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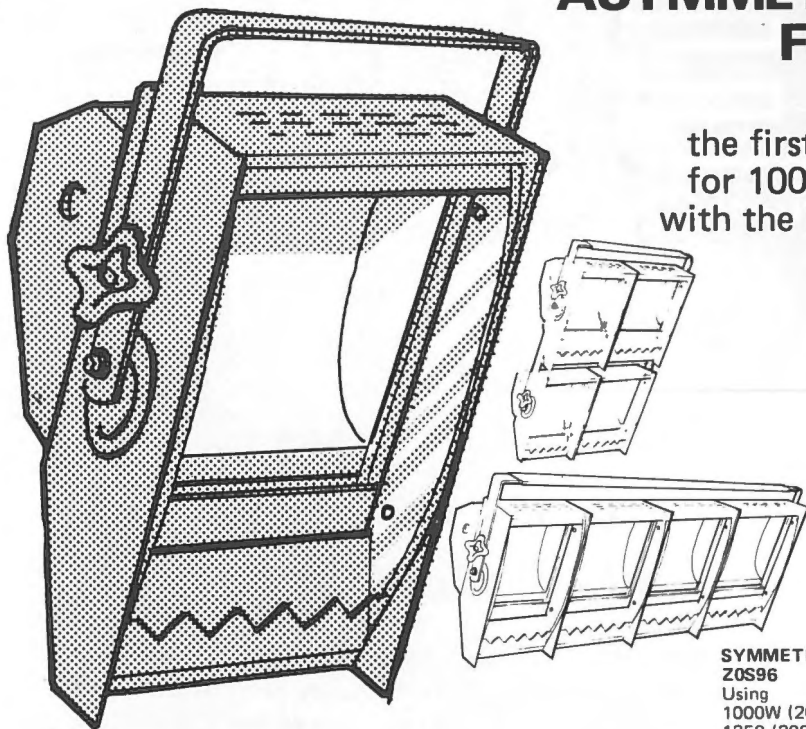




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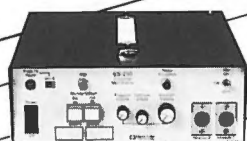
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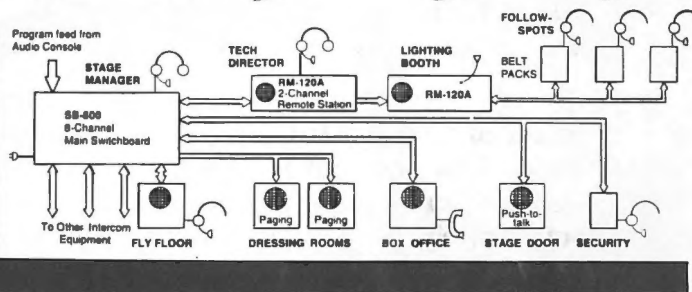
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Peter Hall and John Bury gave us a *CARMEN* in which we could totally believe. David Fingleton describes this expertly achieved production seen for the first time at Glyndebourne as strong, tense and sharply focused. Our cover photograph of the death scene is by Guy Gravett.

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## HOW MUCH TECHNOLOGY? — TAKE YOUR PICK!

*The great theatres of Ancient Greece had no lighting nor sound equipment, but were central to their civilisation. Our theatres, which have become peripheral to ours, contain too much lighting and sound equipment for the simple purposes that the drama ultimately requires of them.*

Now there is a statement which is likely to appeal to few readers of Cue — and to none at all of our advertisers (although that great marketing man Fred Bentham stimulated Strand sales very effectively by telling buyers that they were using too many lights and too many dimmers).

This latest plea for the dramatic purity of simple planks to support the actor's passion comes from John Pick (see book review page) who is concerned that *the British theatre seems to be destroying itself, not because of the fact that its performers make it labour-intensive, but because it has chosen to organise itself so that the non-performers cost too much.*

But surely Mr Pick, and the battalions of axe-grinders who have preceded you and will to continue to plead simplicity until the drama's ultimate fade (which incidentally, is likely to be technological — sun, moon and stars obliterated by nuclear fall-out), surely theatre is the widest of churches where the communication can embrace the widest range of styles from the utterly basic to the totally complex?

Many of those whom you identify as *necessary experts to operate the unnecessary technology* would share your disquiet that *more people are actually engaged in marketing and promotion than appear on stage*. And vice versa. But they, and the actors whom they support in the service of the audience, would join in acknowledging that it is neither excess of technology nor excess of administration that puts theatre at risk. That only happens when there is a poverty of imagination in using the technology and applying the administrative procedure.



# STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

A puzzling choice of stagings for the Royal Opera's end-of-season productions. □ High standards of stage design continue to give pleasure at Glyndebourne □ ENO rounds off the season with *Akhnaten* in a stimulating and powerful production □ At the National sets and lighting for *Duchess of Malfi* were notable for atmospheric and operatic effect □ Of the five RSC productions at the Barbican *Henry V* was the most visually exciting.

For the 25 years that I have been going there Glyndebourne Festival Opera has regularly delighted me with a consistently high standard of stage design. Of course there has been the occasional miss-hit, or even downright disaster, (in which opera house is there not?), but over the years one has come to expect, and to receive, beautifully planned, expertly achieved productions in which every aspect of design has been stimulating and enjoyable to look at. This season has certainly been no exception. Both *Carmen*, being seen for the first time at Glyndebourne, and Britten's *Albert Herring*, which had its world première there back in 1947, offered stage design of the highest order and thus enormous visual satisfaction. Both operas had the advantage of being directed by Sir Peter Hall, who once again demonstrated how nowadays his finest work seems to come when working in Sussex, and once again displayed the really strong directorial plan that tends to bring out the best in a designer. For *Carmen* the designer was Hall's long-term colleague, John Bury, and clearly the two of them in presenting this opera in a small house had aimed to get away from gaudy travel-poster Spain with its spurious glamour, and instead to get back to the roots of Prosper Mérimée's dark novella upon which the opera's libretto is based.

In so doing they gave us a *Carmen* in which we could totally believe. Bury's first set was a dingy working-class quarter of Seville, a square dominated by the heavy black chimney of an ugly tobacco factory and peopled by scruffy, dusty soldiers and even scuffier bare-footed townspeople. The atmosphere was thus appropriately oppressive and claustrophobic, much helped, as throughout, by Bury's own meticulously precise lighting. The credible quality of the first act was entirely matched by the setting for Lillas Pastia's tavern in the second: a seedy basement bar, decorated with Moorish tilework, exactly the kind of place where the soldiery would liaise with the local tarts, as well as a wholly credible rendezvous for *Carmen*'s friends, the contrebassiers. For the third act mountain pass Bury wisely used the full depth of Glyndebourne's stage so as to allow the action to unfold on different levels while isolating *Carmen* and Don José in their predicament, and also enabling us to sense Seville glimmering below. Finally the

fourth act bull-ring again eschewed glamour and high colour: again it was in a down-market part of town and small in scale, so as to focus the tragedy; and even here *Carmen*, though now shod, wore sombre colours.

