or low-band U-matic formats on either PAL or NTSC systems from Clive Gulliver, 18 Cherrywood Gardens, Flackwell Heath, High Wycombe, Bucks. HP10 9AX, United Kingdom, at £150 for PAL and £175 for NTSC.

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A Theatric Tourist in Belgium

FRANCIS REID passes through Brussels

Thank you for your query regarding theatre museums in our country but we must, unfortunately, advise you that there are no such museums in any of our cities said a letter from the Belgian National Tourist Office. Guide books and tourist offices are not an infallible information source for specialist travellers of the theatric kind. But in the case of the Belgians the tourist office is very probably right – certainly close encounters with detailed Benelux museum literature does not produce any clues other than a collection started in 1902 by the Friends of the Monnaie and said to promise delights from the eighteenth century “to be visited by the audience in the entracte”. I read this on the morning after a recent performance and immediately regretted having spent the interval lazily enjoying the ambience of the foyers rather than in more actively applying the roving eye of a theatric sleuth. However, the reference is perhaps just to the theatrical paintings which are distributed throughout the public areas with a purpose that is ambient rather than archival.

With both French and Flemish influences – often independent, yet inevitably interacting – there is considerable potential for a National Theatre Museum. Walk around Brussels and look at the neglected facade of the *Theatre Royal Du Parc* or the *Konink-*

lijke Vlaamsche Schouwburg intriguingly clad in cast iron tiering: it is difficult to avoid suspecting a lack of awareness of the growing international realisation of the importance of theatres as a significant part of the architectural heritage. Whether the theatres are older (like another Theatre Royal incorporated in the elegant “galleries” shopping arcade) or younger (like the Theatre National within the towering Place Rogier), neither the interiors or exteriors are to be found in any of the current architectural books to be leafed through during an extended browse. Apply the picture postcard test: only the Monnaie is to be found.

The *Theatre Royal de la Monnaie* or *Koninklijke Muntshouwburg*, so called because it occupies the site of the former Royal Mint, was founded early in the eighteenth century and played a significant political role on August 25th 1830 when riots at the performance of Auber’s *Masaniello* helped to spark off the revolution from

which the modern state of Belgium was born. Its present bilingual status – carried meticulously on every fragment of its print – denotes its role as the national lyric theatre. The Monnaie is an elegant essay in old gold tiering and painted ceiling. The tiers are double layered in places so that there are never more than three rows, and with box partitions only waist high, there is an open feeling throughout these shallow tiers. The inscription of composers’ names demonstrates an interesting hierarchy – which is not at all reflected in this or any other house’s current repertoire. Gretry, as would be expected, has centre place of honour facing the stage. Wagner and Offenbach face each other across the pit from their respective stage box facias. Mozart and Meyerbeer rank next, with Rossini and Boieldieu completing the selected masters.

There is a splendid painted ceiling which I, of all people, once had the temerity to insult by dropping hemp lines through to hang a



The puppet master is dressed at the performances in white shirt, black waistcoat and checked cap: a live logo.



The Monnaie: Belgium's national lyric theatre in Brussels.



Brussels' Flemish Theatre has striking cast-iron balconies cantilevered out from its walls.

spot bar. This desecration was temporary — but essential since two-thirds of the set for *Man of la Mancha* (with Jacques Brel . . . and that was quite a performance!) was built in the orchestra pit. When I returned two years later to light an opera (*Poppea*) my arrival was viewed with some alarm: if there had been a conservationist's equivalent of 999 then I got the impression that it would have been dialled without hesitation. But the opera was set upstage and I coped with the houses then (1971) foh: known as Les Pattern, the total number did not reach ten a side, and their box position was a little high. However, a 23/N gives quite a lot of light at 110 volts. A dozen years later the foh positions have expanded but are still relatively discreet.

An Easter recital by Montserrat Caballe demonstrated just how well this largish house can provide the intimacy (shallow tiers again!) required for a solo recital.

I have never penetrated the interior of the Flemish Theatre and I would love to know the story behind the inscription high on the exterior wall at the stage end of the building *Magasins De L'Artillerie Et Du Genie*. Was it once the home of guns and engineers?

But to every theatric tourist passing through Brussels, I recommend the *Toone* marionette theatre as a must. The puppets, perhaps a little more than one-third size, are operated by a rod fixed to the head and only two strings — one to each arm. Yet their feet move with an abundance of character. This

tradition is a popular one with a fairground atmosphere, and dialogue conducted in a mixture of classical French and Brussels vernacular. It is a wonderful opportunity to experience the magic of 'rough theatre' at its best. Hands come into sight from time to time, and there tend to be operator shadows especially when the puppets sit. The audience, all adult, for Michel de Ghelderode's *La Passion* was totally held and their (I mean *our*) laughter was real and sympathetic. The performance is a revelation of what can be done with a stick, two strings and a voice. No actor could fail to learn something about character projection from the puppets at the Toone. The theatre's bar is a museum with puppets festooning the walls, and the stairs are so poster lined that the ascent is a pleasantly slow process.

What else? The schedules in *De Scene* indicate a lot of performance activity throughout the country. A look at the exterior of the Antwerp Opera makes me want to see inside and the Flemish Opera's productions, shared with Ghent and regularly listed in *Opera*, make me feel another ferry trip coming on.

And I really must follow up a one-line note that I made on visiting the Opera in Liege way back in 1961. I was then young enough to be, quite properly, more interested in the future than in the past. But following a description of the lighting installation, I wrote *Fantastic collection of stock scenery patched with 1890 playbills*.

Erte and the Folies-Bergere



Costume design for Mistinguett by Zig, c. 1930, in the exhibition *Erte and the Folies-Bergere* at Off Stage, 17 Chalk Farm Road, London NW1, 7 June to 3 July

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REIDing SHELF

One of the most productive areas of the Wagner industry has always been books — although the past winter has seen a rather interesting growth in film and television exposure for both the composer and his works. Much of the standard Wagner bookshelf is occupied by matters philosophical, and so Charles Osborne's production picture book will be much welcomed by those of us who are fascinated by the supreme visual challenge of the musical stage. **THE WORLD THEATRE OF WAGNER** looks at 150 years of Wagner productions, tracing the development of their staging in a series of drawings, paintings and photographs that illustrate the contribution of sets, costumes and lights from the earliest performances until today. Each opera has its own chapter, commencing with programme note stuff about the historical background to its composition and a plot summary which is remarkably concise — a bonus for my eye which rapidly becomes glazed when faced with the complexities of the average opera synopsis. The rest of the text discusses key productions, relating them to the development of staging techniques and including many quotes from contemporary commentators responding to what they saw. The text is all good background, but it is the pictures that make this book so essential for both the Wagnerite's coffee table and the scenographer's research library.

Another recent picture book performs a similar function for Richard Strauss with a chapter for each of his sixteen operas and two ballets. The author of **RICHARD STRAUSS. The Staging of His Operas and Ballets** is Rudolph Hartmann who has directed (or produced as they still say in the opera world) many many Strauss productions including the premiere's of the last two. Although the book's scope is perhaps a little limited by restricting the illustrations to mostly German and Austrian productions, Hartmann's viewpoint makes this book a must for anyone seeking an insight into what a director requires from his designer. In particular the captions often pithily summarise the degree to which a setting, in Hartmann's view, provides a successful visual response to the work. And the plot discussions take note of staging problems in a way that can only add to our appreciation of the Strauss operas, and the role of the director in realising them on the stage.

The last of the batch of books celebrating that 250 years in Covent Garden is **THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE** photographed by Clive Bournell and written by Colin Thubron. Whereas previous ROH books reviewed on this page have been concerned with history, this one is about today. With freedom of access to all corners of the house, Bournell has been able to record the work processes of manufacturing ballet and opera under conditions which would not be acceptable in most other factories. The rehearsal pictures are the familiar stuff of programme

books, and the style of the writing has a flavour of heightened sycophancy. Mildly interesting to read today but a record which will become increasingly fascinating with every passing year until, during the next century, it matures into an indispensable source.

