

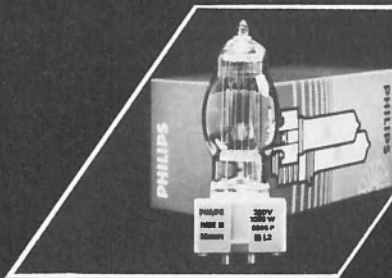
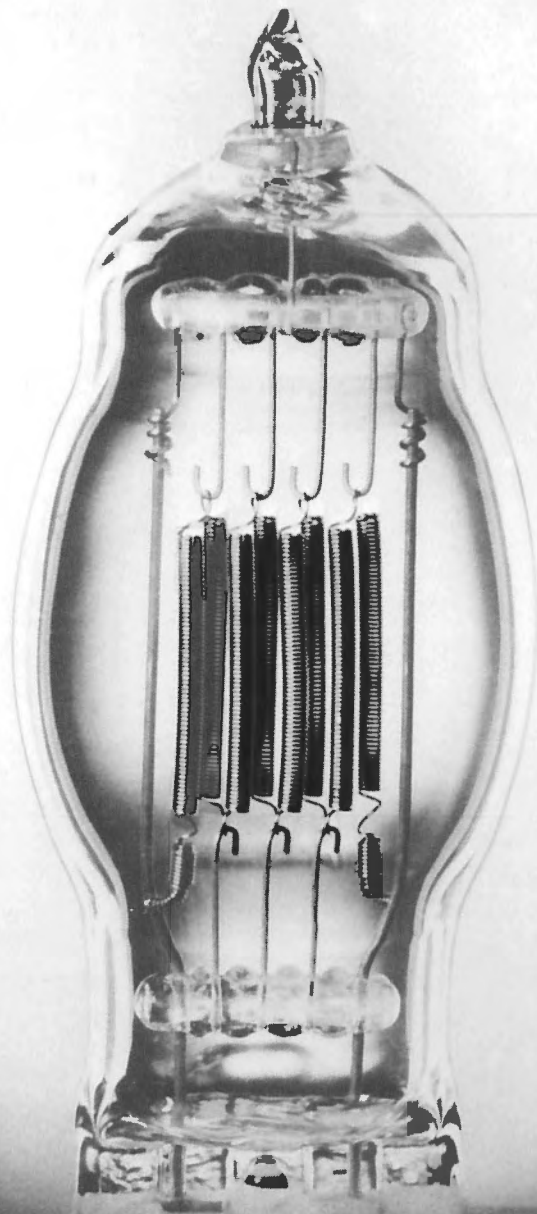
# CUE

Technical Theatre Review 27

January/February 1984 £1.75



**A FAR BRIGHTER SPOT  
AT NO EXTRA COST**



**FIT PHILIPS STUDIO-THEATRE LAMPS**

***BI-PLANE***

**FOR GREATER INTENSITY OF USEFUL LIGHT**

**PHILIPS**

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ASK YOUR USUAL STOCKIST  
PHILIPS LIGHTING CITY HOUSE, 420-430 LONDON ROAD, CROYDON CR9 3QR



Cover

The opening of the Melbourne Concert Hall 6th November 1982. This fine concert hall is complemented by three auditoriums in a theatres complex under the spire and due to be opened this year. Iain Mackintosh describes the extraordinary undertaking which is the Victorian Arts Centre, a cultural complex which it has taken 25 years to achieve.

CONTENTS

<b>Under Down Under</b> <i>Iain Mackintosh</i>	4
<b>Appropriate Technology</b> <i>Eric Pressley</i>	10
<b>Frederick Bentham:</b> First Fellow of the ABTT <i>Francis Reid</i>	12
<b>Antipodean Colosseum</b> <i>Denis Irving</i>	13
<b>The Renaissance Theatres of Italy</b> <i>Francis Reid</i>	16
<b>Stage Design</b> <i>David Fingleton</i>	20
<b>Books</b>	22
<b>Product News</b>	23

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

*Editorial Board*

James Twynam (Managing)

Francis Reid

Jeremy Twynam

Jasbir Singh Bassi (Art)

*Editorial,*

Advertising and Subscription Office:

Twynam Publishing Ltd.,

Kitmore, Faringdon, Oxfordshire SN7 8HR

Telephone 0367 21141

# CUE

Technical Theatre Review 27

January/February 1984 £1.75

## NEVER ON A SUNDAY?

To a theatrelover, there is nothing quite so depressing as a dark theatre. We therefore gladly join in the general relief being felt about the current surge of activity in London's West End Theatre-land. Our relief would expand into real joy if all concerned would bite the bullet on the most essential issue of all — SUNDAY OPENING.

The other day we overheard what must be one of the most incredible statements ever uttered in the course of the history of the theatre. *An actor was complaining about unsociable hours!* Are actors no longer the servants of their audience?

Over the last decade, our regional theatres have fully embraced the idea of Sunday performances. Admittedly these regional Sundays are usually given over to one-night-stands of a programme different to the week's main production. But these Sunday openings provide overwhelming evidence of the audience's desire to go to theatre on a British Sunday when they are given the same opportunity that has long been standard practice throughout the rest of Europe.

Is the prospect really so awful? Family shows could try the New York practice of playing their Sunday shows on a matinee only basis, thus giving the actors a longer weekend from tea-time Sunday until teatime Tuesday. (And while we are mentioning New York, why don't they experiment with London's commendable habit of spreading some matinees over to Tuesdays and Thursdays rather than just the traditional Broadway Wednesday.) It is totally inevitable that some west end theatres shift their day-off from Sunday to Monday. This cannot be done without more flexible agreements between unions and managements. Perhaps unions would be less protective if managements were less secretive about the details of their production finances.

Sunday opening must surely come soon. Not only does survival demand it, but we must never forget that we are the humble servants of the audience.

# UNDER DOWN UNDER

or The biggest Arts Centre in the English speaking world

IAIN MACKINTOSH

*Well said, old mole! Canst work i'the earth so fast?  
Oh worthy pioneer!"*

Hamlet Act 1 Scene V

Pioneer yes, fast no. Sir Roy Grounds was appointed architect to design the Victorian Arts Centre, Melbourne in 1959. The Centre will be completed in summer 1984 with the opening of the final central element, the triple auditoriums for opera and dance, for drama and for experimental theatre. The planning and building of the Arts Centre will therefore have taken a quarter of a century from appointment of the architect to the opening of the complete centre.

Sadly Sir Roy Grounds did not live to see his life's work completed. He died in March 1981 before even the opening of the Concert Hall in May 1982. He did, however, live to see the National Gallery open in 1968 and become both a familiar landmark in Melbourne and a remarkably successful gallery/museum of world class stature.

A reminder of the scale of this extraordinary undertaking is quite simply the fact that this is the largest arts centre in the world to serve at the highest level *all* the arts. One architect was commissioned to put on one site a full range of facilities ultimately consisting of the following: a major fine art gallery with a permanent collection of the arts of east and west from antiquity to the twentieth century as well as exhibition space for contemporary art; a 2,600 seat concert hall; a 2,200 seat opera and dance theatre; an 850 seat playhouse; a 420 seat experimental theatre plus restaurants, bars etc and delightful "extras" such as an excellent Performing Arts Museum. The cost! 200 million dollars Australian, roughly 125 million pounds sterling.

All this in a city with a population of scarcely 2.7 million which is the capital of a State with a population of only 1.1 million beyond the city itself! The total commitment is and has been extraordinary. Other capital cities in Australia have been more flamboyantly romantic — Sydney with Utzon's magnificently impractical Opera House — or more prosaically successful — Adelaide with its efficiently planned and quickly built Festival Theatre which opened over ten years ago despite starting five years after Melbourne. But Melbourne has been more tenaciously ambitious than any other English speaking capital city, state or national. All the virtues and all the ensuing problems of the mega arts centre are therefore here writ large.

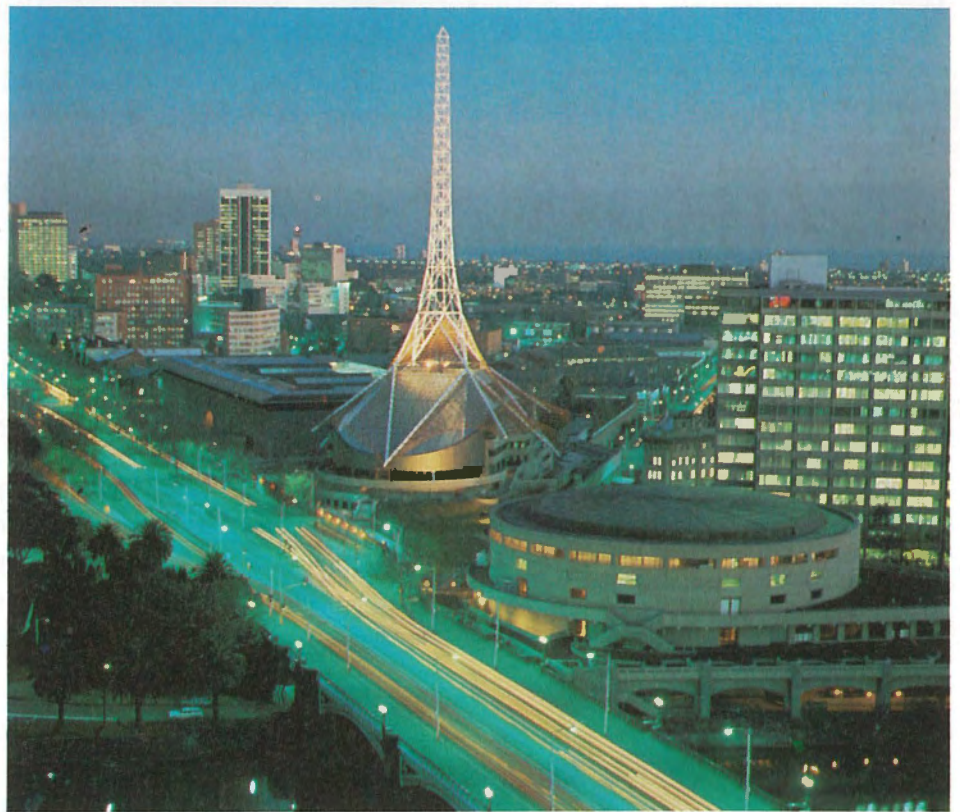
First the aspiration. In March 1957 the Government of the State of Victoria formed a Building Committee made up of the good and the great. By the end of the year they issued a simple statement entitled "Spirit and Purpose of a Cultural Centre". It is worth repeating in full and when savouring its high minded vision, to remember that in

1957 Britain's first post war theatre, the Belgrade, Coventry was scarcely one year old and that the National and Barbican theatres were then hardly a gleam in anyone's eye. (For the record the appointment of the architects for the National took place in November 1963 while the decision to include a major theatre in the Barbican, for the whole of which the architects had long since been appointed, was taken in February 1965).

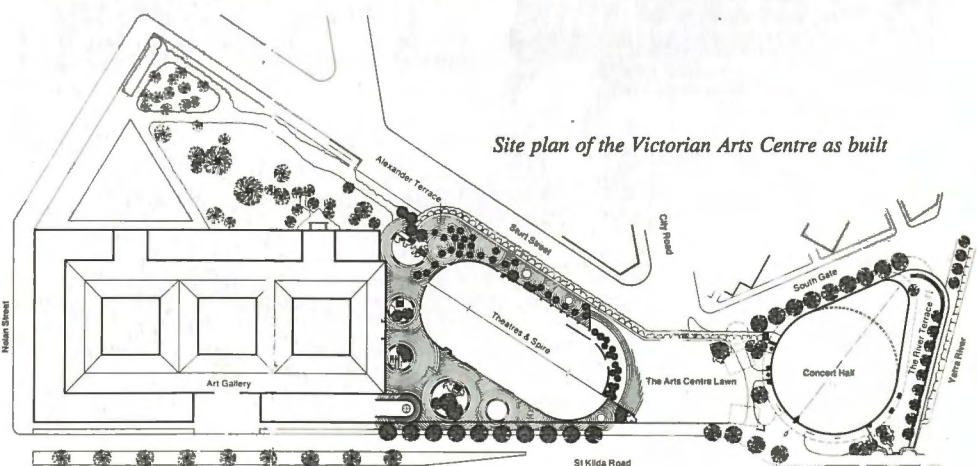
"Before dealing with the physical requirements of any projected building, an attempt should be made to state its general purpose, and the character or

spirit which is desired. This would seem to be particularly important if the building is, like the new National Gallery and Cultural Centre, to be largely concerned with non-material things.

"It is important to state firstly that this building is to be a setting for the display and performance of various arts, and therefore its architectural character should not be too dominant. Self-conscious "grandeur" must not be allowed to overawe the material shown. It must be warm and welcoming and free from any "institutional" atmosphere. The people of Victoria who use this building should



Between the circular Concert Hall building and low rectilinear National Gallery lies the main building with three auditoriums topped by a single spire



be free to feel that it is their property and not the playground of a select group. Every attempt should be made to avoid the impression that the provision of the arts is an act of condescension from above. At the same time the building will be the one place free of commercial interests, where standards are set, and it is vital therefore to have dignity and poise, and once inside the doors visitors should feel removed from the prosaic surroundings of everyday life. The building and its various activities must indeed instill in the citizen the sense of an adventure in which all who enter can play their part. Culture is not to be imposed in this building, but created by the community itself.

"The effect of freshness and surprise must always be present, and the building should not exhaust all its secrets in the first or even many subsequent visits. Some of this atmosphere can certainly be achieved by the flexibility and variety of the activities, but it should also rise naturally from the architectural design. In brief, the desired effect on the visitor should be one of enchantment rather than functionalism.

"Finally at all stages, while lifting the spirits of the visitor, some sense of contact with the natural world should always be retained. It is expected that some visitors will wish to stay within the building for long periods, and therefore windows opening on to lawns, trees and sky should be arranged. The arts must at no stage be cut off from life inside an air-conditioned box, but the visitor must always feel the flow between them. A building which does this will serve the community in far greater ways than by its mere ability to provide entertainment and information."