This was a remarkably strong, tense *Carmen* and its fine designs will undoubtedly travel well. So try to see them during Glyndebourne's tour to Oxford, Manchester, Birmingham and Southampton in October and November.

For *Albert Herring* Hall brought in a designer new to Glyndebourne, but well known for his recent work at the National Theatre, John Gunter. Now *Herring* is of course set in the mythical Suffolk market town of Loxford and Hall's roots are in Suffolk, and Gunter is at his strongest when designing urban scenes. The result was a triumph. Each of the three sets — Lady Billows' hall, Mrs Herring's greengrocer's shop, and the marquee for the May Day fete — took the stage with stunning realism, with every detail of turn of the century Suffolk life precisely accurate. Lady Billows' hall was a splendidly panelled 17th century room, replete with busts of her ancestors,



John Bury's design and lighting for Bizet's *Carmen*, Glyndebourne Festival Opera. Conductor: Peter Haitink, Director: Peter Hall, Choreography: Elizabeth Keen. Photo Guy Gravett.



Stefanos Lazaridis's set model for the English National Opera production of Michael Tippett's *Midsummer Marriage*. Conductor: Mark Elder. Producer: David Pountney. Costumes: Sally Gardner. Lighting: Nick Chelton. Photo Zoe Dominic.



well-worn, rather heavy furniture, and vases of flowers. Through its crested casement windows one could see a meticulously created, carefully tended garden, and if the entire setting bore a striking resemblance to Glyndebourne's own Organ Room that was certainly not a disadvantage. The second act shop was seen from inside looking out across the High Street to two more shop-fronts opposite, and the interior was full of precisely the sort of goods a 1900 Greengrocer's would have been selling. The urban architecture was not only correctly in period, it was also correctly East Anglian. The fete in the vicarage garden was another joy, with its billowing marquee, socially precise costumes and impeccable props – the jellies actually wobbled and Albert's lemonade was just the right colour. Colour throughout was greatly assisted by David Hersey's infinitely sensitive, exquisitely varied lighting which exactly realised English light, both interior and exterior, in late Spring. The total effect was to create on stage a wholly credibly, genuinely living English community: a formidable achievement.

While Glyndebourne was opening its season both the Royal Opera at Covent Garden and English National Opera at the Coliseum were bringing theirs' to an end, each with two new productions. Those at Covent Garden both originated with other companies: Richard Strauss's *Ariadne Auf Naxos* was first given by the Paris Opéra in the Salle Favart, and Rossini's *La Donna Del Lago* came to London from the Houston Grand Opera in the U.S.A. This begs the question as to why they were selected, and by whom, to be given at Covent Garden in these stagings. With the Rossini piece, scarcely ever performed anywhere, there was obviously very little choice; once it had

been decided to do it the production either had to be Houston's, or a new one specially created here. Not so with *Ariadne* however, which is to be seen in many of the world's leading opera houses nowadays, and which could surely have been seen to better effect in London than in Dean-Louis Martinoty's fussy, Gallic high camp production.

This may have achieved the kind of spurious operatic glitter that is thought to keep people happy when they have paid £37 for a seat in the stalls, but its endless distraction and unnecessary 'business' did little for Strauss's exquisite but problematical work, nor for the artists who were attempting to perform it. What on earth was the sense, for example, of giving

the opera in the second half to no fewer than four audiences – three on stage, all hamming busily, plus us – other than to dilute the opera's impact? It was not that Hans Schavernoch's sets were ill-made, and certainly Lore Haas provided some sumptuous costumes, it was the basic plan that was so utterly wrong that even the gorgeous Klimtian drop-curtain for the final transformation scene merely caused another irritated frisson. Ming Cho Lee's scenery and Jane Greenwood's costumes for *La Donna del Lago* were simpler, but otherwise little better. The painted cloths evoked China rather than Scotland, the costumes were unwieldy and at times impossible to take seriously, and the total



Albert Herring (Britten) at *The Glyndebourne Festival Opera*. Mrs Herring's greengrocers shop. Set designs by John Gunter, Lighting by David Hersey. Director Peter Hall. Photo Guy Gravett.



*The National Theatre production of Pravda* a comedy by David Hare and Howard Brenton. Director: David Hare, Settings: Hayden Griffin, Costumes: Lindy Hemmings, Lighting: Rory Dempster, Music: Nick Bicat. Photo Nobby Clarke.

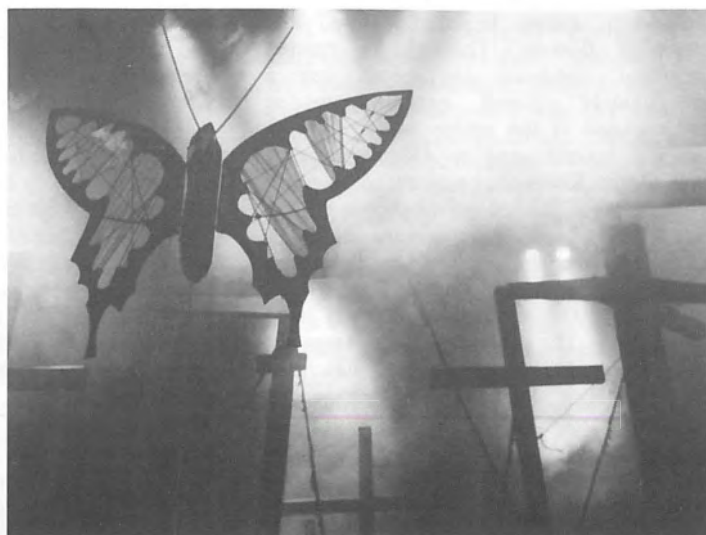


*The Duchess of Malfi* at the Lyttleton Theatre. Director and Designer Philip Prowse. Lighting: Gerry Jenkinson. Photo John Cere Brown.





RSC's production of *Richard III* at the Barbican. Director: Bill Alexander, Designer: William Dudley, Lighting: Leo Leibovici. Photo Reg Wilson.



Part of Farrah's set at the Barbican for the Royal Shakespeare Company's *Red Noses* by Peter Barnes. Directed by Terry Hands, Lighting: Terry Hands with Clive Morris. Photo Ivan Kynel.

effect was fussy yet apologetic and half-hearted. Let us hope that the new season at the Royal Opera House has better things in store.