SO YOU WANT TO WORK IN THEATRE? Then start by reading the ABTT's new A5 16-pager with this title. The booklet covers all jobs front and back, with indications of the range of available training including addresses to follow up. Every job is covered except performance but (Careers Advisers please note) this should not exempt potential performers from readership. I am constantly surprised at just how many young people, including those whose theatre commitment extends to being terminally stage struck, are unaware of the range of what has to be done and who does what. A clear concise primer. And FREE!

THE WORLD THEATRE OF WAGNER. A celebration of 150 years of Wagner Productions. Charles Osborne. Phaidon £25 (UK).

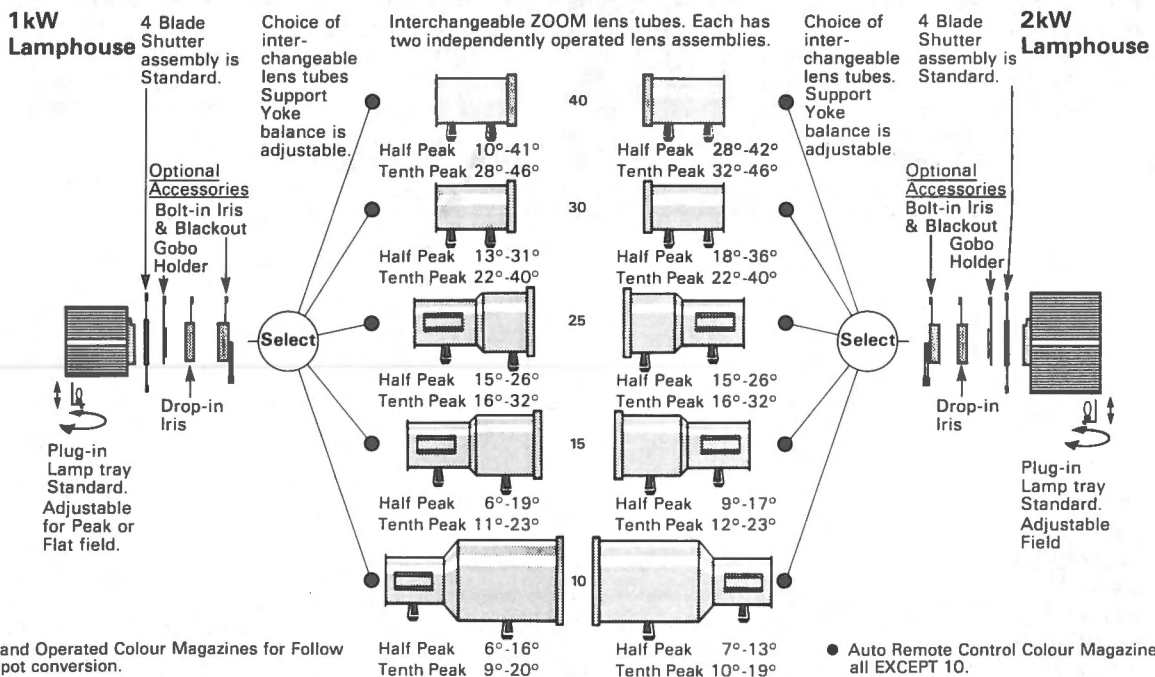
RICHARD STRAUSS. The Staging of His Operas and Ballets. Rudolph Hartmann. Phaidon £25 (UK).

THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE Covent Garden. Photographs by Clive Bournell (Picture Editor: Mia Stewart-Wilson) Text by Colin Thubron. With a Foreword by HRH The Prince of Wales. Hamish Hamilton. £20 (UK).

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The New Tyne Theatre Newcastle-upon-Tyne, 6 May 1983

IAN MACKINTOSH REPORTS

With a single performance theatre history was made. The Tyne Theatre (1867) is now re-established as one of the finest dozen theatres of Great Britain. "A bunch of amateurs" had demonstrated that tenacity and vision are the qualities that matter most in theatre management. They, the 400 amateur actors of the New Tyne Theatre Company had restored to use this great theatre and had staged an event which any properly trained arts administrator would have known to be impossible. The event had attracted over 1,200 people who had paid over £30,000 — prices from £15 at the back of the gods to £300 for a stage box. Tickets had been unavailable for months, sought after not by the Glyndbourne crowd but by a fiercely proud Geordie audience who had supported the 40 amateur productions staged in this theatre since it reopened in 1977. True Ted Heath had flown up from London plus a few others of us less grand southerners determined not to miss this event. True there was a generous sprinkling of grander middle class folk who are habitués of Newcastle's other theatre, the Theatre Royal, but whoever they were and however marvellously dressed this was not a Covent Garden audience. Collectively this was an audience of lovers of the musical theatre probably closer to a nineteenth-century European opera audience than anything else one would find today in Britain, always excepting the Alex Gibson supporters club of Glasgow in the early 'seventies.

A special event? Yes, this will be an event which will be told to every grandchild of those present for "they" had hired the world's greatest Italian tenor, Placido Domingo, to sing Caravadossi in a single performance of *Tosca*. But this was no old-fashioned star vehicle with third-class support. Everything else was planned to be up to the highest standard. Thus there was a pit full of the 60-strong Northern Symphonia conducted by Robin Stapleton. There was a first-class set and production hired from Welsh Opera and, on Domingo's advice, there was soprano Mara Zampieri as Tosca making her British debut. To complete the operatic picture there was even a last moment crisis. On the Wednesday the Scarpia, Silvano Carroli, had been taken ill and a substitute flown in less than 36 hours before the performance, Hungarian Laslistau Konya.

Meanwhile in the house itself there were new tabs and recovered seating to complete the French blue colour scheme of this exquisite four-tier opera house blessed with an acoustic rich enough for Verdi and yet of a

scale that allows a singer to enchant with a whisper. On the technical side there was even a new lighting control board (by Berkey) being christened on this night of nights. Everything except the Tyne Theatre's unique

stage machinery described elsewhere in this edition of CUE, was to be on show.

The miracle happened. Everything went off well. We might have been in one of the world's major mid-scale opera houses rather than in a recently reconstituted theatre run by amateurs. In Act I we breathed Italy and incense helped by production and the lads of the Newcastle Grammar School as much as by the principal singers. In Act II Mara Zampieri, both in her romantic duet with the tortured Caravadossi and in the erotic intensity of Scarpia's seduction, raised the temperature to a level not achieved since 1919 when the Tyne had closed as a theatre. The night was as much hers as it was Domingo's: she conquered us in Newcastle as she had conquered in La Scala and at the Vienna Staatsoper and will no doubt one day at Covent Garden. In Act III we wept. Then at the curtain calls we cheered, standing and stamping for seventeen calls in as many minutes. Properly the first of the bouquets was handed across the orchestra pit, musician to musician, not to Domingo but to Mara Zampieri: it was a single rose in an empty bottle of Newcastle Brown. Opera had been given to the people, everything had been paid for at its market rate for there was no charity here except for the owners giving their services in marshalling this extraordinary audience. Domingo received his fee of £8,000 for the performance and commensurately all other professionals were properly paid. And yet without a single penny of public funds or any artistic compromise the evening had broken even. The vision of the New Tyne Theatre Company Chairman, Peter Dixon, himself a charismatic musical actor, had been vindicated.