At first everything got off to a quick start.

The National Gallery was planned and built in seven years at a cost of \$14 million, \$1.5 being raised from public appeal. It is a fine building, its blank stone facade seen through trees and over a shimmering reflecting pool. It represents an unselfconscious and hence successful coming together of western and eastern traditions, in impact very different from North American 'Japanese', a style which one often feels is dictated by fashions in interior design and by super engineering rather than by an understanding of the essentially humanist building traditions of the east. In 1969 Grounds described the National Gallery thus: "The building must not be too obtrusive. The art exhibits are what matter and the setting should display them. The problem has been to provide a museum for the fine arts and at the same time to make it a refreshingly enjoyable experience; the very reverse of the stuffy atmosphere too frequently associated with art galleries". Overshadowed only by the cool excellence of the two great Kahn galleries of North America, the Kimbell at Fort Worth, Texas and the Center for British Art at Yale, Newhaven, the National Art Gallery at Melbourne is for me one of the great modern galleries of the world. Of course my judgement may have been coloured by delight at their ambitiously scaled special show of 1983, "The Great Eighteenth Century Exhibition", half a dozen galleries of superb British and European paintings, furniture and ceramics all gathered, astoundingly, from the Gallery's own holdings.

So familiar is the National Gallery that it is now the remainder of the centre which attracts the attention and the criticism. This may be because the remainder, unlike the Gallery itself, is mainly underground. To those foreigners who have fancifully primitive ideas of Australia consisting of small townships scattered over thousands of mile of outback, the Melbourne decision to go under down under seems perverse. But if you recall that Australia is the most urbanised of all 'Western' countries — ie a higher proportion live in towns than in America, Britain or France — then the reasons become clearer. The Building Committee wanted a city-centre site and got it, directly across the Yarra from that hub of metropolitan communication, Flinders Street Station. And on such a sensitive site the vast bulk of large auditoriums and their fly-towers would have been unacceptable on town planning grounds. Hence the decision to work i' the earth.

And there, of course, the problems started. The original brief was for gallery/museum plus three auditoriums: 1,200 seat, 1,000 seat and 300 seat. Ten years later in 1970, it was still thought that a 2,000 seat concert hall, a 1,700 seat opera theatre, and a 750 seat playhouse plus 'small studio theatre' could be located in one totally subterranean clump between National Gallery and river. Even the flytowers were to be totally buried. But soon the limitations of the soil, silted mud, became apparent. The hole then became shallower and, since other commercial

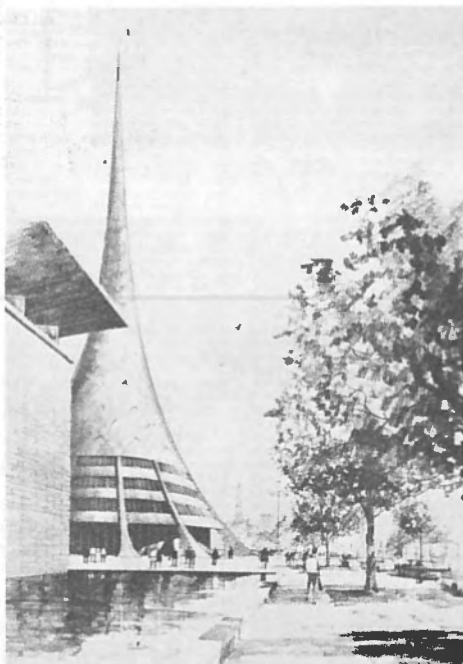
pressures were enlarging the auditoriums, the concert hall was hived off to its own hole between theatres and river thus producing the present linear plan along the St Kilda's Road.

However Grounds had never intended that the whereabouts of his theatre would not be marked. At first he had proposed a 126 metre decorative tower to mark the site, exactly the same height as Melbourne's St Patrick's Cathedral across the river. This was to be an exotically graceful copper clad spire, reaching in a single sweep and with sheer exuberance to the clouds. Sadly what is now there is a pale shadow — lower by 22 metres than his first compromise design (said to have been inspired by a ballet dancer's skirt) and lower than either the first sketch or St Patrick's Cathedral. And while wind tests and budget cuts were chopping away at the spire the bulk of the proposed opera house underneath was getting bigger, pushing the flytower through the earth and up the skirts of the tower. The final result is the greatest single disappointment of the whole centre, an awkward cross between airport engineering and trendy Italian furniture design. One hopes that the architect's earlier designs will be kept to show what might have been.

Back now to the hole — or rather from the early 70s two holes because of the problems encountered in digging the first one. While the work on the big hole continued (every technical device was used including freezing the ground and dickering with the water table which induced three law suits in 78/79 from neighbouring sky scraper owners anxious not to follow the Trust into its own hole) Sir Roy Grounds started, in 1973, to talk to American acousticians Bolt Beranek and Newman about the acoustical design of the now separate 2,500 seat 'pure' concert hall. The design proceeded fast and, because the new site turned out fortunately to be over a reassuringly rocky former island in the once wider Yarra, the concert hall, which at first was planned to open two years after the theatres, in fact opened two years earlier, in May 1982. Thus on a visit made in September 1983 it was possible to experience the Concert Hall in action as well as to visit the theatres in their near completed state.

Beranek reports that Grounds' brief was for them to design the 'yolk of the egg' around which his firm, the architects, would design the 'white' of lobbies, bars, dressing rooms and support areas. The analogy is apt as the building in its two lowest stories is tear or egg shaped and only circular where it breaks ground.

But what is inside is not oval as is the same firm's work in Toronto (the Roy Thomson Hall which is a collaboration of the same BB&N designer, Ted Schultz, and Canadian architect Arthur Erickson). The Melbourne Concert Hall is described by its own designers rather as "semi-surround" (presumably because of the existence of choir stalls) and as having "a nearly square plan as compared with the shoebox shape of other excellent halls". I myself would describe it more as a two balcony fan, a



Artist's impression of the architect's original unbuilt design for the copper clad landmark spire.

form significantly unlike any other excellent hall.

The form has received careful detailing by the architects. The top circle, with its steep 500mm risers between rows, sweeps down to the choir stalls and flies down and over the lower circle. The attention is seized and thrown toward the performer with such verve that many subscribers have refused to take seats at the higher (street) level. But such a strong reaction is in a way a complement: there is nothing bland about the form of this very three dimensional and lively space. Yet the question must arise as to whether the architects were well served by the acousticians. The blunt question to be answered is "Does it Work Acoustically?" On balance the answer seems, sadly, to be 'no'.

By September 1983 the hall had settled down. The PR hype of undreamt of excellence had been toned down and the provincial 'knockers', always anxious to stress that nothing really good could happen in what they implied was a backwater, were looking for new achievements at which to sneer. (The most unworthy instance of the latter's silly superiority was the revised one that the thin sound of the strings only too apparent in the opening series of concerts was not attributable to acoustics but to the low quality of the house team, the Melbourne Symphony, since the strings of the L.S.O. on tour had sounded so much more satisfactory — an insult to their compatriots as the L.S.O. were equally unhappy about the string sound). So I approached my sample, the eighth Concert of 1983 'Red' series by the Melbourne Symphony, with the voices of hype and knocking audible but faint.

Saturday, 3rd September 8p.m, the first of three identical concerts, three being necessary to accommodate the sheer volume of subscribers to this ABC series. (That fact alone is possibly the best advertisement for a hall entering its second year). Hiroyaki Iwaki conducting. First, Bach's Symphony in B minor with a string orchestra of 8,8,6,4,3 plus harpsichord. Second, Tchaikovsky's variation on a Rococo Theme Op.33 with Renard Fontanarosa soloist, 12,10,8,6,4 plus 6 woodwind and two French horns. Third, Holst's 'The Planets', with a full orchestra of 54 strings, 16 woodwind, 15 bases, 6 timpani and percussion, 2 harps and 1 piano and, offstage, the Melbourne Choral. An evening therefore of, successively, 30, 49 and 94 orchestral musicians on stage. What a test of variable acoustics!

The generously provided house seats were in the front row of the lower circle directly in front of the leading music critic of the Melbourne *Age*. Surely where the critics and house seats are placed the acoustics must be as good as anywhere? The seats certainly can't have been put there for quick access to the bar which was a long way back up the long aisle.

Perhaps I should explain what BB&N variable acoustics consist of in the current late 70s mode as evidenced in the three great new halls opened recently, and within a

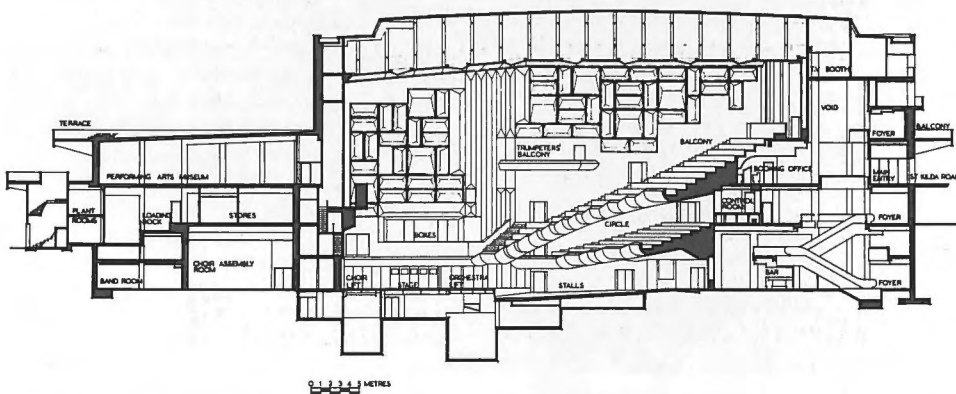
couple of years, in San Francisco, Melbourne and Toronto. To the fixed form are added two moveable elements: banners and 'granny glasses'. The banners are much more in evidence in Melbourne than in Toronto where the discovery that the purely decorative ones were acoustically significant and were hence removed caused a fracas between architect and acoustician. The Melbourne banners are much more similar to the Russell Johnson variety, possibly having a common ancestry from the 60s when RJ worked for BB&N, and can be judged here in Britain in the Royal Concert Hall, Nottingham, which hall was conceived by RJ and Theatre Projects Consultants working closely together. These are of two sorts: vertically furling ones on the side wall and horizontally drawn ones on the rear walls under the overhang. Such banners are dropped in for a number of reasons: to produce the deadened acoustics, required for amplified rock and popular music concerts, to take the hollowness for rehearsals in a hall lacking the absorption of 2,000 bodies and, in conjunction with other devices, to vary the acoustics so as to distinguish acoustically between, say, a chamber orchestra playing Bach and huge percussive works such as 'The Planets'.

The second adjustable device in Melbourne is the array of 'granny glasses', 24 slightly convex (downward) and slightly oval perspex dishes of approximately 2.25m diameter which are hung on 3 lines. Theoretically these can be adjusted in height and angle to alter the balance and clarity of

the acoustic. But they weren't and the banners remained stationary and out of sight. The Bach sounded distant and the cello soloist not as good as one suspects he is. The Holst on the other hand sounded superb. What Melbourne has with its adjustable devices apparently unalterable is a big hall for the big event. To the layman the answer seems obvious: where are the all important first reflections provided in a rectangular 'shoebox' hall by the side walls and where, in anything that fails to provide the right side surfaces immediately beyond the strings, the compensating reflecting overhead canopy adjustable in height and providing for the much needed close acoustical encounters of the Russell Johnson kind? (Yes, fellow Theatre Projectors who engineered the 36 tons of canopy now working at Nottingham and under construction in Calgary, Alberta, these enormous devices are certainly evident by their absence in Toronto and Melbourne. 24 light weight plastic lenses ain't the same thing).

The *Age* agreed the following morning. So, evidently, did the ABC sound technicians. Usually an acceptable sound for broadcasting a symphony orchestra can be produced by a combination of high flown and of wall mounted microphones. In the Melbourne Hall these were placed in the midst of the orchestra — half a dozen elegantly counterweighted stand mikes 3 metres tall and looking like so many Japanese fishermen.

But if the acoustics disappoint the hall certainly registers in two different ways:



Longitudinal section through the Concert Hall



The opening Concert, November 1982

first by way of its finely planned and excellently managed technical installation and second by reason of its extraordinary decor of which more anon. Both are pointers to the other three auditoria which are to open this summer.

Theatre consultant on all the theatres was Tom Brown, theatrical planner of all major Australian theatres except the Sydney Opera House. Hence the design of all the Melbourne Hall is theatrically workmanlike in the straightforward sense of the word. But Australia is a vast country and the internal airlines as ridiculously expensive as those in Britain or Europe. So the detail planning has been more in the hands of the Centre's Production Director, Bill Akers, who is No 2 in the batting order of the entire centre, second only to General Manager George Fairfax. Bill is not only the senior theatre technician of Australia but probably the most travelled having nursed the Australian Ballet around the world for much of the 20 year growth period of that great

company. He and his staff have ensured that the whole centre is more performer and technician friendly than almost any theatre I've visited — and of course it had better be with almost everyone except the follow spot operator being underground all their working lives.

Sipping champagne or rather swigging the excellent stuff, champagne along with oysters being civilisedly cheap in Australia, while seated in the grandest green room imaginable, I heard about the technical running of the centre from Bill and his lieutenant on the floor of the Concert Hall, Pamela Foulkes. (The green room is the brilliant green of the mineral chrysoprase, one of those colours which seems as peculiar to Australia as all those strange marsupials).