At the Coliseum both ENO's final productions of the season were of comparatively recent operas. First came Sir Michael Tippett's *Midsummer Marriage*, to celebrate the composer's 80th birthday, in a production by David Pountney, designed by Stefanos Lazaridis with costumes by Sally Gardner and lighting by Nick Chelton. I did not find it an entirely successful enterprise, not because the design was in itself poor, rather that both director and designers seemed to have had too many ideas, insufficiently worked out. Predictably perhaps this was an urban and political, rather than pastoral and romantic 'Marriage', heavy with symbolism and with Lazaridis providing an elaborate cut-out abstract set, rather reminiscent of Joan Mirò's for the Catalan company which came to Riverside Studios some years ago, but lacking Mirò's discipline beneath the freedom. With globes, placards, computers, pyramids, ladders, ropes, and furniture all jostling for place on stage it was hard to follow a theme. Nor did Sally Gardner's plastic macs over leotards for the clumsy Ritual Dances assist, though the rest of her costumes were admirably evocative of the mid-1950's when the opera was composed. Perhaps when this production is revived it will have benefited from a certain amount of reconsideration and excision: there are good things there, but a feeling that little had been fully thought out.

No such lack of clarity impeded David Freeman's production of Philip Glass's fascinating work *Akhnaten*, which also happened to have been brought to London from Houston. Here Freeman and his designer David Roger took us back to the world of Egypt 1370 B.C. by powerful imaginative suggestion. Sand and water dominated the stage, backed by a thrilling cut-out disc of the sun; threshing and brick-making continued eternally on stage and the

capital of Akhetaten was built in sandcastles and then destroyed. There was remarkably vivid use of colour and space and splendidly firm choreography for the production. Richard Riddell's lighting was likewise masterly, using great banks of floods and spots above the stage to achieve an atmosphere of their own. This was music theatre at its most stimulating and powerful. There was a similar contrast between two productions at the National Theatre. At the Olivier David Hare and Howard Brenton's new play, *Pravda*, directed by Hare himself, looked as if it had burst the seams of the smaller Cottesloe Theatre and thus taken refuge in the larger auditorium. Hare's direction seemed inept and Hayden Griffin's succession of trucked cameo sets seemed undecided, apart from a passable reproduction of the Morning Room of The Garrick Club, as to whether they intended to

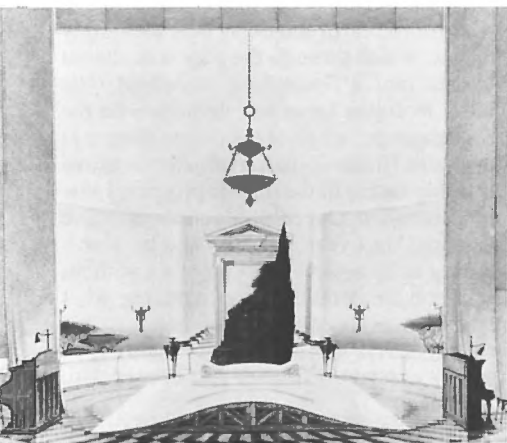
be realistic or stylised. The uncredited lighting seemed similarly indecisive. Against that Philip Prowse, making his NT debut, showed no such visual uncertainty in his production of Webster's *Duchess of Malfi* in the Lyttelton. His series of enclosed halls in grey and white, presided over by the black, cowed figure of Death, pervaded by the smell of incense, and peopled by mainly black clad characters, impressed strongly by their atmospheric power and operatic effect. So too did Gerry Jenkinson's immensely skilful shadow-play lighting. But eventually the effect seemed mannered and self-conscious and one began to wonder what purpose was being served and whether Prowse has as strong a grasp of direction as unquestionably he has of design.

Finally to the Barbican where the Royal Shakespeare Company have offered in the past few months, in their main theatre, three



*Siege of Harfleur* from *Henry V* at the Barbican. Design and Costumes by Bob Crowley. Lighting by Bob Bryan. Director: Adrian Nobel. Photo RSC.





Richard Strauss's *Ariadne auf Naxos* at the Royal Opera House. Set design; Hans Schavernoch. Costumes: Lore Haas. Photo Donald Southern.

Shakespeare transfers from Stratford, plus Peter Barnes' new play *Red Noses*. Of these I must confess that I found only Adrian Noble's Brechtian production of *Henry V* to be truly visually exciting. Bob Crowley provided an eight-foot high traverse curtain, making a clear division between the apron and the rest of the Barbican's hexagonal stage. There was a splendid coup de theatre, using a bronze wall with inset ladders, for the storming of Harfleur, and Crowley's costumes differentiated powerfully between the gritty English and the effete French. Robert Bryan supplied thrillingly powerful lighting, which literally bombarded the audience in the battle scenes.

Against this I found Maria Bjornson's black, grey and white designs and Chris Ellis's all-white lighting for Ron Daniels' rather minimalist production of *Hamlet* to be elegant but ultimately soporific, and William Dudley's meticulously crafted Gothic cathedral sets for *Richard III* to be ill in tune with Bill Alexander's almost surreal direction of Antony Sher in the title role. That said, the Coronation scene, beautifully lit by Leo Leibovici, displayed admirable use of space and light. *Red Noses* deals with 14th century France and the Black Death, and director Terry Hands and designer Farrah have employed all the theatre's advanced technology to create a calvary of huge crosses,, interspersed with steaming pits, penetrated by search-lights and bathed in an eternal fog of dry ice. Certainly theatrical, but ultimately monotonous. Much to be preferred was Alison Chitty's highly imaginative railway carriage setting for Stephen Poliakoff's *Breaking the Silence*, which RSC have transferred from The Pit to the Mermaid Theatre. I dare say Ms Chitty's crumbling Pullman would have seemed even more powerfully evocative and atmospheric in The Pit than on The Mermaid's gaping stage, but at least her effects were achieved by the use of visual imagination and graphic skill rather than by theatrical high-tech.

## Which Way for Lighting?

JEREMY COLLINS,  
Auckland

Occasionally one gets the opportunity and makes the time to reflect on the broader aspects of our theatre and where one's particular passion (in my case, lighting) is going. This occasion arose when I was invited to speak at the National Conference of the Federation of New Zealand Operatic Societies. What follows is a personal view of where we are; how I disagree with it, and some thoughts as to the future. I have confined myself to the design situation.

I guess we are all children of the multi-lantern rig as developed in the States by McCandless and espoused by Richard Pilbrow and others in the U.K. Originally revolutionary in that it sought a dynamic plastic form-revealing light, finding its philosophical roots in the works of Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia. It represented the break from colour washes and 'pictures' to control and sculpture. Our developing technology of luminaires, and in particular control systems has today made this ideal an achievable goal.