It was an extraordinary evening and I shall be telling my grandchildren. But apart from the excellence of the moment and the effect it will have on the lives of the people in that theatre a number of other matters had been raised. A provincial audience had paid the highest international prices for the highest international standards. Hopefully this could be the start not only of further operatic events of international stature but also an upheaval in the bureaucratic caution of the administrators of both subsidies and of theatre buildings. If the initiative of this "bunch of amateurs" allows a revival of theatrical opportunism on the great nineteenth-century scale (the sort of opportunism which built great theatres such as this) then Friday May 6th at the Tyne Theatre may turn out to have been an evening of historic importance for music theatre well beyond Newcastle.

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Heading Towards New Horizons

ANTHONY McCALL reports from Geneva

Peter Brook's latest production, *The Tragedy of Carmen*, is another departure from his past styles: not only has he turned large-scale opera into a chamber work, with a greatly strengthened and dramatized storyline, but it also marks a fresh step into the world of lyric theatre. Fresh for the lyric theatre certainly; and fresh for Peter Brook too, since his early Covent Garden and Met Opera productions of the 'fifties were hardly in the same vein. What could have been his reasons for such a move?

In 1978, Brook was paid a visit by the General Administrator-designate of the Paris Opera, Bernard Lefort. He had his misgivings, apparently, since he had imagined Lefort would suggest some kind of *fait accompli*, probably destined for large-scale theatre. However, Lefort recalls Brook's surprise when instead he suggested working in the Bouffes du Nord, Brook's own theatre in Pigalle, trying Janacek's *The House of the Dead* or Britten's *The Turn of the Screw*. Could he have time to reflect? Brook asked.

It was Bernard Lefort's turn to be surprised when Brook came back with the idea of staging *Carmen* — an opera he had already planned to revive himself in the traditional version. Seeing no real conflict though, since the Bouffes production would, of necessity, be a far more modest undertaking, they agreed to go ahead. Calling in their collaborators, Marius Constant for the music, Jean-Claude Carrière for the staging, they set to work — with the premonition, as Lefort put it, of "heading, from our first conversations, towards new horizons".

Brook and his Paris version of the Round House, the Bouffes du Nord (a former lyric theatre, last century), have been dear to a large number of followers for a dozen years now, and *The Tragedy of Carmen* was no ex-

ception. Indeed, it reached a new public, bringing, as it did, a new, "living" kind of opera, simpler and more direct, to audiences old and young alike. In achieving this, he has, in my view, won a remarkable battle.

The critics found it understandably hard to be precise enough in their *Hosannahs* to put their finger on just what he had achieved, although they wrote about all manner of wonders being achieved and of people holding their breath in their seats. A critic in *Le Point* (a kind of French *Newsweek*) got near: "In fashioning out of the most popular French opera in the world one and a half hours of pure enchantment, in tossing off scenes with a dazzling irreverence, in stripping naked the very soul of *Carmen* (going back beyond the libretto to the original book by Mérimée) with four singers, two old carpets, three jute sacks and a few knives, Brook has really produced the work of a magician".

Brook is on record as explaining his latest foray as follows. "For me, total theatre is a form of theatre which makes maximum use of the human potential that an actor represents. This is what we have been aiming to do all along in our work. And since that implies research into music, rhythms, the voice, in that sense, one can say that our theatre (Bouffes du Nord) has always been a lyrical theatre. Which is why, from the start of this research, the need was there to confront a type of theatre where the voice was of prime importance.

"All our theatre research is conducted from a basis of elementary themes, accessible to the greatest numbers of people: popular themes in the sense of being directly understandable rather than didactic".

Before taking a look at *The Tragedy of Carmen*, which has played for over a year in Paris before taking to the road for an eventual New York run (going via Grenoble, Lausanne and a season in Hamburg), it is worth while examining a few brief pointers to Brook's technique as well as his cast. He has rejected, once again, large-scale effects or designs that might distract from the immediacy of the performance. The emphasis is small in scale, and above all, personal. Two years were spent in searching out his final cast of ten singers, so we're told, before spending six months on their acting. They learned of the ease with which a gesture is made — in real life; the importance of movement; the essence of an emotion — and what that bespeaks. All this in the neutral territory of Brook's beloved Bouffes, away from neon lights and gaudy dress circle bars, away from agents and interviews.

The result of this careful, even painstaking work, is paradoxical. It often is with Brook. For his special talent is to simplify without

diminishing the original, to strip down without impoverishing. With *Carmen*, he shortened the perspective, by creating a small, more intimate chamber work, but he did not sacrifice the weight of it, or the depth. Is this perhaps, his secret? By joining together the imagination of his audience (by simple scenery and setting) with direct, lifelike performances, he discovers what seems to resemble a common ground between spectator and performer, where the story, instead of happening just to that actor, could . . . be happening to almost any one of us. Such is the straightforward, lifelike quality of the performance, and the auto-suggestive nature of the sets, that an everyday imagination is called for, not one of suspended disbelief, of *grand guignol* or circus sawdust. Brook has worked on Shakespeare (*Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Timon of Athens*, *The Tempest*, *Titus Andronicus*), Chekhov (*The Cherry Orchard*), Alfred Jarry (*Ubu*), Colin Turnbull (*The Ik*), all with his distinctive stamp. Now it is the turn of Prosper Mérimée, Georges Bizet, Meilhac, and Halévy, the librettists.

I caught the first night of the touring production's *The Tragedy of Carmen* in the Haute Savoie town of Annemasse, on the road to Mont Blanc. I had heard beforehand of the hassles with the local mayor, who was not happy with the idea of covering the shiny new parquet flooring with 22 tons of sand and gravel for "neutral, realistic effect" no matter whose production it was. And the theatre-in-the-round where it was staged turned the bleacher seating around three sides to wrap round the stage, then covered the parquet floor with plastic sheeting before bringing in the gravel-pit decor.

Remembering *The Ik* at London's Round House in the late 'seventies, where similar intimate seating arrangements were sought and sand featured strongly in setting the scene, I was prepared, quite mistakenly, for something along the same lines, but *en chantant*. What a surprise. When the lights came up, there was a 15-piece chamber orchestra in the wings, stage right — with kettle drums and percussion opposite, stage left, and a handful of performers in simple period costume, which, thanks to designer Chloé Obolensky, avoids looking crisp, but lived-in, rather. Here were the elements of a conventional production, but used sparingly and deliberately, with each detail playing its part. The staging, which had the collaboration of Maurice Bénichou, was apparently casual, but in reality, planned in great detail.

We first see a mysterious figure, a woman, seated on jute sacks, head hidden as she chants her spells and reads the future. Then in one clean gesture, the head is thrown back,

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and a striking young girl, Carmen, is revealed. A simple technique, but very effective. It reminds us that Carmen dabbled in witchcraft and could foretell her own future, indeed her own death at the hand of Don José. She is therefore fatalistic: if there is no avoiding the future, the present must be lived to the full. And she means to be free as a bird – free to think, free to love and free to come and go as life, or her whims, dictate. Her fight with Micaëla, whom she draws away from Don José's arms with her taunts of love for him, is quick, sudden, like a pair of cats, and frightening, when we notice that Carmen has drawn a knife. When the pair are separated, Micaëla has a bloody cut across her forehead. Another simple, strong moment; one cannot repress a feeling of shock. There are many more such moments, as fight scene turns to gentle embrace, and

from quarrelling to amorous seduction, with the different characters. One particularly striking piece of imagery takes place in the scene between Carmen and Escamillo, the toreador, at her friend's, Lillas Pastia, in whose den the male visitors are plied with drink before seeking Carmen's favours in an adjoining room. Escamillo kneels close to Carmen, by now in a reclining position, and sings her his famous Toreador song. He sings slowly, movingly, reliving his moments of daring and steel nerves in the bullring, which he says he is inspired to by the thought of her dark eyes, and her love. ("Toréador en garde, Toréador, toréador, Et songe bien oui songe en combattant, Qu'un œil noir te regarde, Et que l'amour t'attend . . ."). As he sings to her, he holds the orange she has passed him for his refreshment, and treating it as a symbol for the bull, he plunges his

knife into it, as if revelling in the danger of the ring, then when the mood of the song changes, the orange becomes a luscious fruit once again and Carmen greedily collects the heavy drops of juice he squeezes above her face. The orange, by now, is deeply impressed on our imaginations as a bull, which Escamillo has gored repeatedly in his demonstration of the proud, lone fights against his own nerves in the bullring, thus it comes as a considerable shock to struggle with the sight of Carmen drinking the "orange" juice, since to us it is now bood, the embodiment of the bullring. Another simple but strong dramatic shock.