Both Concert Hall and the three theatres are to be run as receiving rather than resident houses. Various companies are to think of one of the spaces as their home base: Melbourne Symphony in the Concert Hall,

Victoria State Opera and Australian Ballet in the Opera Theatre. Only the Melbourne Theatre Company in the Playhouse is to introduce its own technical staff to work the installation. But even the MTC, which has been directed for 30 years by one man, English born John Sumner, will not occupy its own theatre for 52 weeks a year. For two six week periods it must hand the booking back to the Centre's own management and presumably do the same with the Studio. Hence the MTC will keep one or more of its present three theatres elsewhere in town. And all companies and the orchestra will continue to have their own HQs outside the building complete with workshops, wardrobes and rehearsal rooms. A\$200 million did not create any production or rehearsal facilities beyond those needed by the week by any active touring company.

Touring is still the basic professional discipline throughout Australia, there being very few resident houses. This has bred very different technical attitudes to those of Britain today. For example, there is a greater interest in technical standardisation. Thus Bill reports that soon all the major Australian centres will probably have the same lighting control — Rank Strand Galaxy no less — and that means not only the state arts centres of Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, Adelaide and Canberra but also single renovated touring houses such as Her Majesty's Perth, and the Princess and Comedy in Melbourne. Add the proposed 'digipatch', also to be standardised, and the touring opera and ballet companies will have their get in tasks considerably lightened.

There is also a deep professionalism in Melbourne for seeing that everybody who books the hall is looked after with equal courtesy and concern. The Concert Hall is a state asset, hence it is bookable by anyone who can put up a case. On Friday 2nd September rehearsals were in full swing for a booking by a small township hours away by car or train. The inhabitants of Bairnsdale would just fill the 2,600 seat auditorium while on stage were: Bairnsdale High School Junior, Intermediate and



*Foyers of the Concert Hall*



*The Concert Hall with concrete and banners painted by scenic artists in outback desert 'strata'*



*'Lucky diggers' — the Queen's Melbourne c 1853 by Samuel Thomas Gill*

Senior Concert Bands; Bairnsdale High School Vocalists; Naval College Concert Band and Choir; Bairnsdale Citizen's Group; East Gippsland Concert Orchestra and Stage Band; Bairnsdale District Jazz Club; and, whatever that is, Mahtoose. The rehearsal I heard was great!

A detailed exposition of the theatres must wait until they are in use. My tour coincided with the commissioning of what was the biggest scissors lift I'd ever seen — 15m×4.5m in plan with a 10.6m vertical travel with a load of up to 25 tons — which, like a prop from an early James Bond movie, can transport whole scenery trucks down into the cavernous Dr No like scenic storage spaces which open out on one side of the opera theatre stage. That stage itself is a bit of a Germanic marvel, though engineered by Britain under the Rank Telestage flag. A few statistics may impress such as two rear stage wagons, parkable one over the other on a compensating elevator, both 16.4m×13.4m, one purely for dance the other with a 13.25m revolve. In addition there are split ½ stage wagons each side, 8.2m×6.7m about which I am doubtful — would not a full wagon one side not be preferable? Aloft are 111 power driven flying sets at 150mm centres by September already safely commissioned by the confident American firm, Peter Albrecht.

In front of the stage there is a single huge 87m<sup>2</sup> orchestra elevator which could present an unbridgeable gulf for the less than Wagnerian end of the operatic repertoire. The distance from stage edge to the downstage edge of the compensator elevator is more than 3m which is large even by German standards. (This means the total distance from setting line to front row of the stalls is over 11m.) But lighting will not be a problem: there are, for example, no less than 3 full height advance perch concealed slots each side between the 15m wide proscenium arch and the ends of the three circles.

The other two theatres, 850 seat playhouse and 350/450 seat studio (22m×22m flat floor with a 5.4m working height and encircling gallery at 3m) are equally conventional. They promise to be as efficiently workable as British theatres also planned in the late 60s. They lack only the humanity

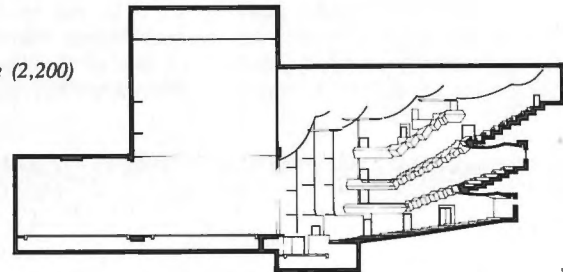
and pzazz sought after by the designers of the present generation of less technically orientated and hence less rigid theatre spaces which are now under construction and which owe so much to the way directors and designers have used such spaces as the Royal Exchange, Riverside or the Cottesloe.

But what is the chief impression, you may ask, of this kingdom under the ground with its luxurious dressing rooms for 326 plus orchestra rooms plus staff rooms? The answer is the one element avoided up till now: the decor. It is quite literally breathtaking and totally unlike anything attempted in any other arts centre.

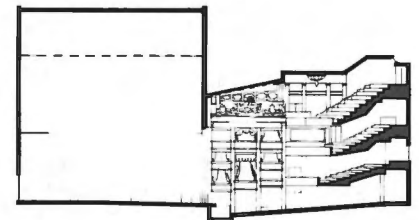
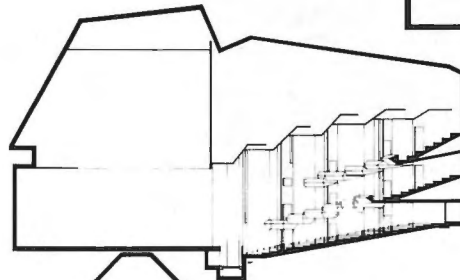
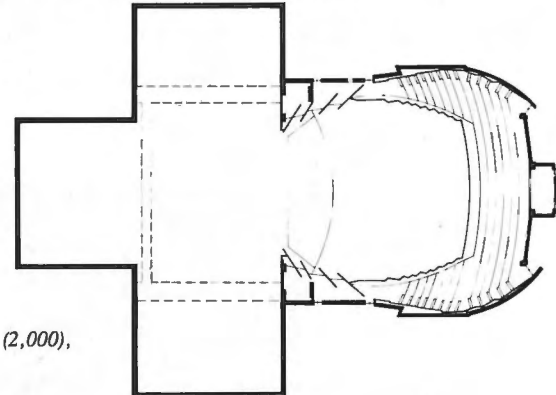
How the Victorian Arts Centre came to emerge from Sir Roy Grounds' concrete

chrysalis into the multi hued butterfly that reminds one at first of an up-market Holiday Inn is a strange, strange, strange story. In 1980 the controlling Committee of the Centre was wound up and in its place the government created the Victorian Arts Centre Trust to be representative of commercial as well as art interests in the State of Victoria. The new trustees, despite a cost escalation from the 1976 figure of \$97.6m to the then projected figure of \$166m, went out to raise an extra \$5m for 'Improved Finishes'. Sir Roy Grounds was so ill that he was able to have only a few meetings with Oscar winning ('Camelot') Australian stage and interior designer John Truscott. History does not record their agreement or otherwise.

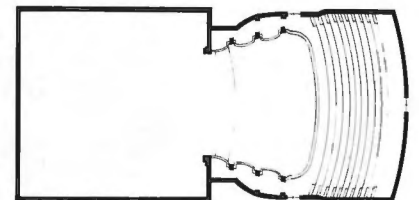
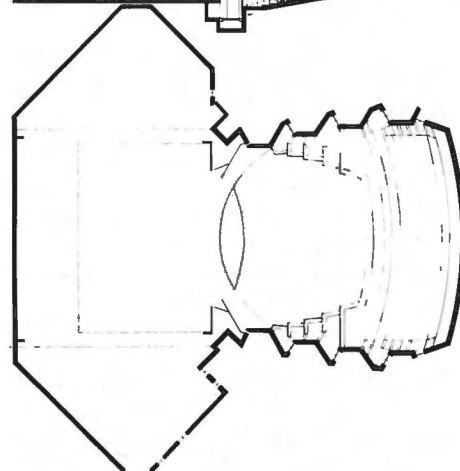
State Theatre Melbourne (2,200)



Festival Theatre Adelaide (2,000)



Theatre Royal Drury Lane (2,240)



Comparative drawing three theatres seating over 2,000 to the same scale



## Lancelyn Lighting

### Sales and Hire

Berkey, Bob Kelly, Brocks, CCT, Duraplug, GEC, Lancelyn, Lee, Le Maitre, Pluto, Strand.

Phone for our full catalogue

Lancelyn Lighting Oxford 102 & 112 Walton St. Oxford 0865-512464 (24 hrs)  
Lancelyn Lighting North West Paulton Road, Bebington Merseyside 051-334-8991 (24 hrs)



In the space of a few months everything to do with the interior finishes was altered. On the ceiling of every foyer and public staircase is real gold leaf imported from Holland. On the walls cream coloured leather. On the floors real marble. Backstage in the soloists' dressing rooms are the most comfortable casting couches conceivable. Then there is that five star green room. Gold plated four sided lampshades stand on the ubiquitous gold coffee tables in every corner of the lobbies. In the public areas only the hammer finished concrete columns betray what might have been.

And the Concert Hall itself? Let the P.R. handbook speak:

"The concrete walls are painted in colours and patterns that are found in Australia's mineral and gemstone deposits, creating strata that give the impression that the huge auditorium has been carved out of a hillside. Australia's wool, timber and livestock industries complement each other in the finished design".

Words fail at the sight of concrete and banners alike floating with colour and at so much plaster hand painted to look like rare Australian woods (so rare it looks like formica to a Brit). However it certainly provided one hell of a lot of employment to scenic artists who even now are painting marble on to the recently plastered hammer finished columns in the opera theatre lobbies.

In 1840 Macaulay chillingly speculated that "some future traveller from New Zealand shall, in the midst of a vast solitude, take his stand on a broken arch of London Bridge to sketch the ruins of St Paul's". I, in answer, can say that I have, in Melbourne in 1983, looked on Xanadu, both stately pleasure dome and caverns measureless to man. I stand amazed at three things: how a state of 3.8 million people can spend £125 million on the creation of such a magnificent performing arts building; how a single design team, led by such a great single minded pioneer as Sir Roy Grounds, could have created so sensibly planned and inevitably complex a complex and, lastly, how insanely appropriate that this whole subterranean territory, under down under, should have been touched by the fairy wand of designer Truscott. Of course in the original design the underground spaces might have turned out oppressive in the Piranesi/Barbican sense but somehow I feel that Grounds would have given the client what had been said was wanted only ten years ago - "the architectural style should not be too grand, but should warmly 'take people by the hand' encouraging them to be relaxed and informal in enjoying the buildings and the programmes they contain". Other designers and architects who cross the perilous seas to tread these faery lands forlorn may also in future cross themselves to ward off not just those all too familiar budget cuts imposed during construction but equally less familiar budget increments that come so late on that they can only be spent on wallpaper.

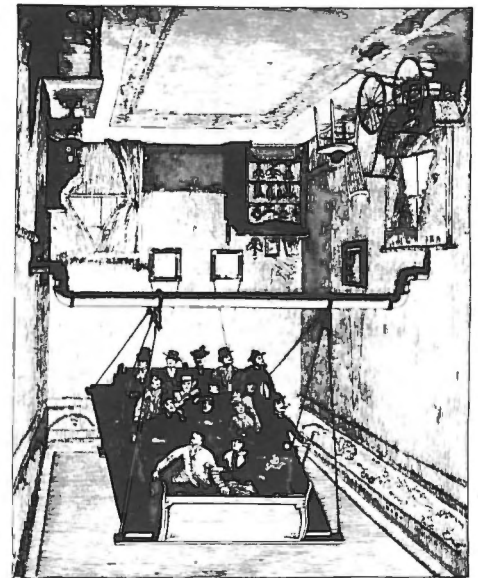
### Post Script

I am, at last, one up on Francis Reid who has been attempting to do for theatre museums the world over what Bernard Levin has done for Michelin 3 Star Restaurants with hot and cold running Wagner. I can boast to Francis that I have visited what is the newest and probably the finest theatre museum in the English speaking world: the Performing Arts Museum of the Victorian Arts Centre. It opened in 1982 some time before the Concert Hall and, under the direction of Ron Danielson, has been a resounding success from day one.

His policy is to stage long running exhibitions on a particular subject. These occupy the whole of the approximately 500m<sup>2</sup> display area which is conveniently situated at river walk level behind the Concert Hall and beyond the Treble Clef Coffee Shop. The opening show was centred on Dame Nellie Melba (the magnificent Bunny portrait of whom was subsequently transported to Britain for the 250th Anniversary Exhibition of the Royal Opera House held at the Royal Academy from December 1982 to March 1983). The second show, which I caught, was entitled "Bourke Street on Saturday Night" - an evocation of Melbourne's Shaftesbury Avenue from the middle of the nineteenth century to the closures of the 1950's.

In spite of a lowish ceiling of 4/5m this is a triumph of the exhibition designer's art and craft. Every inch of the space had been transformed into something theatrical: stage with pantomime set, stage door in the 90's, foyer in the fly blown 50's, dressing rooms, etc. The standard of scenic presentation was both imaginative and of the highest technical standards of the sort which could withstand a close up from a T.V. camera. There is more than one evocative sound tape and from time to time a seemingly tireless pianist would play an on appropriate piano while we, Joe Public, wandered past distorting mirrors and marvellously painted gauzes, all in the glare of footlights or early moving picture projectors. "As Britannia rules the waves so does the Britannia Theatre rule the world of the Photo Play Theatres . . . The first theatre in Australia to be fitted with a Perfect System of Scientific Ventilation . . . Here held captive are the imaginations of the masterminds. Here are life reproductions of historians, the stories that enthrall during years to come, the tales of Knight and Lady, of blunt businessmen and the quaint characters of travel and adventure" . . . all this on Bourke Street Melbourne in 1912.

The museum also has a more serious role. Its holdings of painting owned or on loan include the charming watercolour illustrated page 7. There are vital archives from J.C. Williamson and a host of private collections available to researchers. There is a living sound archive which captures all Australian musicians from Nellie Stewart to the Bee Gees. But above all the whole is presented to the public in a manner which is at once stylish and scholarly. One can ask no more of a performing arts museum.