However, in my opinion, this goal is rarely striven for; the plethora of equipment at our disposal seems to have fudged the issue for us, in that we are often able to illuminate from all possible angles, many colours and any intensity, so we do — ending up with something not too dissimilar to the floodlighting of old. Why is it important? Theatre today is in the very competitive business of entertainment. We must compete for our audience with the Cinema, Television and now Video. In an age supersaturated with images demanding

our attention, we turn off and limit those which we will accept, let alone think on and respond to. Our competitors have powerful tools to break through this protective screen including the close-up, a vast array of technological Sci-Fi and fantasy tricks, and a powerful ability to reproduce 'reality' which is denied to those of us working in the theatre.

The theatre has many unique tools of its own. The most powerful is the ability to manipulate an audience's emotions through the direct performer/audience relationship. The early protagonists of the multi-lantern rig were searching for more powerful ways to enhance and support this relationship. The role of the lighting designer of course makes up only part of the team supporting the performer by providing the staging, music, movement and situation. Their contribution should bring together all the other elements in response to them. In a negative way I experienced how a lighting designer's lack of sensitivity to the timing of a production could completely destroy the work of the performers. The piece was a West End-type comedy of several scenes staged in a single set. The dialogue was crisp, pacey and the cast worked well, feeding off each other to build the tension and create the humour. Typically it built to a crescendo at the end of each scene from which the next was launched . . . but it wasn't. Instead the audience were plunged into an interminable series of blackouts — no doubt an opportunity was required for the actors to clear, but they weren't in

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wheelchairs and the scene changes only involved minor repositioning of some furniture. The audience fidgeted, the whole momentum sagged and the work of the performers was reduced to the meaninglessness of the series of vignettes, with little relationship to a directed whole. Clearly not only the responsibility of the lighting designer, but a good example of how essential it is that our designs are sensitive to the dynamics of the production.

Coming to the team very late in the piece, the lighting designers role was originally brought about because the directors found themselves increasingly unable to manage the lighting along with the rest of their responsibilities. In fact the position was an innovation by commercial managements for greater efficiency, not in response to artistic needs. Once established, the creative input lighting designers were able to contribute began to be recognised. It is a process which is still going on. So often lighting is treated on an ad-hoc basis, added on at the last moment rather than being developed as an integral part of the production/design process. It bewilders me how a designer can visualise a set without light; a director visualise, block and plan the moves without seeing these in light; a choreographer stage dance routines without considering how they will be seen — yet so often one hears and sees the result of where the lighting person is brought in at the last minute to hang a few spots, wire them up and then bring them up and down. We get what we deserve — flat, featureless illumination providing no support to the performer or visual stimulus to the performer or visual stimulus to the audience — and the audience compares this with what they see in the cinema, on television, etc! The results of a

truly collaborative work, with the lighting designer as a creative member of the team rather than a technician, speaks reams. A completeness and depth is added which assists that production to transcend the ordinary and become a true work of the theatre.

In my own limited travels and experience I would cite two examples

- The work of Tharon Husser in the American musical theatre. Along with Michael Bennet and Robin Wagner, she helped make up the team which created "Chorus Line", "Dreamgirls", etc. Involved from the beginning in a process which would evolve over many months, Husser's designs animate Wagner's setting to provide a plastic dynamic space in which the performers work. The sense of timing demonstrated in the many cues and the use of multiple followspots is masterful; the music and action is underlined, revealed, and ultimately integrated to form the one score. A result which is not only the combination of many months discussion but of a protracted rehearsal period dedicated to getting everything right.

- My second example is closer to home. John Rayment is an Australian designer whose work with the Sydney Theatre Company I have seen on three occasions. In particular two sets of images remain with me. The first are the strongly sculptured shapes he created for "Chinchilla", which live with me some three years after seeing this production. the second was his evocation of the West Australian outback,

the burnt red earth and dusty heat seemingly endless, which through the play was altered by man into a flourishing woodland. His ability to create focus and definition on the 'Cinemascope' stage of the drama theatre at the Opera House is masterful. Just to prove the fickle nature of the theatre process, I saw the Australian Opera production of "Die Walkerie" last year which he also lit. It was lighting at its worst — a puggy mix without definition or contrast. One wonders what resemblance the work I saw bears to his original given the demands of lighting in repertory and the difficulties associated with that house.

For me the challenge we have yet to embrace in this country is how to effect the change from being lighting technicians to that of being designers. For this we require supportive directors, designers and managements aware of the part lighting can play in the theatre and committed to realising it. In some way the opportunity and importance of this change must also be brought home to our lighting people. To conclude, a quote from Josef Svoboda from an address he gave to a recent symposium on 'The Theatre Today — The Theatre Tomorrow', which I feel had relevance to our situation.

"In my opinion theatres — and when I say theatres I mean the team of people who create theatre — should be created on the basis of a common programme and not on the basis of an administrative decision, otherwise an integrated work of art cannot be created. Theatres should be created spontaneously and, I repeat, on the basis of a common programme. On this foundation a team can then absorb new members who share its common ideas. This does not concern only actors and stage directors, designers and choreographers, but also artistic technicians. I say this specifically because the latter should be of a different type from the majority of technicians working in the theatre at present. They should take an interest in everything which takes place in the theatre, not only on the stage but also in the workshops, because it is especially there, in the course of putting on the final touches, that the design of a specific production achieves its definite expression. Workshops should employ small teams and essentially they should be arts and crafts studios because only in this way can good theatre be created which will successfully compete with the mass media."

We are indebted to the New Zealand Association of Theatre Technicians for permission to reprint Jeremy Collins's article which appeared in the June number of Profile. Jeremy Collins is a toplighting designer in Auckland where his company Selecon is also the leading manufacturer and retailer of stage and theatre equipment.

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# GRAND OPERA

FRANCIS REID

visits Verona

Passion for theatre architecture feeds a desire to experience original performance conditions. Generally speaking however, the older the building the less is this likely to be possible — even if research is impeccable, how can actors and audiences respond in terms of period attitudes and aspirations? (Who will finance an experiment for a theatre company and an audience to live for a month or so in a historically accurate commune prior to a performance such as a georgian barn-storming?).

In the case of a Roman Amphitheatre we are unlikely ever to be able to recreate the performance, never mind hope to experience the audience response to it. Racing chariots, combating gladiators and persecuted christians were the multipurposes of such a venue. Mortality was a routine, and popular, production device.