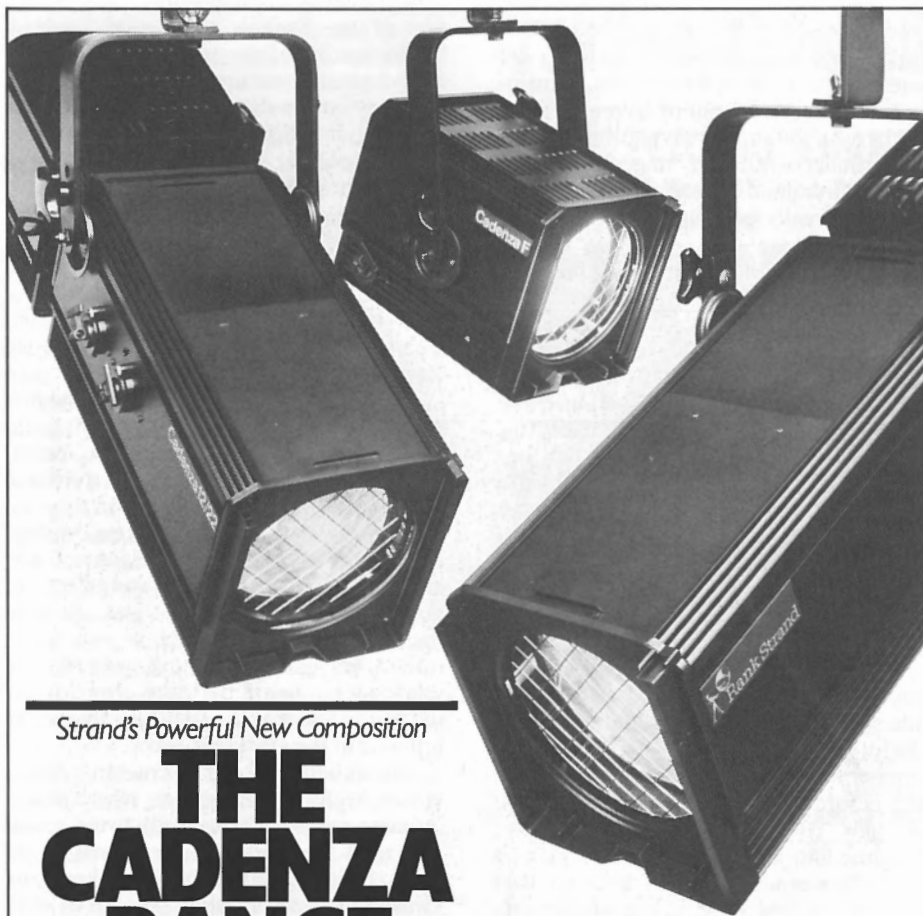
The production as a whole holds together. It holds together remarkably well considering the simple means employed. All the emphasis went on the performers; and though some were inevitably more appealing than others, there were no weak links. One would have forgiven the odd hiccup on the opening night of the tour, but no forgiveness was needed. The touring cast is not the same as the Paris one, but they exhibited an ease that comes only after long, careful rehearsal.

It seems to me that Brook derives his strength precisely from keeping things simple. This simplicity promotes ease of understanding; and the uncluttered visual appearance of the sets and the directness of his intimate productions gives the feeling that *real* people are living *real* experiences, almost in your living room. If a fight took place in your own home, you would remember it vividly for a long time. The same feeling remains when Brook has finished with you. *The Tragedy of Carmen* has several layers to the original story – like the complexity of Carmen's personality. Unless we can follow these complexities closely, her character, and hence her predicament, becomes mere theoretical issues, a "storyline" up on stage rather than shared hopes and fears.

A separate word of comment is deserved for the musical side of this production. A chamber orchestra of 15 players recreates astonishingly closely the feel of the original score for 60-piece orchestra, if with a more delicate shading, colour and intimacy. But that is fully to be expected of a cut-down orchestra. Curiously, although the evening is set in Spain, Bizet scored no guitars, no castanets or any other national (not to say clichéd) instrumentation, so as to give the work a wider canvas – not just limiting it to Spain and Spanish people and customs. Marius Constant, the arranger and conductor, went further still, and added kettle drums and other subtle shadings, to add touches of light and dark here and there, to change the colour of the music according to the plot's dictates. Such subtleties are once again more easily achieved in intimate, rather than operatic-scale settings, such as an opera house.

Finally, a look at the work that went into adapting *Carmen* into Brook's *The Tragedy of Carmen*, yields a plethora of insights into the task they faced.

The Brook production is closer to Mérimée's original story than to the Bizet opera, and seeks to bring out the elements



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most relevant to our times, according to him. Thus, Carmen is not a liberated woman, or a militant, or even just a sexual creature — she is an individual, first of all, a mixture of all three, and more things besides. She should be fascinating, complex, understandable, and allow each member of the audience to identify with certain aspects of her personality. She shouldn't conform to any *a priori* labels or definitions, as Brook put it.

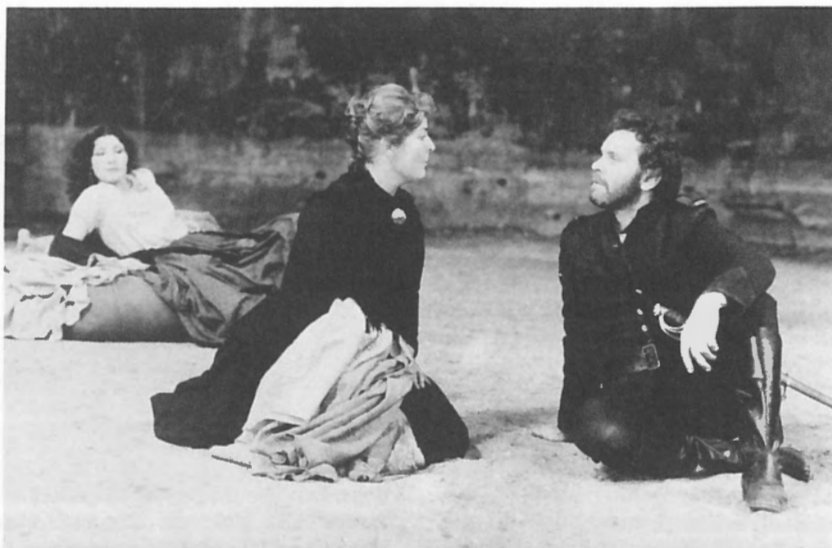
In 1832, the time set by Mérimée for his *Carmen*, Spain was still a wild country, in the eyes of Europe. Goya died four years earlier. The French vividly recalled the memory of the terrible guerilla — from which we derive the very word — opposing Napoleon's invasion. The Bandits of the Sierra Morena were a reality.

Mérimée's novel stresses the gypsy element, and strikes us today by its particular dryness and objectivity, a long way from romanticism. Bizet had another problem. How to present these wilder aspects of the storyline to a French audience still dancing to the tunes of operettas that poured out of every theatre in Paris. There was scarcely ever a more energetically, almost obliviously lighthearted mood in the whole of French history. He knew he couldn't get away with a scene on the public stage about a thief-cum-prostitute-cum-witch and at a push even a criminal (or at least the instigator of crimes) as Carmen appears in the novel. However, his own version, which watered down the original considerably, still scandalized its spectators in 1875. To us nowadays, like all "old" scandals, this seems incomprehensible, since the restraints of the day have virtually all disappeared.