The catalogue of the Bourke Street exhibition tells us that 'The Haunted Swing' was in Bourke Street 'opposite the Eastern Market' - presumably at the end of the nineteenth century. You were strapped into this car which barely moved, the realistically furnished room being rocked backwards and forwards and eventually rolled over and over by unseen hands. The illusion apparently always led to screams of horror.



The poster for the Performing Arts Museum

# Appropriate Technology

ERIC PRESSLEY

A recent *Stage* editorial, winding up the latest outbreak of correspondence on the evils of sound in the theatre, said: 'Occasionally we think that the trouble with the theatre is that it is jammed with too much technology for its own good, thereby damaging the essential theatre experience.'

A sane, judicious, and thoroughly unhelpful remark. Even if one assumes that the essential theatre experience is unchanging, one cannot assume the same of the expectations of the people involved — on both sides of the hypothetical float microphones. I am sure that more than one sound engineer has been asked to amplify a wind machine by a director who insisted on using one but wanted the sound louder, in stereo, and fading into the distance without reducing the ferocity of the gale.

Electro-acoustic techniques give the theatre new and better ways of representing nature and unprecedented ways of distorting it. Electric lighting offers the same possibilities (there are no snap cues in nature and

moonlight is not blue), and that seems to be here to stay. Perhaps representation and distortion are the essence of theatre. There are, of course, excesses, but I am sure there always were. You do not need high technology to be unsubtle; good old traditional techniques like rolling cannon-balls around offer splendid opportunities.

It must be conceded that much theatre sound equipment is insensitively operated and most is disastrously under-engineered, but the problem is not nearly as simple as that. In many cases the complaint is what was the audience intended to hear, against what the majority expected to hear.

Even if the essential theatre experience is immutable, the listening experience for most people has changed drastically in the past thirty years. There is now a whole generation for which entertainment (in fact, communication of all sorts) has always come out of loudspeakers, and whose expectations of theatre are formed by what it has seen on television and heard on records.

Thus we have audiences who are not capable of sustained concentration, performers who use artificial aids to make up for their lack of basic performing skills, and technicians who are so wrapped up in the mechanics of the process that they ignore the needs of artist and audience alike. With the ever increasing popularity of personal stereo we are heading for a situation where the listener's expectations are based entirely on the use of headphones. Then the theatre as we know it will be totally impossible.

This is an over-pessimistic view, but there are real difficulties — in the presentation of musicals, for instance — and the problem does not begin with a philistine turning up the wick. Audiences want to see stars of television and recording, managements understandably want to cash in on proven earning power, and directors rightly wish to employ their undoubted talents. But given performers whose techniques were not learned in the theatre, and most likely a composer more accustomed to writing for the recording studio than for live performance, the sound man has a problem which is not of his own making and for which there may be no ready solution.

Certainly the style of production will inevitably be very different from that of thirty years ago. Dissatisfaction is as likely to result from artistic or commercial decisions as from technical incompetence. The dangerous assumption is that talent or material developed in another medium can



**MAKING THE BEST-BETTER**  
5 completely new Spotlights join the CCT family plus a major update to the renowned Silhouette System.

Call or write EDDIE HUNTER  
for further details.

**CCT** theatre lighting

WINDSOR HOUSE, 26 WILLOW LANE, MITCHAM, SURREY, CR4 4NA. Tel. 01-640 3366 Telex 946648



*Enough faders for ten fingers, a few knobs, a keypad to assign control where required and a display screen to tell the operator what's going on. It could be a ten year old lighting board. Actually it's the latest thing in sound control and it only takes up four seats. It might just find a use in the theatre.*

be presented in the theatre by the use of non-theatrical techniques.

The remedy is not necessarily more technology — though there is no reason to think we need less — but technology appropriate to the needs of the theatre, combined with an appreciation of what that technology can and cannot do. However, the sound man is faced on one side with the assumption that he can, with the means at his disposal, turn a very minor talent into Judy Garland; on the other with the belief that if only he would send the gadgets back to the recording studio where they belong, Andrew Lloyd Webber would be writing *Lilac Time*. All round is the peculiarly theatrical belief that having the right tools for the job saps integrity.

There is no encouragement to look at the real problems of using sound, certainly none to seek appropriate technical solutions. A prevalent attitude among performers, producers, and many members of the audience can be summed up as: 'We've paid for sound, so let's hear some.' in these circumstances it would not be surprising if the operator abandoned the unequal struggle and simply turned up the wick.

Although use of sound in opera is highly controversial, there is one commonly held belief — that amplification is widely used. This is assumed not only by the theatrically and musically unsophisticated and in the face of the purist's tenet that any form of artificial intervention is immoral (though how one can be purist about an art form like opera remains a mystery).

The purist, of course, is sure he could detect crude electronic meddling, therefore much of the sound man's best work goes unnoticed — as it should. The possibility of holding strong opinions about something that one cannot reliably detect is a speculation for the philosopher. To a simple mind, it looks like blind prejudice. This, among what should be the most informed section of the audience, is extremely

depressing to those who are involved in opera production and whose day to day task is to refine the compromises which make opera possible.

The bells in *Parsifal* have always been a matter of compromise. In practice, the conductor has to choose between using the wrong sort of bells at the wrong pitch, or playing the part at pitch on totally different instruments — usually an *ad hoc* collection which never really sound together. One must conclude that this piece has never been played as the composer intended, or that Wagner's imagination was restricted by the technical limitations of his time. To shun, on artistic grounds, the computer-aided synthesizer which seems to offer the best practical solution to date, seems perverse.

It is not surprising that conductors, having found it possible to solve in the recording studio some of the balance problems inherent in opera, are unwilling to relinquish this creative control in the opera house. Audiences' expectations of opera are formed by what they hear on recordings, and it is often interpretations developed in the recording studio that they want to hear. It is a pity that, as yet, techniques are not available to effect this control fully in the theatre. When it does work it can be very impressive, and even the purists must sympathize with a conductor's desire to achieve a performance that lives up to his idea of how the music should sound.

In contrast, the producer who wishes to use dramatic techniques of this century rather than the last can expect no sympathy. He does, admittedly, sometimes make a singer's life harder by asking for a degree of naturalism. By positioning arias anywhere but downstage, or by using visually impressive but acoustically unsympathetic scenery, he can make it more difficult for the singer to be heard.

Before condemning such a producer as insensitive to the special needs of opera, we should ask whether what we consider appropriate operatic staging and acting were not merely inherited from the nineteenth century along with the bulk of the operatic repertory. Certainly our operas look very like the descriptions and illustrations of nineteenth-century plays.

Is it really perverse for a twentieth-century producer to want opera to look like a twentieth-century play? Singers can cope magnificently with the difficulties of voice production and drama combined, and the sound man can unobtrusively solve some of the acoustic problems — sometimes so unobtrusively that there is a tendency to pretend that his electronic meddling does not really happen.

This pretence does nothing to encourage the refining of techniques necessary for this unique and very tricky application, let alone promote a better understanding of what sound can and cannot do for opera. There is no doubt, however, that producers and conductors want to make use of electro-acoustic techniques in order to reach a better compromise between conflicting musical and dramatic requirements.

In plays, amplification of speech is the

major issue. It is, I believe, quite common in the USA and becoming more so in the UK. Although I know of no sound engineer who advocates it, amplification will soon be taken for granted. It does not really matter whether the cause is inadequately trained actors, audiences accustomed to the level of concentration demanded by TV panel games, or directors with no real belief in the power of words (and all these exist). If amplification is to be done at all, it must be done well, if only because until the technique is perfected the question will always be 'Was the sound good enough?' rather than 'Did it do any good?'

One of the theatre's principal difficulties in making full and sensible use of sound is the failure to realise what a complicated problem it is. A love of homely analogies and a healthy distrust of the specialist has produced a tendency to think of theatre sound in terms of a giant hi-fi. Since the superficial resemblance between the average auditorium and the average living room is not great, one might expect problems — and problems there are.

If you place a pair of loudspeakers on the stage of a typical theatre and adjust for best results at the director's favourite seat (fairly common practice), then listen around the auditorium (not so common), you will be lucky to find the sound acceptable in all seats. Even in a good auditorium it will be noticeably inferior in some seats; in a bad one the majority of the audience will not be hearing what it is intended to hear. The problems will generally be loudness (too much or too little) and high-frequency perception (usually too little). Moving the speakers sometimes helps, but often the only position that really works is in the middle of stage or somewhere equally impractical.

Adding more speakers is the usual solution. The number required depends on the size and shape of the auditorium, and will probably be between four and forty. By careful positioning of the appropriate number of speakers, most of the problems of loudness and frequency response can be dealt with.

However, as with any remedial measure, there are side effects. Most people in the audience are hearing two or more loudspeakers. Since, in such situations, the brain gives precedence to the sound that arrives first, those unfortunate listeners are all too aware that they are hearing a loudspeaker somewhere above them and to one side, which is where it usually is.

We have to introduce an electronic device to delay the signal to each loudspeaker so that we can decide which the listener hears first, for it is from this one that all the sound will appear to come. All we need now is enough electronic gadgetry to adjust the frequency balance of each loudspeaker, as otherwise identical loudspeakers in different parts of the auditorium can sound very different.

Given this uniformity and, of course, a means of controlling loudness, we stand a very good chance of producing a sound that an audience numbering 2000 will find not

# Frederick Bentham

## FIRST FELLOW OF THE ABTT

greatly inferior to their home hi-fi. Capital cost per seat is likely to be more than the average man pays for his record player at home, but the problem is much more difficult and the market is not large enough for mass production to reduce prices significantly.

When it comes to capital investment, theatre managements seem to base their policy on the price tag in the local hi-fi shop rather than the precedents of the audio industry. However, the real danger of thinking of theatre sound in domestic terms is the assumption that complexity is avoidable. Architectural constraints and the nature of the problem itself both make it inevitable.

Stereo is essentially a one-dimensional phenomenon, the illusion of reality in a line between two loudspeakers, whereas the theatre has never been less than two-dimensional, a picture in a frame. With space an important modern production value, the theatre is now very much three dimensional.

Eight loudspeakers are required to produce a three-dimensional soundstage which is not always going to be in front of the audience; it could be anywhere. This approach obviously requires a very large number of loudspeakers, all accurately controlled not just for loudness but also for time of arrival. Because the brain insists on concentrating on the first sound it hears, it is possible to suggest the position of the sound source with a distant loudspeaker and then, without changing the sound's apparent position, to improve clarity and increase loudness by feeding the same signal, suitably delayed, to loudspeakers closer to the audience.

If the arrival of sound from a number of loudspeakers is synchronized, the audience will not be aware of which loudspeakers are being used. In fact, it may be possible for them to forget that loudspeakers are being used at all.

The technology that makes this subtlety possible is quite new, but its potential contribution to theatrical illusion is obvious. Art that conceals art is much admired in the theatre. Technology that conceals technology has not so far been sufficiently exploited.

That theatre sound is a complicated problem hardly needs further illustration. There are difficulties enough in the need to create sounds to complement the theatre's range of visual styles and illusions, which were developed over centuries by employing new scenic technology as it came along while keeping the old. The desire to employ the styles and techniques of other media without accepting the limitations inherent in their use may stem from an admirable desire to enrich, without damaging, the essential theatre experience, but it makes for complications unparalleled in other fields.

The real tragedy of theatre sound is not that it has consistently failed to make full use of existing technology, but that it has failed to initiate the development of new technology to meet its own unique needs.

It was in an Empire that I first heard any formal reference to lighting design. Archaeologists may wish to know that the particular Empire was a Moss but not a Matcham. I do not recall the exact year, but it was during that period of turmoil in European history prior to the surge in marketing technology that led to bananas being packaged in bunched skins rather than home constructed by mashing boiled parsnips with banana essence. Neither can I recall which double act was working for my laughs, but there is every statistical reason for supposing that the front cloth would have located the scene quite inappropriately in Piccadilly Circus. The funny man was discovered centre in a complex statuesque pose. The straight feed entered to enquire "Why are you standing like that?" "Why am I standing like this?" "Yes, why are you standing like that?" "I daren't move. I've just been lit by Robert Nesbitt."

Robert Nesbitt's appearance was also appropriate because his lighting technique has come full cycle. His downlighting acting-areas and sidelighting pageants used the visible beams of lensless equipment to create the kind of coloured haze that was lost between the demise of those early beam-lights and the arrival of the par can.

Inevitably and appropriately there was a light console (a Bristol Old Vic pensioner) in attendance at the presentation ceremony. Bentham's major contribution to the development of stage lighting is generally considered to be the Light Console. However in several matters, particularly of timing, it represents something of a terminal branch line in the history of control. (J.T. Wood's electronic is the seminal system from which today's desks can be traced.) But not only did Fred's light console put control under the hands (and feet) of an operator who could be positioned with a view of the stage,



There may be some who will be mystified, even irritated that I should recall all this while setting out to report upon the elevation of Fred Bentham to the unique position of first ever Fellow of the Association of British Theatre Technicians. But Fred will understand because Fred taught me that any writer needs an angle. Just as the appearance of Robert Nesbitt to present the Fellowship Scroll provided Fred with a cue upon which to hang his acceptance speech.

How appropriate it was to bring these two together at this moment. Fred's heyday was when directors like Nesbitt did their own lighting with technical advice from Strand Electric. I suspect that he has never really quite adjusted to the arrival of the Lighting Designer, although he certainly turned this development to marketing advantage by insisting (with eyes a-twinkle) that it was they rather than Strand who were advocating the growth in complexity of multi-lantern rigs.

but his insistence on *playability* has ensured that the better "boards" continue to have a welcome affinity with the organ loft rather than with mission control.

I believe that Fred's major contribution has been and continues to be the way in which he adopts an interesting, positive and usually contentious point of view. Many constructive things happened because Fred encouraged my generation to react against him. In debate, Fred is always both constructive and entertaining. His role as a *catalyst* throughout half a century of theatre technology is of a unique importance that cannot be overstated.