But a historically accurate performance is not by any means an essential ingredient for the recreation of ambience. Wonderment at thought of performances which the walls have witnessed can feed the imagination sufficiently to trigger moments of awareness of events long past. A crowded auditorium, united in attentive response, can catalyse. And this is the situation when 22,000 concentrate, in one of the world's great silences, on an opera performance in the Verona Arena.

The operas, ballets and rock bands of today's Verona may be different from the spectacles of the first century AD, but the beer sellers, cushion renters and panini men balancing trays of rolls on their heads probably have a pedigree that connects them back to the opening night. Although the open air summer opera seasons that we associate with Verona did not start until 1913, the Arena has proved to be a useful adaptable space across the centuries since the time when an *anfiteatro* was considered by the Romans to be an essential feature of any town plan. (No Roman government, not even at the height of Nero's imperial decadence, would have allowed their Arts Council to axe its Housing the Arts department.)

Whether as a mediaeval fortress, a bullring visited by Napoleon (who donated handsomely to the repair fund) or a nineteenth century prisoner of war camp, sufficient uses were found for the Arena to ensure that its stones were not removed, as elsewhere, for domestic building — except for most of the outer ring which presumably

was at least loosened, if not parted from the stronger core of the structure, in the 12/13 century earthquakes.

There were theatre performances in the eighteenth century: Marco Marcola's 1772 painting of a *commedia dell'arte* staging shows a performance on a proscenium stage set up in the middle of the arena. The audience have a sunshade ceiling adjustable on wires, and conditions, from the chairs to the food seller with basket on head, that strike resonances with today's performances. Touring companies visited throughout the nineteenth century: an engraving shows a largish proscenium stage with audience filling the flat central area and spreading up into the lower steps of the arena. These companies mostly presented plays (for opera, Verona has had a *Teatro Filarmonico* since 1732, when the first of three theatres on today's site was built by Bibiena) although Colonel Cody's Buffalo Bill is recorded as a hit. Verona also has usable remains of its *Teatro Romano* where there is Shakespeare and Goldoni in the summer for those who prefer their theatre spoken rather than sung.

My first visit to the Arena was a couple of Septembers ago. The opera season had just finished and a rock concert was fitting up. The Arena, for a small charge, is open daily and one can clamber at will. The simple statistics are the overall size (453 by 358 feet) and the seating (22,000). As already mentioned, most of the outer wall, which added another 46ft all round, has disappeared. However this was peripheral to the main oval of raked steps focussing to the central floor. This structure incorporates a series of entrances with staircases leading to vomitories at various levels. For today's performances, a stage with orchestra pit is constructed at one end of the arena's original central flat gladiatorial performance space, leaving the rest for conventional stalls seating. The segment of raked stepping behind the stage is available as a scenic area. The stage is a simple platform: there is no proscenium. The pleasures of a daytime visit, apart from the multiple seat testing that is a feature of life for architecturally orientated theatrepersons, include turning outward to view Verona from the upper perimeter.

Whereas technology for a rock tour to the Arena is likely to be based on a truss rig supported by integral towers, the opera relies on conventional scenic construction. There is, however, a building site type crane to lift the appropriately monumental lumps

of scenery 'up and over' the wall during the daily repertoire changeover. In the absence of scene docks, repertoire storage has to be outside the arena: mostly in the area originally bounded by that now missing wall, but also spilling into the street. so if it turns you on, as it does me, to inspect other people's construction and painting at close quarters, there is every opportunity.

Arriving on a July afternoon with the intention of attending that evening's *Il Trovatore*, I lacked both seat and bed. The box office was open but completely sold out. However a pavement entrepreneur was prepared to part with £6 tickets for £20. Beds were cheaper, and available at the fifth hotel approached.

As performance time approached, the whole tempo and mood of Verona seemed to become increasingly focussed towards the evening's opera. The air had all the feeling of a countdown: a little tension mingled with that only enjoyable form of inevitability, the anticipation of pleasure. I have often felt this kind of performance build-up backstage (but not as often as I should), and sometimes in the foyer, but rarely, except perhaps at Bayreuth and Aldeburgh, pervading the town.

The way to enjoy such a period of anticipation is to eat. The Verona audience gently segregates itself, with the formally shirted filling the expensive elegance of the tables on the pavement facing the Arena. We open necked operatics of the *seconda gradinata* spread up the side alleys but I secure a pizzeria table at the end of a side street with a glimpse of the Arena's stony curve. My pizza is enormous but featherweight, although the anchovies frolicking with the olives amongst the cheese will later produce a thirst that must be urgently assuaged at each interval. But meanwhile the jug of bianco alternating with acqua minerale produces a sense of well-being more in accord with Verdi's soaring romanticism than the mediaeval troubadours who provided his plot.

Drums sound, striking a note that if not discordant is less than appropriate: the Incas are a little remote from the world of Italian opera. A major Inca exhibition in the city, in accord with the welcome style of our times, is producing its own fringe of street theatre.

An hour to go and the 'house' is open. I order a huge gelati entitled 'diavolo' and watch the audience surging onwards and upwards through the layered arches. The administrative process of getting such a large house in is quite simple. The lower



regions can take their numbered seats in the orthodox manner, but for the thousands on the unreserved steps the rule is the earlier you get there, the wider the choice. Gradually the gates, working from the centre outwards, are shut as the more central areas fill up. Hedonists like me who linger over their capuccino find themselves so far round to the side that they are backstage. (And backstage it is, because although this is an arena, the production format is firmly end-stage). Anyway, backstage is where I belong.

The seating on the arena steps is precisely that — steps. There are no aisles: a step has sufficient depth (I wish I had thought to measure it) for an ample bottom and a big pair of feet, but there is nothing to spare for a passage in between. The 'seat ways' certainly do not conform to anything approaching what we know as 'continental seating'. And once the rows have filled up there are no aisles in any direction, neither crossways nor up and down. The vomitories tend to acquire standees and the spaces immediately behind them are refrigerator stations for the beer, pepsi and fanta. So programme and refreshment sellers require an agility of a balletic order to reach their customers. The panini men have an accurate aim with their rolls as do the cushion boys with their indispensable rental product. But you cannot throw a paper glass of beer, and the empty bottles remain crated beside the fridges — presumably a concession to safety, if just about the only one. Unless you