Mérimée's minute attention to factual detail was foregone in favour of a sentimental and decorative simplification of the work at this time. For example the opera took out a fight Don José picks with Carmen's redoubtable husband, Garcia: too violent. Like all these strengths of the original novel, Brook puts them all back in. It certainly makes it punchier. Operatic Carmen was more sensual perhaps, and wholly without scruples. Brook shows up her fundamental contradictions, as in Mérimée.

This strengthening of the dramatic plot, returning to the novel's original characters, and the spirit of the tale, as well as the drastic shortening of the piece to one and a half hours without interval, transforms *The Tragedy of Carmen*. It is amusing to note that when Bizet's *Carmen* was first staged, at the Opéra-Comique, in repertoire with works by Donizetti, Boieldieu, Adolphe Adam and others. It started at 8pm and the curtain came down at 12.40. The first interval lasted 33 minutes; the second 42; and the third 33 again. Why so long, we are not told.

Stage requirements and book requirements are quite different things, yet while reducing the length of the lyric version, Brook's team turned again and again to Mérimée for the new essence of their production, while simultaneously re-working each alteration for the stage ... and updating the action for 1980s tastes and values. I am put in mind of juggling, with different-shaped objects.



Background CARMEN, with MICAËLA and DON JOSÉ foreground. Twenty-two tons of gravel and sand were spread round the stage area to give a two-foot deep neutral setting (photo Marc Enquerand, Paris)



This scene between ESCAMILLO and CARMEN is a striking piece of imagery (photo Nicholas Treath, Paris)

Putting the Clock Back

AN ACCOUNT OF THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE ST LAWRENCE THEATRE TORONTO

by Iain Mackintosh of Theatre Projects Consultants

"Toronto has enormously successful alternative theatre companies. My company is the one to which they are alternatives". Thus Eddie Gilbert succinctly summarised the role of CentreStage Company when we first met in 1981 to discuss the remodelling of the old (1970) St Lawrence Centre.

The conjunction of the words "old" and "1970" may suggest to the British reader a breathless North American desire to update anything ten years old and that hence a story of so precipitate an adjustment is unlikely to be of interest to the outsider. But you would be wrong. Rather is the St Lawrence remodelling possibly the first of what could be a world-wide move to put right the over-spaced unfocused (and unfocusable) theatres of the 60s and 70s – those concrete temples of spectacle to which the actor finds it so difficult to restore humanity. All credit then to Eddie Gilbert – Oxford graduate of both University and Frank Hauser's seminal Meadow Players of the 60s – for taking the lead insisting on a rebuild in Toronto and to the public and private authorities who supported him and the theatre manager, distinguished ex-actor Bruce Swerdfager, to the tune of \$4.5 million. Contrast Toronto's achievement with New York's dillying and dallying on the long dark and equally disastrous Vivian Beaumont by Joe Mielziner and Ero Saarinen (1965) on which the St Lawrence had been erroneously modelled.

But the problem of determining the

character of the new theatre which would replace the old was in the first instance independent of the inherited concrete structure of 1970. What sort of an auditorium and stage should Toronto's mainstream theatre company have if it is to carry out its role of providing city and metro with first-class productions from across the whole repertoire of world drama? Establish that and the design team could then get on with the secondary job of fitting a new auditorium into an old building.

We started by doing two things: establish the broad outline of a shared philosophy of auditorium design and evaluate the other theatres in Ontario province so that a remodelled St Lawrence would fit well into its theatrical context. For the first we were quick to agree that what CentreStage needed was a theatre that would work for Shaw, Miller, Ibsen or Tennessee Williams as well as being both openable up for a musical or capable of being focused down further for the close-up needed for most contemporary writing. We agreed that such a house should work even better for comedy than it would for tragedy. This comedic quality we thought was something that had been lost sight of in many modern theatres but was the very quality which made the smaller Broadway or West End London theatres so attractive to both actors and theatregoers.

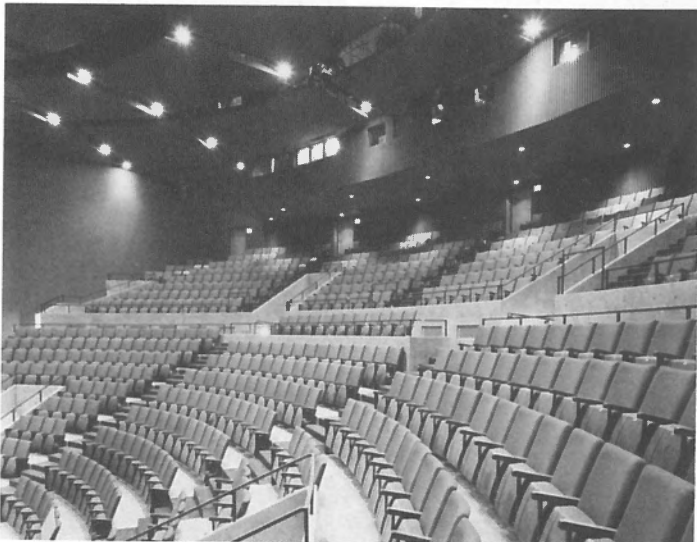
Evaluating the other theatres of Toronto and Ontario came next. The O'Keefe, a 3,000-seat wide, wide fan of the 'sixties was

clearly not a drama house and so not relevant. Both the Royal Alex and a 1914 vaudeville/movie palace currently being restored by the Province of Ontario hold over 1,500 and feel like musical houses of the scale which on Broadway or in London are rarely used for drama. What we had to do was create a theatre that felt tighter and less portentous than either of these.

In the area within 3 hours drive of Toronto the Festival Theatre at Stratford seemed quite simply the best thrust stage in the world. The other Stratford theatre, the Avon, was however, a considerable disappointment with a proscenium/forestage/orchestra pit arrangement that makes the actor's job much more difficult than it need be.

To a visiting British theatre design consultant the most fascinating of all the major Ontario drama theatres is the Niagara-on-the-Lake Theatre: marvellously sympathetic lobbies, a warm humanity in every part of the house, plus, above all, an auditorium that feels right. When told that for the St Lawrence job we had aboard the same architect as had achieved Niagara (The Thom Partnership) then everything suddenly looked good. If one could lower the level of the balcony to get a less vertiginous feeling – the improvement to Niagara which with hindsight the architects themselves would have liked – and fit such a resulting auditorium into the St Lawrence then surely this would be just what was needed.

But visits to the excellent alternative



The old, 1970, St. Lawrence



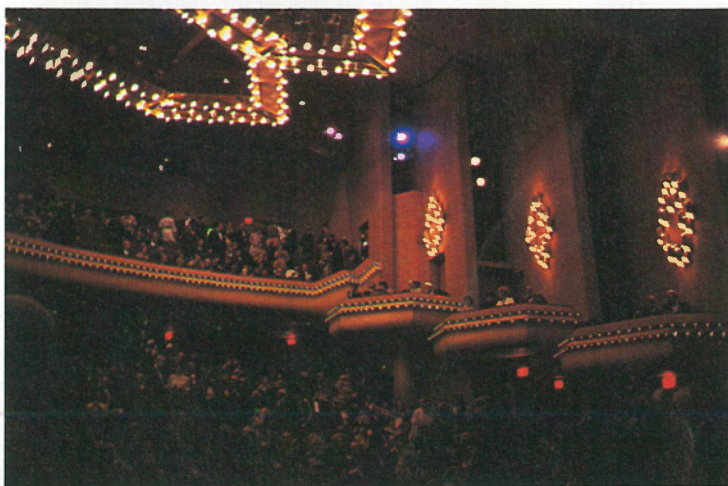
The new, 1983, St. Lawrence



The new St. Lawrence auditorium



View toward the stage showing lighting bridges glittering like a giant chandelier.