By waiting so long to create their first fellow and then bestowing that honour upon Frederick Bentham, the ABTT have ensured that their Fellowship will confer the very highest distinction upon future recipients.

FRANCIS REID

# Antipodean Colosseum

D.C. IRVING

Theatre equipment consultant for the Sydney Entertainment Centre

“What is the total weight of scenery and lighting that will be used for opera or ballet productions?” – this question, fired at the writer during his first attendance at regular Architectural planning meetings, was the beginning of a long series of activities consequent upon the decision by the New South Wales Government to alter the planning brief for the Sydney Entertainment Centre. Originally conceived as a large stadium accommodating 10–12,000 people for sporting events, circuses, pop concerts etc, the Centre had been planned with a space frame roof construction, strong enough for the hypothetical layer of hailstones, and for lighting equipment arranged on a U shaped catwalk but evidently not to carry scenery.

The rapidly rising cost of good seats in the Sydney Opera House combined with an apparently growing interest in ballet and opera persuaded “them” to authorise changes in design and equipment so that the auditorium could be reduced by appropriately located divisions to create a 7,000 seat thrust stage theatre or a 3,500 seat proscenium style, known as the Lyric Theatre. Both these forms imply the use of scenery and conventional stage lighting hence the question quoted above. We agreed that 20 tonnes was a reasonable figure for actual working load, and that a further 20 tonnes would cover the weight of the hoisting equipment itself. Obviously, counterweighting was out of the question and therefore direct winching has to be used, the winches being located in the roof structure. By this time the structural engineer was reconciled to scrapping the roof plans and had changed the design from space frame to more conventional box trusses, these being approximately 5m depth×1m wide, there being 2 in each direction, dividing the roof into 9 sections like a noughts and crosses game. The centre section was kept free of cross bracing as much as possible thereby gaining extra flying height. It had been hoped to provide a full grid over the Lyric Stage, but the statutory design loading for working floor areas would have increased the roof design requirements beyond acceptability so the final design uses 4 suspension beams with a catwalk alongside each, giving access to the loft blocks.

Currently the flying complement over the Lyric Stage has 4 fixed speed winches to carry masking legs and borders, plus 20 variable speed scenery battens and 18 spot-lines. From a point during rehearsals immediately prior to the Opening and continuing as I write, there has already been investigation into the cost and feasibility of providing additional flying, as the initial quantity appears to be insufficient for major

touring companies. However, the funds available only just sufficed to install the first lot after leaving out some fixed speed winches and also the remote control panel at floor level which was in our original specification.

The variable speed winches use 3 speed switched pole motors and have two adjustable working deads as well as automatic stopping at stage level and grid level. The 3 speed facility is only available between the working deads, rigging adjustments outside those deads being at minimum speed only by

with 20 masters has a duplicate control which can be connected at either of 2 floor level control positions. There is also a wireless riggers control for use when setting up.

The method of dividing the auditorium results from many discussions and trials of different materials ranging from conventional velvet drapes through painted canvas to plastic panels, timber frames and all sorts of gadgets which slid; flew or were otherwise disposed of when not required. This eventually boiled down to discussions with a local sailmaker and the final decision was to



*The Sydney Entertainment Centre looking to 1.5 million visitors a year*

constant pressure key switches.

The bulk of the lighting comes from a catwalk slung below the trusses and lighting over the stage area can be hung on five 16m long self climbing trusses with a rated load of 700Kg each. These units, built by Telestage, can be hung anywhere over the stage area, including parallel to the long edges if required.

There are 496 lighting outlets with individual dimmers, 40 are 10kW, the remainder 5kW. These are controlled by an Australian built QLite Memory System which was born out of the British Thornlite, which was in fact the system originally ordered. The control is a 150 channel with facilities generally as Thornlite 500 excepting that it includes electronic patching to the 496 dimmers.

The lighting control room is in the centre section of the underslung lighting catwalk, with a sound proof audio control room alongside. As this is quite a long trek from arena level (and from sanitary accommodation alas!) the matrix pin patch back up

use stretched painted canvas in 4 large panels, using yacht mast extrusion to form head battens, and multiple sheaves with a single hauling line to lift each section into position as required. As can be seen from the photograph overleaf the Rosco painted canvas looks surprisingly solid, and when properly tied down at the base keeps quite flat and free of movement.

The proscenium for the Lyric mode is formed by the edges of the division canvas with an additional drape above, in velvet to match the house curtain, which latter has its own variable speed flying gear. Simple enough one might think until the Department of Services began to worry about fire regulations. All very well, they said, to have an open stage but when there is a proscenium the regulations require enclosure of the stage, a smoke hatch and a fire curtain. So, the roof has 2 large centre opening panels, and when the Lyric mode is rigged the stage is enclosed on 2 sides by 19m high ceramic cloth panels. The house curtain is backed with similar material as is the pro-

scenium masking above, and the underside of the roof trusses and catwalks over the stage are also clad with the same material. This is called "Refrasil" and was we believe originally developed for high temperature insulation in spacecraft but now finds other uses such as protective screens in foundries.

Because the house curtain now has to double as emergency fire curtain, the power winch has de-clutching and hydraulic buffer mechanisms to arrange automatic descent in emergency conditions. Having made all that operational after many difficulties it now turns out that the Centre's Management seems consistently able to obtain performance concessions not to use the fire barriers providing the scenery and costumes have been properly treated.

A detail worth mentioning is the control for the house lights, which the electrical consultant had originally arranged purely for balance across phases, without regard for the changes of mode. After considering the various combinations, we re-arranged the dimmable house lights into 4 U-shaped rows running parallel with the seating. Each of the 4 rows has 3 dimmers corresponding to the Lyric mode, and extensions to 7,000 and 10,000 modes respectively. Each dimmer has an individual control enabling preset of lights for the appropriate mode and for balance of rows. The preset condition is then mastered by an automatic fade circuit operable from various points. There is of course additional metal halide flood lighting of the central arena for sporting events.

Since the building was practically completed early 1983 the management has purchased a 4' high mobile stage which can be set anywhere at arena level. They have also arranged a concession for advertising whereby the Centre is provided with an Eidophor large screen television projector, currently located alongside the lighting control room although its final position has yet to be determined. It has also been found that the soundproof auditorium control room has limited use theatrically, so provision is now made for connection of mixers and tape machines at a position on the cross aisle opposite the orchestra pit.



*The full arena arrangement allows for staging theatrical spectaculars and sports events to audiences of 10,000.*



*The 7,000 mode for major thrust stage productions of opera and ballet*



*In the Lyric mode the seating is reduced to 3,500 seats*

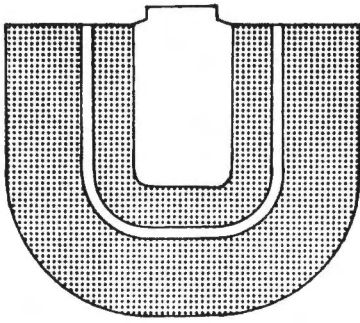
## **THEATRE SOUND & LIGHTING**

Queen's Theatre  
51 Shaftesbury  
Avenue  
London W1V 8BA  
Tel: 01-439 2441/2/3

SPECIALIST CONSULTANTS IN SOUND  
LIGHTING OPTICAL EFFECTS FILM &  
SLIDE PROJECTION & VIDEO FOR  
CONFERENCES THEATRES AND  
EXHIBITIONS

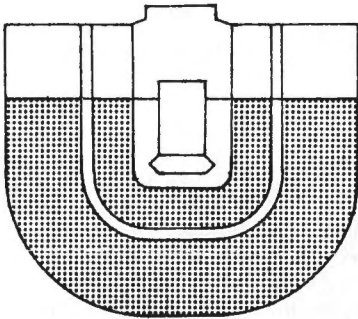
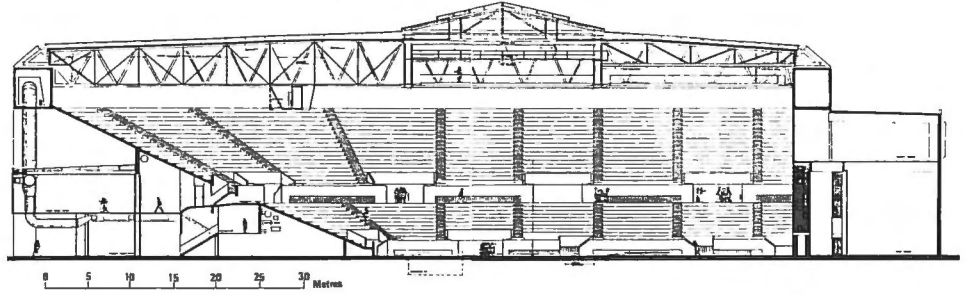
Technical Advice Available  
Equipment for Sale or Hire

Write for Catalogue, giving  
details of Hire Terms



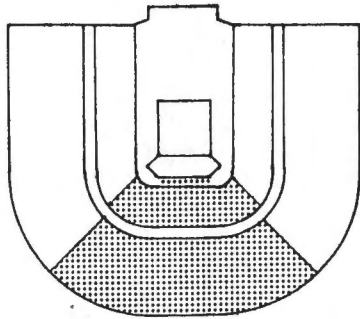
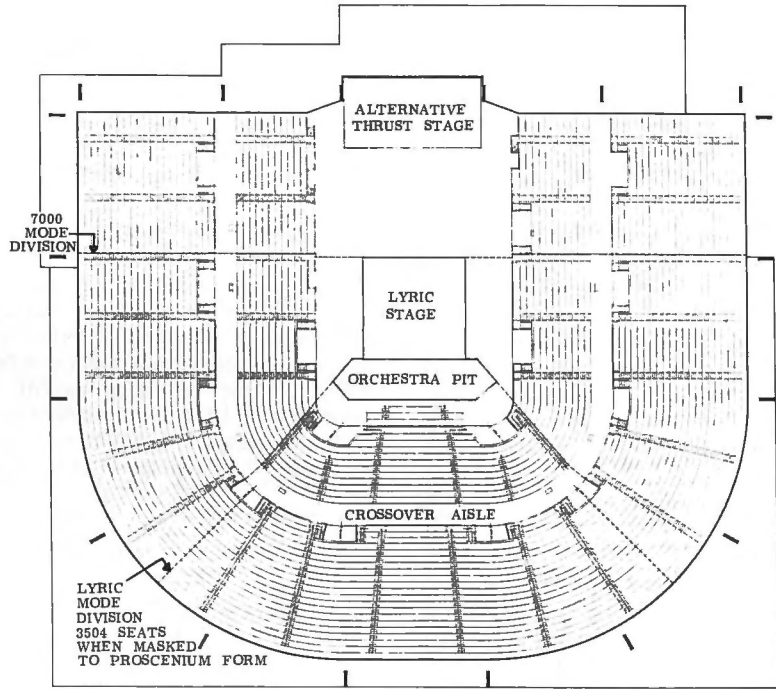
### 10,000 SEAT LAYOUT

This layout is suitable for a three ring circus (complete with trapeze acts), theatrical spectaculars, ethnic song and dance festivals, ballroom dancing competitions, and indoor sports such as tennis, boxing, basket ball and gymnastics.



### 7,000 SEAT LAYOUT

The size of the auditorium is reduced to seat 7,000 patrons around three sides of a large thrust stage which is fully equipped with flying facilities and orchestra pit for 100 musicians. This layout is suitable for major "thrust stage" productions of opera, ballet and theatre.



### 3,500 SEAT LAYOUT

In the Lyric mode the auditorium is further divided to seat 3,500 patrons facing the stage in a conventional proscenium format. The stage is fully equipped with flying facilities and orchestra pit for 100 musicians.

capsule which lowered to stage level, disgorged 2 artists. Because the official acceptance of the equipment precluded the lifting of personnel, special permission had to be obtained for this exercise, which involved a de-rating of the maximum load and the provision of extra safety devices and load sharing arrangements. It was fortunate that the relevant Government inspectors were both sympathetic to, and interested in the problems and therefore satisfactory negotiations were possible. Anyone who has worked on a large television broadcast can imagine some of the problems encountered during the 3 weeks of rehearsals in a building which was still full of building tradesmen intent on finishing work, but were easily distracted by some of the talent. The lighting rig evolved after experiments comparing 5kW fresnels with multiple Par cans. In the end, the most satisfactory base colour wash was obtained by using Par cans, several hundred, in fact, whilst retaining fresnels for backing and key lighting. More Par cans were used for back lighting the audience, the total connected load being approximately 1.4 megawatts. A further problem with this performance was that with the extra lighting equipment, smoke and fog machines, flown scenery, plus 14 followspots with operators the total roof

loading was near to critical and there had to be several calculation runs on the structural engineers computer design program before the complete rig was allowed to proceed, and there had to be a limit to the number of personnel allowed in the roof structure at one time. The total rig was impressive in its size but one wonders how many in the audience realised that it was for the opening occasion only and does not form part of the permanent equipment.

Most of us who were concerned with the design of the project are reasonably happy with the results especially bearing in mind the funding constraints and the problems of reconciling the design brief with safety regulations written around theatres or cinemas in the mid 30's. We would all like the opportunity to work on another similar sized auditorium, using hard won experience. Certainly, one would want more theatrical input to early structural design, including a full grid. An orchestra lift, stage lifts to plus 4 feet, and a passenger lift to roof level would all be most desirable.

As for usage, this will be limited to some extent until other capital cities here have similar buildings and equipment to provide a touring circuit, so far the only other comparable building is the 7,000 seat Perth Entertainment Centre.

The official opening was a large scale television spectacular which covered just about everything from a concert pianist through acrobatic clowns, dance presentations and space-ships to a performance of the 1812 overture complete with machine guns, maroons and the biggest collection of smoke machines ever seen in the Southern Hemisphere. As usual, some of the requirements were more than the design brief anticipated - the space-ship which was flown on 4 spotlines had within it a space

# The Renaissance Theatres of Italy

Theatric Tourist FRANCIS REID visits Vicenza, Sabbionetta and Parma.