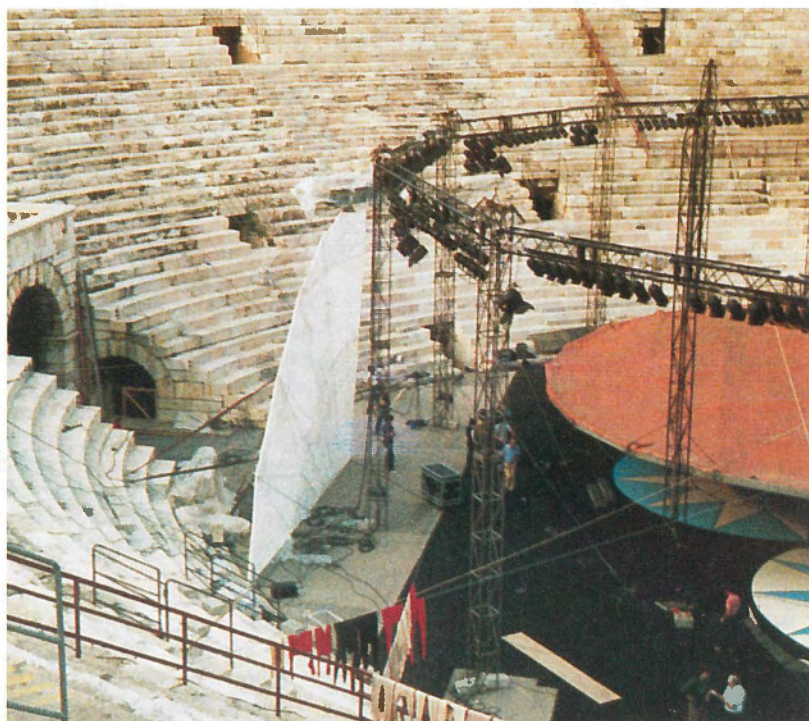


count the fact that candles seem only to be sold to the queues outside. The whole situation, particularly with regard to exit routes, is enough to make a conventional fire officer quake, foam and generally freak. However a pragmatic one would realise that there is nothing inflammable except the scenery. Presumably he has himself a ball in that direction — but the faint-hearted can always try their own matches on the stuff stored outside.

The 'bar bells' are performed (there is no other word) by a character with as big a gong as anyone would wish to carry who wanders around the stage as if having a hereditary right to do so. To mark the end of the interval he comes down centre where the flourish of an extended roll precedes the appropriate number of bongs — one then two then three. His efforts are commented upon and his applause is good-humoured and generous.



*Opera lighting is from towers and poles but rock tours travel trusses*





It is 9.15 and the sky is quite dark. The houselights dim and tiny points of candle burst into flicker, cake like, all around. The maestro has a long walk to the centre of his double-Verdi orchestra but the applause holds. — after all, there are a lot of pairs of hands, even allowing for several hundred whose capacity to clap is limited by their candles.

Can there ever be silence? Will the carnival atmosphere ever permit? Well, it is virtually impossible to get total quiet prior to the start of an act but the moment the orchestra starts all chatter dies. By the end of the second bar there is stunning, absolutely stunning silence. Not a rustle, not a cough. Words like spellbound are appropriate to the degree of audience concentration. The only disturbances are the incredibly insensitive handful who flash their cameras. How can anyone be so inconsiderate to their fellows as to flash a camera during a performance?

At first the sound is a little strange, almost thin. There is a need to adjust to a huge orchestra making what at first seems such a slight sound compared with small theatres and loud gramophones. But one quickly adjusts and the sound soon seems natural, particularly as it has tremendous clarity and the instruments really sing — for Verdi to sound right, the strings have to seem to breathe in before the big phrases. And tonight they do.

Off stage singing, often ineffective and nowadays frequently made more so by microphones, works beautifully whether the choruses from the passages behind the stage, or the four harps behind the set for the miserere.

Scenery at Verona has traditionally been massive and painted in that way which aims

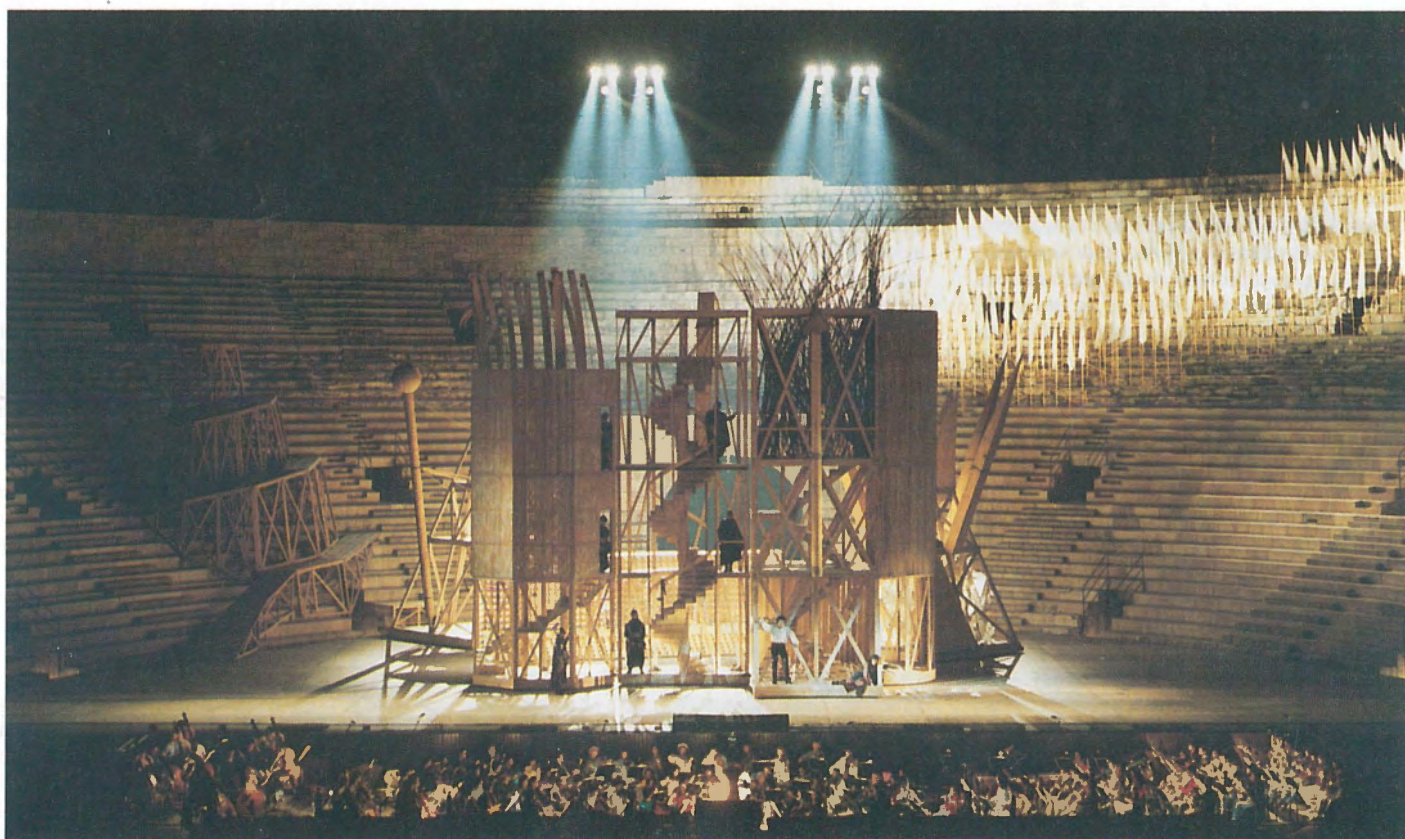
for realism but shuns naturalism. The new production of *Il Trovatore* used a kit of trucks which, although physically massive, were representational and constructed of a raw untreated timber. They evoked the machinery of mediaeval siege warfare. Their grouping permutations for the eight scenes involved a lot of heave ho by a very large crew on a stage cloth whose multiple markings almost became a design feature.