The interval on Gala Night

theatres of Toronto and the discovery that at theatres like Tarragon the staging was as inventive as the writing was stimulating made one realise that even more was needed. Somehow the whole proscenium zone had to be rethought to make it fluid, flexible and thus capable of allowing a whole spectrum of different interactions between actor and audience – from presentational to naturalistic, plus of course the simple picture frame effect itself. We therefore decided that

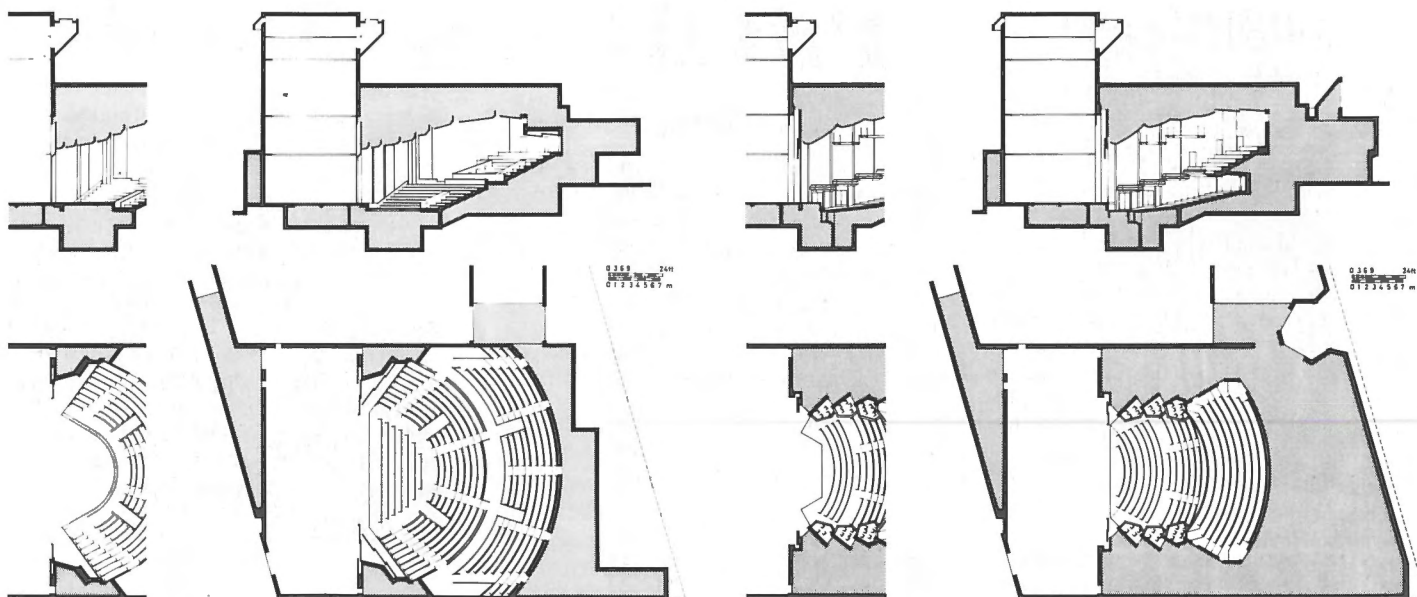
we had to rethink what a proscenium theatre should be, something which has not attracted much attention over the last 25 years. Thrust stages, theatre in the round, open stages, traverse stages, promenade spaces etc. have been debated endlessly. The proscenium theatre was thought to be quite simple: the actor's world contained within a box with a curtain where the fourth wall should be. When confronted with this requirement architects of 1950s, 60s and 70s

had generally got out their compasses, had drawn fan-shaped auditoriums (which were fine at the Leatherhead scale of things but were definitely oversize when they reached Birmingham Rep. proportions) and had kept their architecture for the lobbies and the exterior. No plush and gilt as such frippery was thought trivial and distracting from the serious business of play making.

The dull, dreary and usually concrete product of such naivety is evident in school and civic auditoriums the world over. These are the buildings which Somerset Maugham categorised as early as 1955 as ones in which you "undergo an ordeal rather than enjoy an entertainment". No wonder that in 1960s and 1970s young actors and their audiences deserted the conventional theatres for the basement or converted warehouses with their greater immediacy and often Bohemian charm. But the alternative theatres of Toronto as elsewhere have less than 400 seats. If you accept that a town needs larger playhouses as well as the smaller ones then devices other than the improvised and the haphazard must be found for the 400- to 1,000-seat range. The Guthrie thrust theatre approach has shown to be successful up to 2,000 seats but many might agree that a diet of too much thrust stage can become monotonous. The first St Lawrence showed how unsuccessful, because of how cold and empty, is the Greek amphitheatre approach to playhouse architecture. So where does one turn?

The answer was to look into the past and re-examine the proscenium theatres of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, one London example of which (The Old Vic) had been described by Sir John Gielgud thus: "It smells like a theatre, it feels like a theatre and above all is able to transform a collection of human beings into that vibrant instrument for an actor, an audience". In such a theatre the auditorium is focused tightly on to the front of the stage often at the expense of sightlines for a few seats. The side boxes turn out not just to have been for those who wanted to be seen rather than see but also to have provided a precious sense of contact with the actor. The three-dimensional intricacies of the cascading boxes produced a triangular tension to the whole theatrical occasion which is fundamentally different from that produced by the straight rows which confront the screen in a cinema. In the latter the role of the spectator is passive, sunk back as he is in his comfortable armchair. But if we travel back in time we find that in the older theatres each member of the audience is almost as aware of the presence of others as he or she is of the performer. Everyone present (the French word *assister a* is much more expressive) has a part to play in the occasion of live theatre.

The before and after drawings of the St Lawrence show how today more people (890) than before (830) are now fitted into a much smaller space. But what the drawings can't show is that for the actor the feeling of the remodelled St Lawrence is entirely different from that of its predecessor. Rather than being only dimly aware of stadium-like seating stretching forever into the darkness,



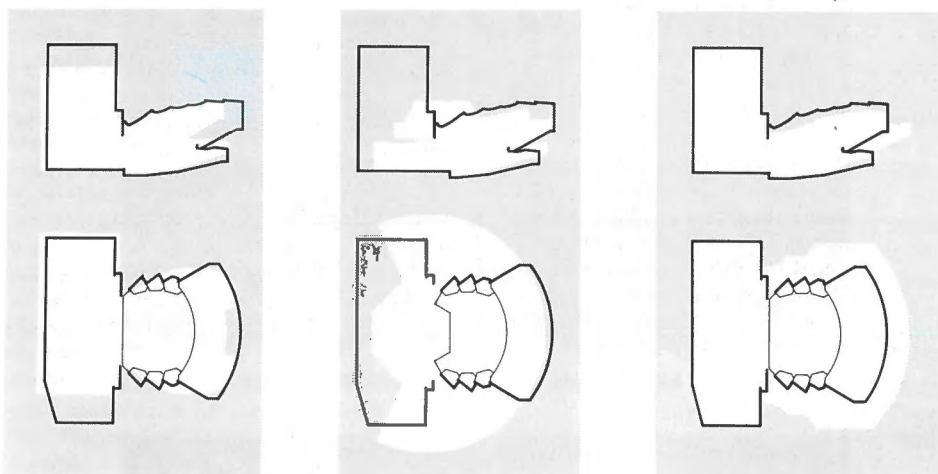
Before and after: plan and section showing the old 1970 theatre, seating 830, compared right with the remodelled theatre, seating 890 in a smaller space

the actor on the new stage is standing at one end of "a room lined with humanity" where he will be sustained by audience reaction both below and above his eye line as well as from those all important boxes at the sides. Here the actors can raise laughs that were achievable only with agonising labour in the former concrete and black, and therefore much more sombre house.