In all theatre history books, there are photographs of the three Italian theatres that have survived from the Renaissance. As they are only some fifty miles apart, they can be visited comfortably on three consecutive days. So I did.

It is from this period that the development of the modern permanent indoor theatre is generally considered to begin. The impetus came from the desire of the humanists to restore to the stage the classic drama of the ancients. To house these performances — and performances of new tragedies and comedies written in accord with classical dramatic structures — it was considered appropriate to attempt to revive the architectural forms of the Greek and Roman theatres of antiquity. No complete theatre had survived and so research centred on the architectural writings of Vitruvius and the examination of roman ruins. The earliest of these neo-classical stages were temporary

structures erected in great halls, using timber for a scaled down interpretation of the original massive open air theatres. Incomplete antiquarian information stimulated creativity in the design of the *Frons Scaenae* whose arches framed painted city perspectives.

Andrea Palladio, entrusted in 1561 with providing both auditorium and stage setting for a performance of "L'Amor Costante" in the great gothic hall of the Palazzo della Ragione in Vicenza, created a complete temporary theatre which was so successful that its cumbersome scaffolding was dismantled and stored for a performance of "Sfonisba" in the following year. Scenes from these productions in Palladio's temporary wooden theatre are recorded on a fresco in the anteroom to his **Teatro Olimpico** of 1585 in Vicenza — a theatre not only preserved but in current performance use. The Olympic Academy started to

build this theatre in 1580. Palladio died shortly after construction began and the work was completed by his pupil Scamozzi for the opening with Sophocles, "Oedipus Tyrannus" in 1585.

The theatre was built on the site of Vicenza's Arsenal and today's approach is through the original armoury gate into a courtyard formed by the Olympic Academy, Palladio's Theatre and earlier buildings. This courtyard is a cool relaxed garden furnished with archaeological fragments, particularly statues from other long vanished Vicenza theatres.

Foyers are provided by the Odeon and the Ante-Odeon. The Odeon is the meeting room of the Olympic Academy who commissioned the theatre. However it is the Ante-Odeon whose walls carry the items of most significance to the theatric enquirer: the monochrome ochre frescoes painted in 1596 to record the Olympic's production successes to that date. These include the 1561 and 1562 performances in Palladio's temporary wooden theatre, the final scene from the Olympic's inaugural production in 1585 and the visit of the Japanese Ambassadors later that year. It is impossible to overestimate the analytical value or emotional power of these records of the interplay of actor, audience and architecture at performances of three hundred years ago.

The original entry to the auditorium was by the stairs from the ante-odeon leading to the rear of the seating tiers. This gives a commanding first view of the scope of all the theatre's features, framed by the shafts of the corinthian columns whose curve contains the audience segment. Today's visitor enters through one of the small vomitories that have been cut into the extreme ends of the semi-ellipse of the seating tiers. From here, one's darting eye records a simultaneous composite of images of the acting and audience zones, from the massive statue encrusted *Frons Scaenae* with perspective streets beyond its arches, across the orchestra, up the sweep of the nine seating tiers to the colonnade surmounted by its balustrade upon which further figures pose in frozen moments of rhetoric.

The atmosphere that gives most theatres their tingle is derived from past performances. Logically, I suppose that we are only responding to our knowledge that the fabric has witnessed countless collaborations between generations of performers and audiences. But intuitively, any real theatre-lover knows that those cumulative years of silent witness result in a theatre having a tangible soul. Palladio's *Teatro Olimpico* in Vicenza is different. Here the ghosts are provided not so much by the performances

**LITO**  
**THEATRE LIGHTING**

**Tulla Lighting**  
LIMITED  
5 Beckett Road Andover Hampshire SP10 3HR  
Telephone Andover (0264) 51114 Telex 47137

1000 W. P.C.

Now being specified in leading theatres.



as by the visitors who have made a purely architectural pilgrimage to experience this masterwork. For the three centuries following the inaugural performances there were virtually no productions. During the twentieth century, activity has increased but it is still restricted to a relatively short September season of around twenty performances. No, the atmosphere with which this theatre crackles is derived from all those who over the centuries have come to stand, stare and absorb. (It was two hundred years old when it received Goethe. Napoleon followed twenty years later.)

Palladio's theatre is a one-off. A captured moment during a frenzy of progress in the rediscovery and development of the arts of theatre. Even as the Olympic was building, its concept was being overtaken. Inspired particularly by the studies of Serlio, changeable perspective scenery was evolving a theatre of illusion rather than the one based purely on the actor's delivery of the text. Although Palladio's stage can be described as a dead end in the development of theatre, and an anachronism at the time of its inauguration, it encapsulates the spirit of so much renaissance thinking on theatre: particularly in respect of the looking back to find a way forward. And it established the idea, lost since antiquity, of a theatre being an important civic building and a major work of art — a western European concept that is only now beginning to leap the English channel. Thus the Teatro Olimpico is not just an interesting stop on the theatric tourist trail, it is one of the essential monuments to be included in any grand tour of European architecture.

After absorbing the first impact of the totality of a theatre, my eye darts around the details. Immediately, questions of authenticity arise. The better the condition of the building, the more one wonders how much is original. Restoration involves decisions and often these decisions have to be made on the basis of incomplete information. Palladio's Olympic, however, has never suffered from the problem that affects many theatres: periods of neglect arising from failure to appreciate their significance. The Olimpico is well documented and its commissioning Academy provides a continuity through to the present day. The principal acknowledged alteration is the replacement by concrete of the original sixteenth century timber supports for the audience tiers. Although the old boards were catalogued and replaced over the new concrete sub-structure so that the appearance is correct, the acoustics were in the words of the official guide book "irreparably ruined".

Again to quote from the guide book, "the story of the Olympic's ceilings is a long tormented one". However the present ceiling, painted in 1914, coffered over the stage and clouds floating over the remainder, seems to be close to the spirit of the original engravings — although for much of its life the theatre had a single awning in imitation of a starry sky covering both actors and audience. The main structures seem relatively free from controversy, although there is some doubt expressed about the present colour of the main stage

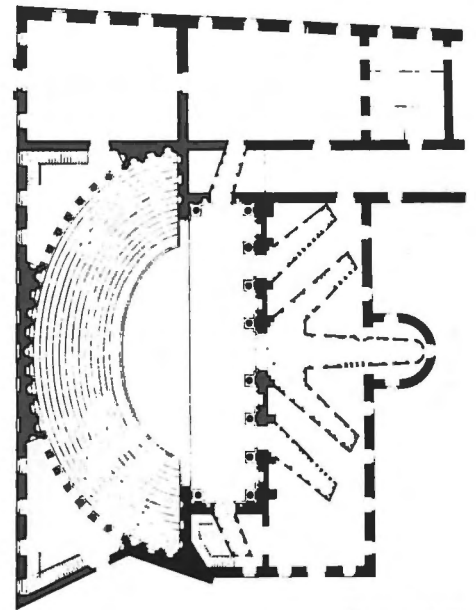
facade — perhaps it was of a warmer tone tending more towards a lighter ochre than the present. What we can never be sure of is Palladio's complete intentions, since he died just as work started on the outer walls. While the basic design had been completed, its realisation left the customary scope of the period for a creative approach to detail. Especially as the various niches were to accommodate statues of the members of the Academy, commissioned by them and provided at their expense. Nevertheless, the final theatre is regarded as being a close interpretation of Palladio's intentions — both in 1585 and as the building remains today. But with one major exception: the background perspectives seen through the great arched entrances of the stage's back wall, and consequently the modifications to the proportions of these arches to make the perspectives visible. These vistas were provided by Vincenzo Scamozzi, acting as scene designer for the inaugural performance of Oedipus Tyrannus. They portray the seven ways of the seven gated city of Thebes. This however is a Thebes seen through renaissance eyes — an ideal city and therefore not unlike Vicenza!

It is thought that Palladio intended simple painted backgrounds and that the change to built scenery represents the influence of the developments in staging methods that were to leave this theatre in a byway of progress. However this theatre is the glorious climax of an antiquarian movement which helped to catalyse the advance towards the theatre of proscenium-framed illusion.

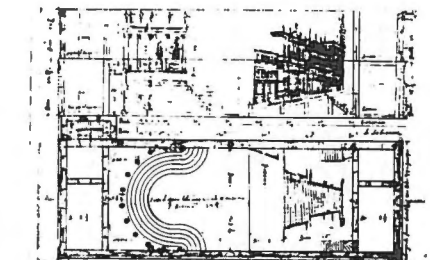
The Teatro Olimpico is designed for daylight performances with tall windows topping the colonnade behind the audience so that the sun's rays are focused on to the acting area and its massive backing which forms a particularly receptive surface for the everchanging angles and colours of nature's daily and seasonal light cycle. Designed artificial light has, however, been in use since that first performance in 1585. Candles were positioned to enhance the sculptured details and Scamozzi arranged oil lamps to heighten the architectural details of his stage set. And the play's director, Ingegneri proposed placing on the stage arch "a frieze suspended from above

... full of small lamps lit with something that created a glittering effect that would be arranged in such a way that they would project their flickering light upon the actors". Whether this was achieved is not clear but we do know that this performance of Oedipus was a spectacular which sought to create a visual and musical feast rather than merely concentrate on the poet's text.

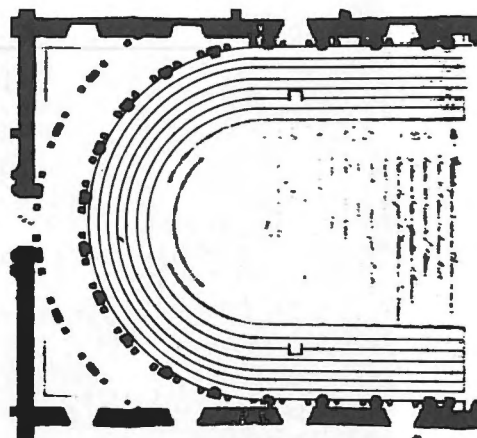
Recent productions have exploited modern lighting, both to enhance the permanent set and to accommodate the staging demands of pieces requiring a more flexible environment — or even something totally alien like "Les Sylphides" whose romantic poet is a creature of classical ruins rather



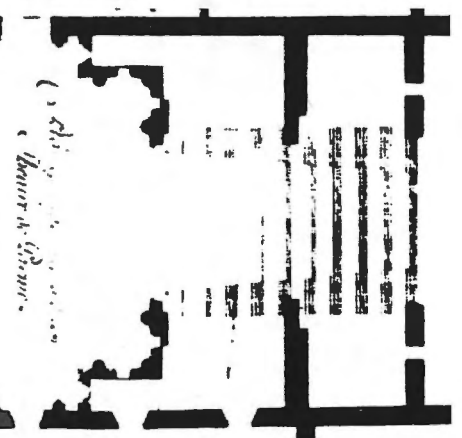
Vicenza: Teatro Olimpico (Drawn by Scamozzi who completed Palladio's design)



Sabbionetta: Teatro Olimpico (Scamozzi's autograph design)



Parma: Teatro Farnese (drawn in 1782)



than the preserved splendours of this renaissance tribute to the ancients.

Palladio's theatre may represent something of a branch line terminus in the history of theatre development, but to sit therein is to be transported directly into genuine renaissance theatre thinking – knowing that the only change of any consequence is the addition of smoke detectors.

In 1588, three years after the opening of the Vicenza theatre, Scamozzi was commissioned to build another Teatro Olimpico. This theatre still stands in **Sabbionetta**, a village in scale but a town in stature, built by the Gonzagas of Mantua as a model administrative centre. Sabbionetta has been almost totally bypassed by subsequent developers. The occasional shop and a couple of bars squatting discreetly in old building shells are the only intrusions of recent centuries, and any encroaching vehicle stirs enough dust to soften its image. To walk the streets during siesta is to eavesdrop upon the renaissance with only a sleepy cat for company.

Whereas the stage/auditorium plan of Palladio's Vicenza is wide and shallow, in Scamozzi's Sabbionetta it is narrow and deep. This is an intimate theatre. The seating is backed by a screen topped with statues in the Palladian manner but the building's restricted width compresses the five rows into a tightish semi-circle with outward turned ends. These seating tiers are a modern replacement to the original designs.

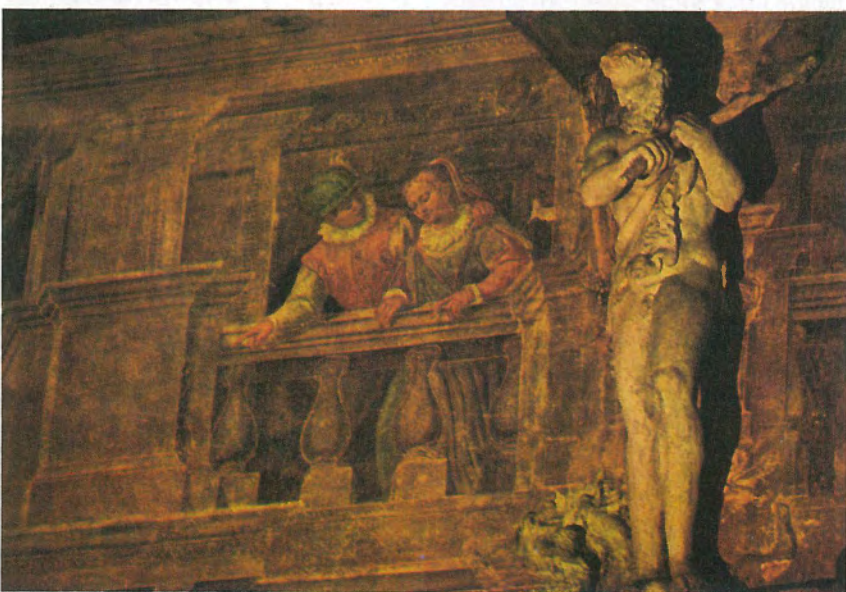
The first stage and its subsequent revisions have been lost, although reconstruction is possible and intended. The present stage is a simple deep platform of the type that we now call an end stage, filling the width of the theatre from wall to wall. Scamozzi provided no elaborate multi-arched Frons Scaenae as at Vicenza, but a simple flat frame embracing the whole stage and pointing the way to the proscenium arch which would soon become the standard means of zoning a performance room. However there was a permanent perspective of a piazza leading to a raked street of noble palaces, diminishing in scale as it receded. This permanent set was subsequently removed so that changeable scenery of moveable flats could be used.