Being sat upstage of the orchestra I could enjoy all this activity although it was presumably invisible to the majority of the audience since there are a row of blinders at the front of the stage to bash a haze of light into watching eyes during scene changes.

Act changes are for standing up to flex one's bottom and back muscles and, especially if your pizza was heavy on the anchovies, struggling with a lot of *scusi*,



*Il Trovatore* in the new 1985 production at Verona Arena, directed by Giuseppe Patroni Griffi in sets by Mario Ceroli and costumes by Gabriella Pesucci





*permesso and grazie* towards the nearest beer point. Fortunately nobody seemed to need to find a loo during the three and a half hours. Quite a lot of this time was taken up with the calls at the end of acts. The principals sweep across the stage in a great hand-holding march, accompanied by a pool of seven follow spots. As they visit left, centre and right, the cheers and the claps from each section of the audience peaks to give a stereophonic applause effect.

All in all a gorgeous evening. As a boy in Edinburgh, two of the most influential events on my growing up were Glyndebourne's *Così fan Tutte* and the Carl Rosa's *Il Trovatore*. Last summer I experienced a magical Salzburg *Così* and now this *Trovatore* in Verona! **What more can anyone seek from life?** was my thought as I retreated to a pavement cafe to watch the audience disperse into the warm night.



*In the absence of scene docks, repertoire storage has to be outside the arena*

## CALLING THE SHOW

### Some thoughts on *cueing*

There is nothing quite so mesmerizing as a cue light. The wait can be so tension building that when the light finally comes on, one is transfixed by a mixture of disbelief that it has actually done so and panic to remember the details of the action that has been signalled — for it is difficult to look both at a cue light and at a plot. And there can often be a moment's confusion as to which cue has been signalled — in a fast sequence it can be easy to miss or imagine a wink of the green. I have a clear memory of the redoubtable Bogey descending from the auxiliary perch (home of 'Bogey's Board') at the old Scala Theatre in Charlotte Street to tap the stage manager on the shoulder with an "Excuse me miss, but there's no use you keep flashing that light, I've no cues left, done, 'em all, and so I'll just go and see to the boiler".

The confusion and uncertainty in responding to a light cue can be matched by a lack of confidence felt by the giver. The only way to be certain that the cue has been taken is to observe its effect, and this can be difficult if the action is upstage or a fade is slow and lingering. Such problems belong mainly to signalling with light. The tinkling of the prompter's bell in a Georgian theatre heralded a flurry of activity and indeed could draw audience attention to it. I can still hear the clatter of grandmastery that followed my push on the prompt corner buzzer in Glasgow Alhambra or the chorus of filament hiss that followed the same action in Edinburgh Kings. These were the days when fly cues given by a single clap of the master carpenter's hands were the rule

rather than the exception.

But today's cue lights are essentially a back-up system to cover failure of the standard verbal cueing over 'cans'. There are circumstances when a headset is inappropriate or inconvenient, such as cueing an actor's entrance or operating certain machinery — unless one has the unjustifiable luxury of an extra person to receive the cue on cans and pass it on by hand signal. However the essence of today's cueing is that the stage manager calling the show gives verbals to all staging departments over an open line where everyone can hear all the cues, acknowledging their warns when appropriate and reporting disasters. With cans, eyes are free to look at plots and look at the stage, while hands, in the absence of acknowledgement buttons and talk/listen switches, are free to operate.

If I have any personal unease about the system, it is that the wearing of cans may sometimes seem to isolate the technicians from the actors. The business of communicating with each other can become so complex that full contact with the show and the subtle variations in its timing seem to be in danger of being lost. Certainly if I were an actor I am sure that I would be scared stiff by all the intensely agonised faces jargonising into their cans as if the mission was about to be aborted. In particular when plotting (in the absence of actors) I find cans a poor substitute for the production desk system that Ernie Webb built for the Albery theatres in the 1960s. A no-switches always-alive microphone and

speaker combination, using several dodges to avoid feedback squeal, allowed a hands-off and ears-free communication. The board could hear the debate at the production desk and the production team could hear the progress of the plotting process in the control room. I have always found it helpful if the crew can hear the requests of the directors, choreographers and designers, in addition to the lighting designer's interpretation of these requests.

But these relatively small doubts apart, I join everyone in welcoming the way in which the development of decent intercoms has given us a means of cueing that is a vast improvement on the red and green lights of yore.

However, even the best cans breakdown: electronics are relatively indestructible but typical usage is stressful to the more mechanically sensitive parts of the system such as cables and connectors. While first line back-up is obviously spare cans, every theatre needs the possibility of falling back on cue lights — which will, in any case, be needed from time to time for cueing situations where lights rather than cans are appropriate.

But what kind of system? The question needs to be asked for several reasons. Firstly, a traditional cue light system absorbs an increasing proportion of budget. Whereas most control circuitry now conveys information rather than conventional electrical currents and transmits complex details along a single wire, every traditional cue light needs a pair of wires carrying real electricity. Then there



is the question of distribution. Obviously back-up will be required at key positions such as lighting and sound control. And in the flies. Plus sockets around the stage for wandering lights. But what is the minimum? And how complex? Putting a system into Glyndebourne in 1964 (back up for the lighting board, but standard for all other positions that could not conveniently see a dropped hand signal from the prompt corner), I opted for a simple three-way switch (standard Strand engraved tablet) per circuit. Up for red warn, down for green go – a positive go because the red went out simultaneously as the green came on, and no wondering whether the red had been left on by accident or whether there were several cues on that warn. An outstation push in the warn circuit allowed an acknowledgement to be flashed back to the prompt corner (lamps in series, of course, to detect lamp failure). It seemed to serve our needs, although visiting critics tended to scorn the absence of mastering – to which I would suggest that cues usually come sequentially rather than simultaneously, and the debate would end with unresolved speculation about the ergonomics of a stage manager's handspan.