Other new design features noticeable to the Torontonians theatregoer include the translation of those often obtrusive (but necessary) stage lighting bridges into an enormous, glittering "chandelier". This appears to float effortlessly under the acoustically determined billows of the exotic new ceiling. Prominent too is the new Italian festoon house curtain which does not draw horizontally or fly vertically but sweeps out in two great unashamed arcs as in the great old theatres of Europe.

The proscenium zone can be arranged in various ways. The arch itself can be closed in like the iris of a lens for a smaller scale naturalistic play. It can also be opened right out so as to remove any sense whatsoever of there being any frame to the actor's world. Out of that world the actor can move onto a forestage, the geometry of which is firmly gripped by the calipers of side boxes. Lastly there is the possibility of an orchestra pit for up to 30 musicians for musicals, dance or chamber opera, the arrangements for pit or forestage being achieved through the removal of two rows of orchestra seats. The new proscenium zone has been given the flexibility which actors, directors, designers and musicians of CentreStage need if they are successfully to play their central roles in the dramatic life of Toronto and of Ontario.

Significantly the three opening productions of the first season set out the proscenium zone in three different ways: for *On the Razzle*, Murray Laufer moved the action swiftly from grocer's store to Vienna street on large wagons upstage of the proscenium, while for the new Canadian play *Jennie's Story* director Bill Glassco and designer Sue



The new St. Lawrence (black outline) superimposed over three theatres familiar to Canadian audiences. From left to right the 845-seat Niagara-on-the-Lake summer festival theatre, the 2000-seat Stratford Festival Theatre, and the old 830-seat St. Lawrence.

LePage brought the action and most of the scenery out on to the jutting forestage. The third show, the musical *Cabaret* will naturally replace forestage with orchestra pit.

But putting a new heart into the concrete giant of the St Lawrence was only part of the job. The theatre is now safer with much needed escape routes from the auditorium which now by-pass the lobbies. There are new bars and new washrooms. There is more room for the audience to meet before the show. By making theatregoing a much more pleasant experience the remodelled St Lawrence aims to put back the fun into theatregoing. The fun is functional in that it supports and encourages the art of the actor.

The new St Lawrence has been welcomed with delightful headlines such as "The old grey hall, she ain't what she used to be" and "St Lawrence Centre: the ugly duckling become a swan". The whole job was on time and under budget. It was also a pleasure for all involved on the design side with a sense of shared purpose and hence shared achievement for client and design team alike. But most important of all it confirmed some-

thing that I had long suspected but had not the confidence to voice: we can put right the errors of the recent past. Transplants are possible. Perhaps there are other theatres closer to home which can be born again!

PROJECT TEAM

Architects and Planners. The Thom Partnership. Ronald Thom, Partner in charge. Robert McIntyre, Project Administrator. James Nelles, Project Coordinator.

Theatre Consultant. Theatre Projects Consultants (Toronto, London and New York). Iain Mackintosh, Director in charge. Jerry Godden, Project Leader. John Bardwell, Commissioning Engineer.

Project and Construction Managers. J. S. Watson & Associates Ltd.

Interior Design Consultant. W. Murray Oliver Ltd.

Consulting Structural Engineers. Robert Halsall & Associates Ltd.

Electrical Engineers. Kalns Associates Ltd.

Acoustical Consultants. Valcoustics Canada Ltd.

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British Theatre Designs for the PQ83

DAVID FINGLETON

The Society of British Theatre Designers exhibition at The Round House certainly ensured that this admirable institution closed its doors, let us hope only temporarily, with a bang, and also offered a truly impressive array of the sheer strength of stage design up and down the country. What was especially striking was the strength of design, not just in the large, heavily subsidised, national companies, but in small repertory companies and theatre workshops working on budgets that barely extend into four figures. With such talent and originality on display it was no easy task to select a truly representative British exhibit for the 1983 Prague Quadrennial: after all we won the Golden Troika in 1979, and it was vital to select the best, as well as the most representative, of British design again this time. Exhibits selected for Prague come from no fewer than 28 designers and offer some very striking models, drawings, photographs, costumes and masks.

Amongst the entry for Prague are (in alphabetical order): Nadine Baylis's drawings for Ballet Rambert's *The Tempest*, striking models by Maria Bjornson for Welsh National Opera's *The Cunning Little Vixen* and *From the House of the Dead*, exciting masks by Jennifer Carey and Ariane Gastambide, Russel Craig's model for Opera North's *Così fan Tutte*, Bob Crowley's for the RSC's *King Lear*, Chris Dyer's for that company's *Roaring Girl*, and two by Robin Don, Opera North's *Marriage of Figaro* and Aldeburgh Festival's production of Britten's *Midsummer Night's Dream*. Tim Goodchild is represented by his model of *The Mikado* for New Sadler's Wells Opera, John Gunter by *The Beggar's Opera* at the National's Cottesloe Theatre, and Martin Johns by his interesting model for David Pownall's *Master Class* at the Haymarket, Leicester.

Ralph Koltai's exciting model for the Lyons production of Zimmerman's *Die Soldaten* will be at Prague, along with Annena Stubbs's costume drawings for that opera, and Koltai will also be represented by his model for the very stylish RSC *Much Ado*. Stefanos Lazaridis' models for Opera North's *Oedipus Rex* and the Chichester Festival's *The Mitford Girls* will be at Prague, as will John Napier's costume designs for *Cats*, Timothy O'Brien's model for English National Opera's *Le Grand Macabre*, and Patrick Robertson and Rosemary Vercoe's stunning models for that company's Mafia-style *Rigoletto*, and Britten's *Turn of the Screw*. Other Prague exhibitors are Roger Bourke, Liz Da Costa, Johann Engels, Dermot Hayes, Carol Lawrence, Saul Radomsky, David Short, Yolanda Sonnabend, Carl Toms, and Priscilla Truett, all with strong work and fine ambassadors for British stage design.

PRODUCT NEWS

The Melody lingers on

Following their extensive rationalisation programme of 2 years ago Strand announce some important additions to what was already a well-integrated lighting system. The replacement of the old ubiquitous Patt 23 by a new generation Minim 23, if not the most important change, will not go unremarked by those lighting men who grew up with Bentham's 250 watt Baby of 1952.