*Vicenza: Teatro Olimpico.*



*Sabbionetta: Teatro Olimpico*



*Sabbionetta: Wall painting in the Teatro Olimpico.*

## WHITE LIGHT

57 FILMER ROAD · LONDON SW6

Theatre lighting design, control, equipment and hire

Audio-Visual presentation design and projection

Equipment maintenance and refurbishing

Installation, distribution systems, special effects

OUR PRICES ARE COMPETITIVE –  
PLEASE RING US FOR A PRICE LIST OR QUOTE

01 731 3291

In Vicenza I stood in some awe of the Palladian grandeur. Even in the presence of a dramatic text of heroic stature with acting to match, I doubted whether I could ever offer a sufficiently grandiose intellect to serve me in my audience role. On the other hand, In Sabbionetta I felt able to embrace a scale which is human without being domestic. The proportions of the statued colonnade remain elegantly classical but the painted people leaning on their painted balustrade link antiquity not only to the then modernity of the renaissance, but enable us today to relate more readily to this example of renaissance man seeking the future by embracing the past. These painted figures in the auditorium also have an interesting role in supporting the actor-audience relationships, by forming a bridge. Indeed the juxtaposition of sculpture and paint is the particular delight of this masterwork of architecture.

At the **Teatro Farnese in Parma**, the proscenium arch has become the frame to a deep picture stage intended for changeable scenery. However this stage is not the only acting area: there is a clear space between the front of the stage and the audience tiers. These tiers then embrace the potential acting space of a deep U-shaped arena.

The opening performance was in 1628, although the theatre had been commissioned in 1617 from the 71 year old Gian-Battista Aleotti, an engineer architect whose experience included building the 1601 Teatro degli Intrepidi in Ferrara, embodying a picture frame proscenium arch embracing the whole stage.

The Teatro Farnese is sited within a hall at first floor level in the Palazzo Pilotta in Parma. Although never completed in the 17th century and part destroyed by 20th century bombing, this Palazzo is still vast enough to contain, in addition to this large

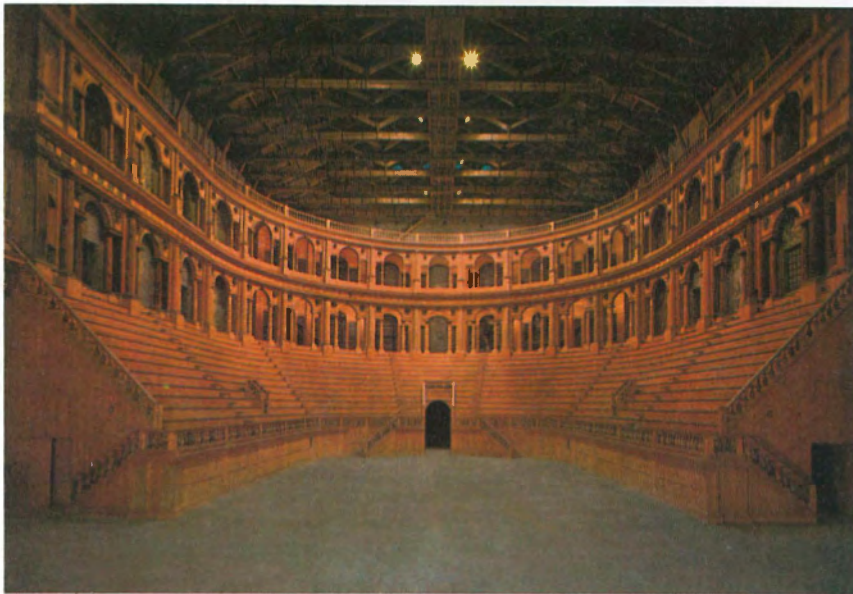
theatre, an archaeological museum, art gallery and a goodly proportion of the municipal administration of Parma. The theatre itself suffered substantial war damage but was so impeccably documented that a faithful major reconstruction has been possible. The timber proscenium and seating structures were the principal bomb casualties and these have been replaced in plain wood. As a result, the proscenium is currently simple untreated warm wood without statues in the niches and free from all other decorative embellishments.

The monumental scale of the proscenium offers homage to Palladio's Olimpico. The giant corinthian columns on substantial pedestals have an infill offering support to allegorical sculptures, and the whole is surmounted by an appropriately massive cornice decorated with further figures, a pair of them holding the Farnese coat of arms as a centrepiece. This proscenium forms a 40ft opening to a 133ft deep stage which deployed changeable scenery in the form of flat painted wings sliding on and off in grooves fixed to the floor while being supported from above by a form of scaffolding.

Although this was a prototype for the proscenium — framed and masked — flatted scenic changing that would rapidly become standard, the auditorium arrangements are those of a special festival house. Monumental doorways between the proscenium and the seating tiers allowed impressive entrances to the arena in which the entertainments could include spectacular tournaments with equestrian participants. The opening performance of an opera-ballet "Mercury and Mars" included not only horses but the flooding of the central arena for storms and shipwrecks. The spectacle culminated in the descent of Jupiter with a hundred attendants. Monteverdi's contribution to the music is unfortunately lost.

Today's visitor to the Teatro Farnese approaches a Palazzo Pilotta that is unimpressive and uninviting. In fact, having lined up my route from the station and put aside my map, I walked past the scruffy hunk of cheap looking old bricks. At a second attempt I found the entrance with some difficulty. However, rounding the bend on a routine staircase, one comes upon the massively important entrance to the first floor theatre. Absolutely in scale with a theatre whose immediate impression is of a performance scale which is vast and monumental. Despite the knowledge that so much of the timber is new, the remaining wall paintings and one's years of poring over old book illustrations ensure an easy and immediate float into time warp. The horses pirouette, the perspectives change and renaissance mankind applaud the achievements of their cultural revival.

Vicenza, Sabbionetta and Parma may not quite provide an accurate or detailed record of the sequence of the development of theatre during the renaissance. But they do allow us a wonderful opportunity to explore renaissance thinking and experience something of the atmosphere of late sixteenth century performances of drama, dance, opera and spectacle:



Parma: Teatro Farnese.



# STAGE DESIGN

Much inventive fantasy among some rewarding stage pictures

DAVID FINGLETON

Far and away the most exciting theatrical event in the latter part of 1983 was the re-opening of the splendidly restored Old Vic. Thanks to the benevolent enthusiasm of its Canadian purchaser, Ed Mirvish, and to skill and flair of architects, The Renton Howard Wood Levin Partnership, and interior designer Clare Ferraby, the 165-year-old Vic has fully regained its former glory and must now rank as one of the most attractive theatres in London. The architects have taken the Old Vic's facade as closely as possible back to its 1818 original, with pillared portico, but for the auditorium the design team have used plans from the 1880's as the basis of their inspiration. Thus there is once more a proscenium arch and twinned stage boxes, which provide a theatrical atmosphere very different from the thrust stage and lowering, battleship grey walls of the old National Theatre. To enhance the effect the ceiling dome, with gorgeous crystal chandelier, has been reinstated, and there is a beautiful new house curtain, embroidered with glittering 'diamonds', as well as charming tasselled pelmets suspended from the galleries and boxes. The auditorium has been comfortably re-seated, offering admirable legroom and sight-lines in the stalls, and most carefully redecorated so as to remain wholly in period.

The architects have also tackled the front of house, again with marked success. The cramped rat-trap foyer and rabbit warren of stairs and corridors leading to awkward, claustrophobic bars have all disappeared. There is now a spacious, elegantly appointed foyer, backed by a broad, open staircase which leads to spacious, uncluttered bars at each level. The entire restor-

ation marks a most satisfying blend of modern technology and traditional theatrical taste, and Mr Mirvish deserves our profound gratitude for the wholly admirable way in which his £2 million pounds have been spent.

The Old Vic's opening venture, the feebly plotted and anaemically composed musical *Blondel*, by Tim Rice and Stephen Oliver, was hardly worthy of the occasion; but it was at least handsomely staged in Tim Goodchild's colourful, modern-medieval designs, strikingly lit by Andrew Bridge. Goodchild's basic setting of lightweight galleries and staircases sat very comfortably on the Vic's enlarged stage and permitted almost instantaneous scene changes which helped give the show some much-needed pace. I now look forward to seeing David Pownall's intriguing play *Master Class*, and to enjoying some real theatre in this highly theatrical atmosphere.

Both of the new shows at the National Theatre at Christmas time demonstrated the inherent difficulties in staging plays effectively in either of the two main South Bank auditoria. Both director Bill Bryden and designer William Dudley had done all they could to impart a truly Victorian atmosphere to their traditionalist staging of *Cinderella* in the Lyttelton. A traditional 'French' painted curtain had been hung, and the cavernous stage opening had been masked by a very pretty false proscenium and stage boxes, all of which helped give the Lyttelton a far greater sense of intimacy and atmosphere than is customary. Moreover Dudley's succession of beautifully drawn and painted flats and gauzes were certainly evocative of the magic of pantomime, as

were the false gas footlights. Unfortunately Deirdre Clancy's stridently-coloured, shiny costumes, all too obviously made from artificial fabrics, were more redolent of a Palladium show or television spectacular than a traditional pantomime and, along with the blank concrete facelessness of the theatre itself, did much to diminish any authenticity of atmosphere.

Director Sir Peter Hall and designer John Bury faced a somewhat different problem in staging *Jean Seberg* at the National's Olivier Theatre. For this musical by Christopher Adler, Julian Barry and Marvin Hamlisch had originally been written for Broadway and, as such, clearly cried out for a large traditional theatre, such as Drury Lane or The Palace, if the appropriate punch and bazazz were to be delivered. The Olivier, on the other hand, with its vast open stage, Greek amphitheatre fan, and lack of an orchestra pit can all too easily dissipate detail and thus theatrical impact. As Richard Eyre and John Gunter demonstrated with *Guys and Dolls*, musicals can be successfully staged there, but Gunter actually created an authentically detailed New York sidewalk on stage to do so. John Bury in *Jean Seberg* relied instead on stylisation and offered a large grey gauze triptych which had to serve initially, and with some success, as a Parisian street, then, altogether less happily, for Marshalltown, Iowa, a film studio, and even the French Riviera. The orchestra was perched, semi-visibly, behind the two outer screens with consequent distraction and dissipation of atmosphere. Worst of all, and for no apparent reason, the company from time to time donned half-masks, *Oresteia*-style,



Opening night with *Blondel* a musical by Tim Rice and Stephen Oliver. Set designs Tim Goodchild. Photo Michael Le Poer Trench



The Old Vic restored to its former glory. Photo Christine Quick

with disastrous consequences. Bury's lighting was blank, white and rather clumsy, and the total effect, given the fragile nature of the piece, was even more instantly forgettable than it might have been in a warmer, more sympathetic theatre.

Altogether more assured design in a modern theatre was to be found in the Royal Shakespeare Company's studio theatre, The Pit, in the Barbican. This oppressive, claustrophobic subterranean auditorium

was given enormous life and theatricality by Ralph Koltai's brilliantly adventurous and witty designs for Nicholas Wright's new play *The Custom of the Country*. The author's device of seeing a Jacobean comedy through totally alien eyes, in this case South Africa in 1890, drew from Koltai an enclosed sand-covered playing area, dominated by a large, horizontal, beautifully modelled pair of breasts. This setting was made to serve equally successfully for

the Zambesi Valley, a Johannesburg brothel — upstairs and downstairs — and an Afrikaner farm on the Veld. Costumes were wittily accurate, props most astutely chosen, and Michael Calf's lighting imaginative and precise. The total effect was to make one forget the theatre's depressing, monolithic surroundings and to lift one instead into a world of inventive fantasy brimming with drama and wit. That Koltai can work equally successfully in conventional surroundings was powerfully demonstrated by his design of Hugh Whitmore's fascinating play *Pack of Lies* at The Lyric. Set at the beginning of the 1960's in a Ruislip suburban semi-detached, Koltai's single, twin-level set powerfully evoked, with its carefully, accurately selected furniture, costumes and props, both the sheer ordinariness of the couple involved, and the terrifying claustrophobia of their unlooked-for situation. This was stage design of a very high level and demonstrates precisely those qualities that resulted in Koltai becoming this year's well deserved SWET design award winner.

It is always an interesting experience when an artist designs for the stage and it is often dance to which an artist will most readily respond. Thus the distinguished American painter, John Hubbard, produced a very rewarding stage picture for the Royal Ballet's new work, *Midsummer*, choreographed by Richard Alston. Apparently Alston disagreed with Hubbard's first, more representational design for his 20 minute abstract piece, and the result that we saw was a vast abstracted landscape painting, 60 feet long and 22 feet high, set behind the dancers and framed by a quartet of receding arches painted a shade of creamy beige. The result was possibly rather more like painting than stage design, but nonetheless with its swirling, bold colours and feeling of warmth and movement, was strongly evocative both of dance and the Dorset countryside where Hubbard lives. In the same Royal Ballet programme the young designer Terry Bartlett was in no way overshadowed in his setting for David Bintley's new ballet *Consort Lessons*. In this, likewise short and abstract, work Bartlett skilfully mirrored Stravinsky's neo-baroque music with a striking design of obelisks, backed by an enormous architectural drawing, a kind of ground-plan view of a marble hall seen in inverted perspective from its topmost gallery. The browns, greys and dark pinks of his design were skilfully mirrored in the dancers' marbled costumes, and both this and *Midsummer* were exquisitely lit by John B. Read.

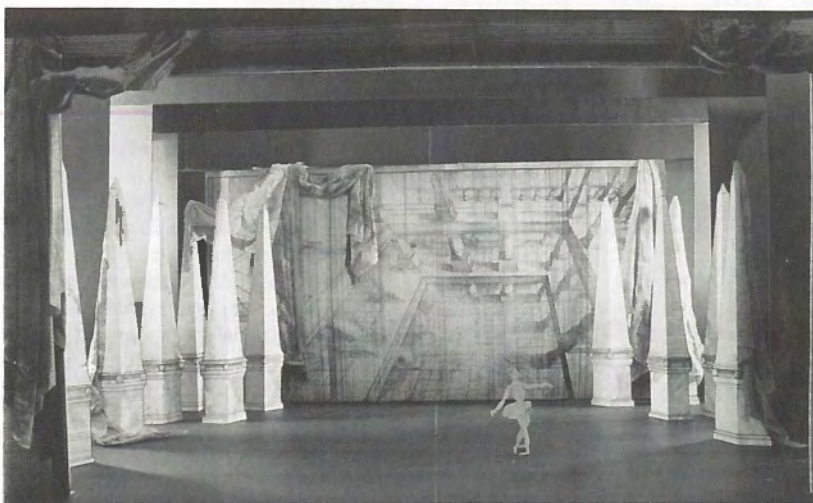
Sadly dance design at this high level was not to be found at the much vaunted Bob Fosse musical *Dancin'* at Drury Lane. Peter Larkin's crudely stylised rehearsal-stage set, Willa Kim's ugly, ungainly, buttock-emphasising costumes, and Jules Fisher's and Karen De Francis's unsubtle, over-coloured lighting all served to emphasise that what comes out of Broadway is not necessarily best. At least the design was no more undistinguished than the choreography, and at least we have here the London



*The National Theatre's pantomime, Cinderella by Bill Bryden and Trevor Ray at the Lyttelton. Settings by William Dudley, lighting by William Bundy. Note the false gas footlights. Photo Nobby Clark*



*John Hubbard's set design for Midsummer, a one act ballet by Richard Alston at the Royal Opera House. Photo Prudence Cumming Associates*



*Model for David Bintley's ballet Consort Lessons. Design by Terry Bartlett for the Royal Opera House. Photo D. Southern*



Where the Wild Things Are Glyndebourne production at the Lyttelton. Composer: Oliver Knussen. Choreographer: Jonathan Wolken. Libretto and design: Maurice Sendak. Photo Guy Gravett

Contemporary Dance Theatre who, in their pre-Christmas season at Sadler's Wells, demonstrated once again how it is possible to achieve vivid, powerful, and highly stylish stage design on a shoestring. Norberto Chiesa's design of Robert Cohan's Monet-inspired *Nymphéas*, David Buckland's impressively inventive setting for Siobhan Davies's *The Dancing Department*, and Paul Dart's sexy, beautifully coloured costumes for Tom Jobe's glorious, rock-inspired romp *Run Like Thunder* all served to demonstrate how much more vital is imagination than a large budget.

Finally a word of appreciation for Glyndebourne's production at the National's Lyttelton Theatre of the 40 minute children's fantasy opera *Where The*

*Wild Things Are*, composed by Oliver Knussen to a libretto drawn by the artist Maurice Sendak from his children's picture adventure book of the same name. Sendak is, very properly, his own designer too, and his succession of exquisitely painted gauzes, beautifully lit by Robert Bryan, were a joy to behold. But it was above all the *Wild Things* themselves who provided the magic. These huge, eight foot tall monsters, with their wonderfully expressive faces, had been brilliantly modelled and constructed by Paul Fowler and his team so that they had a quite remarkable flexibility and energy on stage. The piece itself may be slight, but these *Wild Things* will remain long in my memory.

Dakota than a Jumbo and it certainly did not crash. Perhaps this very fact is the absolute strength of the book and at the same time its weakness.

As a reasonably experienced Theatre Administrator, who has also emerged from backstage and had no formal training in administration I have had most of my administration experience with a large company and only recently became part of an extremely small set-up. I certainly picked up more information and points of recognition useful in helping to run the Watermill Theatre near Newbury, than I did about being an Administrator of a small part of the Royal Shakespeare Company. For the beginner this is good news, but for the more experienced there were areas which could have well done with elaboration, particularly to do with larger theatre and the world of civic entertainment, which, for example, is totally unfamiliar to myself.

But great areas are covered most helpfully and in good detail, from different types of theatre to staffing, from funding to income both earned a good phrase "awarded". Examples of contracts are shown and dis-

## REIDingSHELF

The influence of the 1930s Group Theatre on the development of the British Stage is yet to be fully analysed. When that time comes — and it should come soon — a useful source of information will be **DRAWN FROM THE LIFE: A Memoir** by Robert Medley. One's confidence is, admittedly, slightly eroded by a wildly inaccurate paragraph on the theatres of Cambridge. (A walk in that city will demonstrate that the Festival Theatre was not pulled down and that the new theatre sponsored by Maynard Keynes was called the Arts, although there was a then extant New Theatre dating from 1896).

However it is not for Group Theatre facts that this book is important: the background on personalities and attitudes matters much more. Medley lived with Rupert Doone and it is of incalculable importance to historians as well as to humanists that such relationships can now be treated in biographies as perfectly normal socially acceptable behaviour.

Doone, dancer and director, catalyst of so many Group Theatre productions, probably never fulfilled anything like his total potential. He could, and surely would, have thrived much more fully in the present theatre climate. But this book, in its descriptions of attempts at mounting experimental theatre, reminds us just how barren were the performing arts in the days before the great post-war surge in national responsibility for all the arts, whether mainstream or fringe. This central story is told within the context of Robert Medley's full life as an artist — a life which included contact with many key figures of art and literature. He both adds to our understanding of them, and gives us insight into the life processes of being a painter.

cussed in depth and a number of good caveats pinpointed. Two areas of increasing importance are well dealt with; marketing and the development of the computer into the box office; the checklists throughout are good. Certainly more theatres today would create a better atmosphere and would seem more loved if more note were taken by many managements of the points raised in the chapters devoted to audience care and housekeeping.

The book has been written with a good sense of humour, which is such an important quality for someone working in the theatre and in administration in particular, and the irrepressible personality of the author shines through. Excellent statements such as "I have never understood the difference between arts and entertainment: I only know that between good and bad" and "deficit funding does not encourage thrift" are good news. One may be able to criticise some facts, but from the standpoint of the small theatre it seems to be all embracing and for someone new to the field an excellent starting point.

JAMES SARGANT

## A Book After My Own Heart

It is a joy to find this new book **THEATRE ADMINISTRATION** by Francis Reid. (Adam & Charles Black £7.95) For so long, in fact since Elizabeth Sweeting's excellent book of the 1960 era of theatre went out of print, there has been no good beginner's book in the field. And that was of course what Francis Reid himself discovered when he became Administrator of the beautiful Theatre Royal, Bury St Edmunds after a working life spent more in the world of lighting and production. One gets many enquiries as to any good books to read from interested students thinking about trying to make a start in theatre administration or people already working in another side of the theatre. Now one can very genuinely say yes.

Perhaps the approach of the book is at times a little simplistic, and by the by the too often poor proof reading is extremely annoying, but as the author himself points out his experience is rather that of flying a

Since 1957 my bookshelf has carried the copy of **THE OXFORD COMPANION TO THE THEATRE** which Caryl Jenner gave me as a wedding present. The new fourth edition now sits alongside but does not replace the older version with its more leisurely treatment of topics close to my heart such as architecture, lighting and scenery. Still, history rolls on and something of the past must go if the present is to be recorded. The editorial preface acknowledges the problem and accepts responsibility for the decisions, asking only that anyone pointing out flaws will also help to rectify them. So in the spirit of constructive criticism, may I suggest that the otherwise comprehensive bibliography would benefit from the inclusion of books by Francis Reid.

The editrice may also wish to reconsider the logic whereby Mountview Theatre School has its own thirty line entry whereas under every other drama school we get a terse one liner "see Schools of Drama". But I shall continue to cherish and use my Oxford Companions. Every dip finds something new. (Do you know what the *Theoric Fund* was?). I just wish that there was a theatre equivalent of Grove's treasure trove of musical information.

Warm applause for Volume I Number I of a new quarterly magazine **THEATRE-PHILE** with sixty particularly well illustrated pages on historical aspects of theatre. The subtitle *Popular Theatre Research* is presumably intended to convey that the contents are broadly based and accessible to the non-specialist. This is certainly so: to enjoy Theatrephile, all one needs is an audience enthusiasm for theatre.

The items in the first number are all topical. There is a lot about the Old Vic plus substantial articles on another recent restoration (Berlin's Deutsches Theater) and one which has undergone yet another metamorphosis (The London Hippodrome). All the authors are top drawer theatre historians. But if there were no text, Theatrephile would still be worth buying for the illustrations. One hundred and one of them, and all making a point - no graphic designer's graffiti here. Theatrephile is essential reading for all theatre nuts.

**DRAWN FROM THE LIFE. A MEMOIR.**  
Robert Medley.  
Faber and Faber. £12.50 (UK).

**THE OXFORD COMPANION TO THE THEATRE.** Edited by Phyllis Hartnoll.  
Oxford University Press £20 (UK).

**THEATREPHILE. POPULAR THEATRE RESEARCH.** Edited & Published Quarterly by D.F. Cheshire and Sean McCarthy.  
Available on annual subscription from 5 Dryden Street, London WC2E 9NW. £15 (UK).

# PRODUCT NEWS

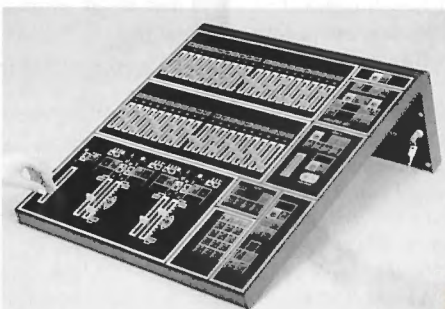


## Limehouse Lights

What looks like roosting Daleks is the latest Rank Strand and Telestage installation in Studio 1 at Limehouse, the independent T.V. production centre. 138 Quartzcolour Giano dual source pole-operated luminaires are mounted in pairs on Telestage self climbing hoists. Lighting control is by a 360-channel Strand Galaxy memory system.

## New memory desk from Green Ginger

MicroFILE 40 has 500 in-built memories and four playbacks with dipless cross fade. The manual preset and channel mimics allows for recording 9 shows. The standard interface voltage is 0 +10V nominal, other interfaces being available. Occupying little more than three square foot of surface area this must be one of the most compact lighting controls available.



## CCT's Axial Optics much in demand

Lighting designers and specifiers have been quick to catch on to the CCT's axial optics. Not surprising therefore to find all the front-of-house lighting at the New Old Vic are silhouette axial profiles. It didn't take long either for the famous Wolfrapp Arts Centre U.S.A. to put the silhouette axials through their paces when they were introduced last summer. This was quickly followed by an order for 250 of them as being the only profiles which achieved their required performance level. And as you might expect where the best of everything is the only criterion the Victorian Arts Centre in Melbourne will open this year equipped with silhouettes.

## New Editor for SIGHTLINE

The new editor of SIGHTLINE, the journal of the Association of British Theatre Technicians is Ian Herbert. He takes over the post from Frederick Bentham, lighting expert, inventor and doyen of technical writers on the theatre, who has edited SIGHTLINE for the ten years of its existence.

"Fred is an impossible act to follow," says Herbert. "He has stamped his personality on ten years of SIGHTLINE and I wouldn't pretend to have anything like his experience or technical knowledge - in fact, I have none! My skill, if any, is a publishing one and I hope to apply it to building a bigger circulation and a wider audience for what is a very important professional journal. For content I shall be very much in the hands of my fellow-members of the ABTT."

Ian Herbert is editor and publisher of the fortnightly **LONDON THEATRE RECORD**, a one-man operation which puts together the ongoing history of the English theatre in words and pictures, reprinting the play reviews of leading critics from press and radio. His previous experience includes a long career in book publishing. As general editorial director of Pitman Publishing his responsibilities included technical theatre books by Bentham himself, Percy Corry and Francis Reid, as well as **WHO'S WHO IN THE THEATRE**, which he has also edited for its last three editions.

The first issue of SIGHTLINE under its new editor will appear in May.

## ABTT Trade Show 84

The ABTT's sixth exhibition will be held this year at Riverside Studios, Hammer-smith from Thursday 15 March to Saturday 17 March.

Open	10 am - 6 pm	Thursday
	10 am - 8 pm	Friday
	10 am - 3 pm	Saturday



# Blue moon

The chances are next time you see moonlight on the stage, it's probably produced by us.

It's not hard to see why.

It's because we've got the longest running filter in the history of the theatre.

So you not only get more vivid blues, but more varied blues. And longer lasting blues; more designer blues.

That's because they're part of our Supergel colour filter range. And Supergel filters are well known because they stand up better and last longer than other filters in today's hot lights.

And they are genuinely 'self-extinguishing' in keeping with today's increased awareness of fire hazard.

There are now more than 60 colours, including 2 new ones and 9 diffusers, to give you real creative freedom.

But at Rosco we do a lot more than play with light.

We also provide a unique service in front and rear projection materials from the smallest to the largest screen, including an emergency service.

As well as scenic paints and dyes, dance floors, fog machines and a host of theatre materials.

In short, if it's got to do with theatre, the chances are that Rosco has it.

I am interested in a truly 'self-extinguishing' filter for my theatre and would like a Colour Media Guide, a swatch book, and sample pieces of the new colours

And rear projection materials

And other scenographic products

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

COMPANY/THEATRE \_\_\_\_\_

FREELANCE \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_



Always Part of the Scene

Roscolab Limited, 69-71 Upper Ground, London SE1 9PQ.

Tel: 01-633 9220. Telex: 8953352.

Also at New York, Hollywood, Madrid, Tokyo, Paris.