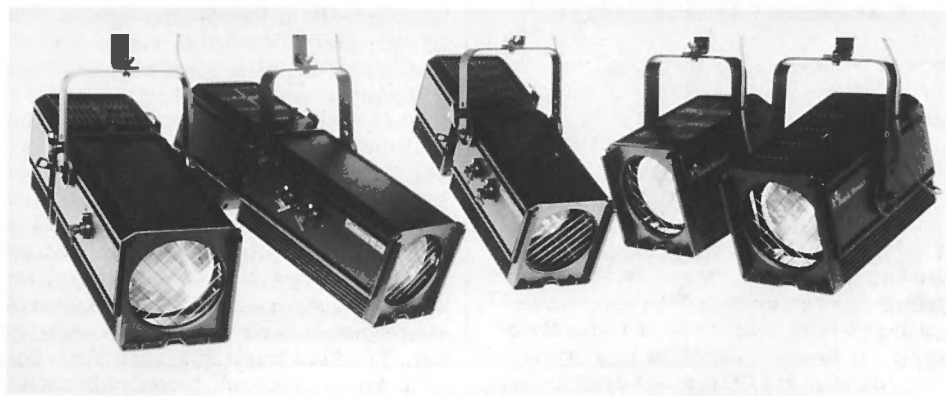
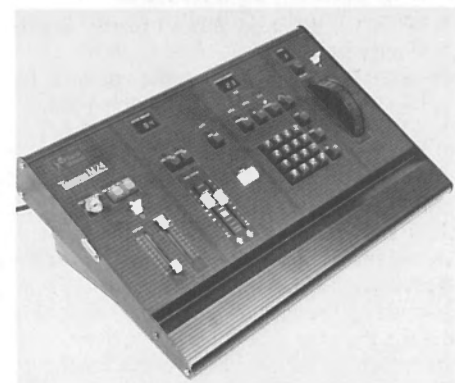
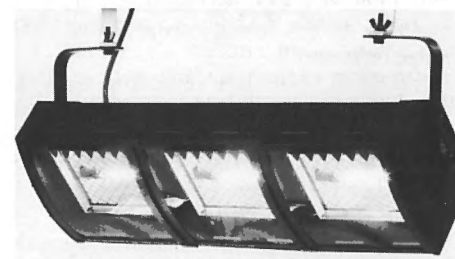
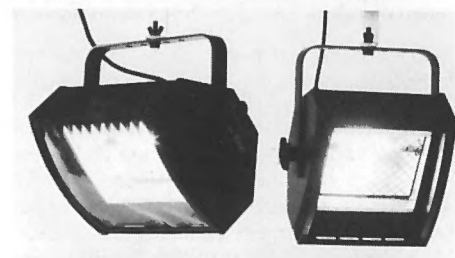
At the other end of the scale and complementing the Prelude and Harmony series is the 2000 watt CADENZA range of Profile, Fresnel and Prism-convex spotlights. Considerable gains in intensity levels and beam quality are promised with a wide range of profile, spot and flood adjustment. Again safety requirements have received meticulous attention which include a comfortable heat-resisting rear handle.

Floodlights, single or in compartment form make up the NOCTURNE and CODA series. Both use linear tungsten halogen lamps but have different optical systems and distribution patterns to suit the many applications of these versatile luminaires.

The TEMPUS 2G Manual control is described briefly as a packaged 2-pre-set, 4-group lighting control for 12, 18, 24 or 36 channels. Obviously just right for lighting graduates looking for something more ambitious than a simple 2-pre-set desk. On the other hand if you aspire to memory systems, then Tempus M24 is one that won't fail to arouse your cupidity.

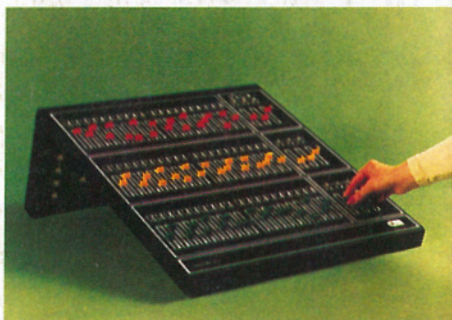
TEMPUS M24 is designed to control up to sixty dimmers and memorise up to 185 different lighting cues. All the professional facilities and options are there without unnecessary gimmicks.

Of course it's got the Strand fader wheel and if you want video display just link it up to any 625/535 line domestic TV. Storing lighting plots is a simple matter of recording on to any home cassette recorder. For additional effects the Tempus M24FX provides a patch/effects desk option for disco. Lighting technicians should send for the M24 data sheet giving a step-by-step operating guide for this sophisticated but budget-priced memory system.



New Design Manual Desks from Green Ginger

A new, elegantly styled range of 3-preset, 3-group manual control desks are now available from Green Ginger. The range provides for internal interfacing to other currently available types of analogue dimmers. Available in 20-, 40-, 60- and 80-way units, Green Ginger's useful linking facility is still retained. Circular multiway connectors are fitted as standard. Other connector variants are available on request.



Rosco – Haussman Range

Hausmann scenography materials are now available in this country from Rosco. The range includes:

HATOMOLD flexible moulding material for reproducing masks, bas relief or sculpture.

WEAVE FILLER 1047 for constructing 3-dimensional objects and ornaments on surfaces or costumes.

WEAVE FILLER 916 – a highly elastic brush-on material which sets quickly with an opaque and neutral colour finish.

HATOCLEAR, also fills all textile weaves but dries clear.

FOAM SYSTEM, a versatile method for producing soft, semi-hard and hard foam.

Data sheets available from Roscolab Ltd., 69/71, Upper Ground, London SE1 3PQ.



Lancelyn Lighting

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Paulton Road, Bebington
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Between Cues

The thoughts of Walter Plinge

Cloths for sheets

Mrs Plinge has been reading Thea Thompson's *Edwardian Childhoods* where she has discovered that Thomas Morgan's mother "used to buy scenery out the Victoria – Vic we called it, you know – the Opera House in Waterloo Road. Used to buy the old scenery – fetch it home, put it in a bath in the yard and let it soak for about a week. And when that was done two or three times we had a bedsheet. You could never tear 'em".

Disastrous Dad

My copy of Gyles Brandeth's *Great Theatrical Disasters* bears the affectionate dedication to the *biggest theatrical disaster of them all, with love*. Such is the esteem in which I am held by my Minnie (familiar to all Happy Families card shufflers as "Minnie Plinge the Walter's Daughter"). I particularly enjoyed Peter Ustinov's request to an actor to "Don't just do something – stand there". And Percy Hammond's review "I have knocked everything but the knees of the chorus girls, and nature has anticipated me there".

Exit with Dignity



Strand have celebrated the end of their thirty-year run of that hit production, the pattern 23, by presenting the last one off the line to Fred Bentham. This was a very right and proper gesture. I hope that Fred will bequeath to the Theatre Museum this key artefact in the history of stage lighting. One of the pattern 23's virtues was its compact size, but if there is a space problem at the museum, perhaps it could be given a place of honour in the saloon bar of the Lamb and Flag. Fred may not agree when I suggest that the 23 is more important than the light console. But then Fred has always been a switch-board man at heart – although we must all be grateful that from time to time he would leave the organ loft for a couple of days to wave his magic wand over the King Street optical bench to catalyse the development of

revolutionary items like the bifocal shutter, the hook clamp and the pattern 23. I met my first 23 (up a ladder, where else) during my second week in the theatre: it was 1954 and we have been inseparable ever since. Strand also presented Fred with the first of the new "Minim 23s". Convention demands that I should proclaim *The 23 is dead, long live the 23*. Which will give me plenty of time to prepare my preliminary user's report for CUE 50.

Restoring cuts

I am already getting very excited about 1984. Not as a consequence of Orwell's novel, but in anticipation of Handel's Bicentenary Commemoration. These are joyous times for Handel opera – although the restoration is perhaps making better progress on the gramophone than in the theatre. From a report in *Opera* I note that Andrew Porter (very perceptive critic – many years ago, he gave me my first good notice) has been offering some amen pointers to a baroque symposium in St Louis. Small theatres with orchestra at floor level to restore balance between orchestra, stage and audience. Decor with changes as conceived. Avoidance of permanent sets. Low light sources. Acting and gestures guided by a study of paintings and writings of the period. And **No Cuts**. Agreed. However, in the pursuit of authenticity I am relieved to be reassured that not even the most extreme musicologists are yet advocating restoration of the unkindest cut of all. These roles will continue to be sung by contraltos and counter-tenors.

Educating the National

The National Theatre's education department responds to requests for career advice with a ten-page handout (their word) about acting, production work (carpenter's, paint and metal workshops, property making and buying, armoury), stage management, lighting, writing, administration (house manager, box office, press office, marketing, education). There is no mention of wardrobe. And not a word about **Design**. Now this cannot be ignorance or oversight (well not from the *education* department of the *National* theatre) so I am reluctantly driven to suspect some sinister purpose.

Still more bad language

For the third consecutive CUE, I have to report discovery of a particular ghastrly addition to the language. And I am particularly sad to have come across **DESIGNOLOGY** in our splendid transatlantic sister journal *Theatre Crafts*. Is this really the word that we want to adopt for a chronological listing of a designer's work?