So what do we need today? For a start it has to be modular. One-off customised systems can no longer be cost-effective and there is no consensus for complete standardisation. Modularity allows a degree of personalisation – cue lights and work lights are just about the last backstage equipment detail where user or consultant can still write a specification with a clear personal signature. And it has to be a single loop carrying digitalised information to activate any cue lights (single or group) nominated by the prompt corner. There should be an acknowledgement facility and this should be independent of a feedback which shows the stage manager that the system is functioning (ie plugged in and no blown filaments).

To any manufacturer who is producing a modular time-shared cue light system, I offer my apologies for failing to mention their product. It is the result of ignorance: please send me your leaflet.

Francis Reid

## ET and EP

ANDY MCGREGOR

### A Visit to the Rank Strand Factory

At long last A.B.T.T. (Scotland) showed that there is indeed life 'North of the Border', and organised an outing to the Rank Strand Factory at Kirkcaldy, Fife, where all Rank Strand's Products are assembled.

After an excellent Luncheon at the Factory, we were ushered into a small room where the entire range of current products was on display, to the astonishment of some Strand Employees, who did not realise the Factory was so productive. An all too brief resume of 'What we do' was delivered with Gemini as the centre piece.

To be fair, there is no selling or marketing carried out at Kirkcaldy, with all finished products going direct to Brentford for distribution, and as was pointed out, we, (there were some twenty five of us) we probably knew the products better than many of the Employees at the Factory. And it was the Factory we had come to see.

And in fact you just about can see from one end of the Factory to t'other – it's enormous 100,000 square feet. One great hall with all you'd need, from a wee painting machine for colouring cable flex (avoids carrying lengths of different coloured flex when only white need be held in stock – they are canny you know, the Scots) through areas for cutting, painting, assembly and testing to a very large area where finished Product is stored prior to collection.

Rank Strand buy in 80% of the component parts, mainly locally and mostly British made. From a ridiculous component stock level of over £2.5 Million in the 1970's the factory now operates within £0.5 Million and has come to expect only 20 items to be out of stock at any given time (out of some 10,000 items and compared to an average shortfall of over 2,000 in the 1970's). Ah, the marvels of computers.

The workforce, of just over 150 (compared to around 300 a year ago) churn out 800 to 1000 lanterns a week, as well as the many control systems currently available. Gemini was omnipresent in the control area and we were also proudly shown Rank's new dimmer module, to be known as PIP, an abbreviation ostensibly for Plug In Professional, however as theatre technicians have been screaming for this type of dimmer module – 2.5, 5 and 10kW variations, using circuit breakers – I think PIP may well mean more Pounds In the Pocket for Rank. I shall leave the task of 'reviewing' the Dimmer Module to someone better qualified than I, and proceed with the tour.

Aluminium extrusion and sheet metal is cut, bent, stamped and shaped in an area dominated by towering machines which

though automated, were still noisy and dirty and required constant supervision, which seemed out of place in these advanced days of high technology.

Great care is then taken over painting the metalwork, which is also done 'in house', prior to its passing down the Assembly line where lanterns are built at an average rate of four an hour per person. After a thorough testing the finished product is boxed and sent to the stock area. It was staggering to see so much finished product – despite the daily lorry to Brentford, and I have to admit to being tempted to fill a box with some spare parts from the vast selection – Kirkcaldy is half an hour from Edinburgh, but I'm still waiting for Harmony shutter blades ordered in February. Ah, the marvels of computers.

Highly automated and computerised, the control system PCB's (printed circuit boards) are loaded by machine, except for a few 'difficult' components which are placed by hand with the aid of a machine affectionately known as E.T. A large stalk holds a light source above the operator's head and this light, on being told the component type, will pinpoint the exact position on the PCB by a narrow shaft of light. It will even indicate if the polarity of the component is crucial. The PCB then enters an oven where it is drawn over a pool of solder, to emerge ready for the fitting of any heat sensitive components and testing.

In fact they were so proud of the testing facilities that we were shown round the sauna, where circuitry is 'soaked' at 50 C to check for "infant mortality" as it is unfortunately termed in the trade. We were told of an overall failure rate of 0.004% which one can only agree is indeed highly commendable, while assuming this does not in fact take the older M24 into account. Those of us who had not fainted with the heat then went on to play with the Gemini and its powerful effects panel, before going homewards after a most enjoyable and informative afternoon.

The staff were all typically friendly – despite us gawping at them for hours, and the boffins, – and there were lots of them, looked after us well and had obviously given a lot of thought to organising the grand tour. Thanks are due to all at Rank Strand, Kirkcaldy, and of course ABTT.

Post Scriptum: Why the Title ET & EP? Well believe it or not the 252 has at long last been replaced by the Cadenza EP, with better optics, light output, and lighter, which will no doubt be appearing soon, and who knows, maybe we will see new effects and lenses as well.

Next Issue: Edinburgh Festival Fringe 1985.

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# Whitehall Masques

FRANCIS REID

A theatric tourist in search of the 17th century in London needs a particularly creative imagination. While an exploration of Shakespeare on Bankside is stimulated by the Bear Gardens Museum (visited in Cue 35), there is no formal display to assist an evocation of the masques that entertained the court of the Palace of Whitehall on what was then the more respectable side of the river. All buildings of this rambling palace have long since disappeared — except one. Amidst latter day temples dedicated to the administration of such basics of national governance as war and taxation stands the **Banqueting House** which Inigo Jones built during 1619 to 1622.

The Banqueting House's theatrical interest stems from the masques that were staged there between 1622 and 1635 — a very short period because Charles I forbade further performances after the Rubens paintings had been set in the ceiling, lest they be damaged by smoke from the stage lighting.



Built by Inigo Jones, the Banqueting House in Whitehall is a double cube, 110 feet long and 55 feet wide. It housed the court masques from 1622 until the installation of the Rubens ceiling in 1635 when Charles I forbade further performances lest the painting be damaged by smoke from the stage lighting.

The building is not primarily remembered for its masques: its popular fame rests on its use as a venue for the execution of Charles I. However this event was something of a theatrical production with the facade of the Banqueting House serving as a backcloth to the scaffold — a high platform draped in black from a rail so that the street audience could not see the actual severing but only the upward sweep of the axe and its swift descent. The production had some labour

problems. That leading actor, the public hangman, went on strike and his understudy could not be found; and the props department, while bringing the 'bright execution axe used for malefactors' from the Tower, could not find the usual waist-high block and had to substitute a low billet of wood. The actor/audience relationship of the high staging was unsuitable for a curtain speech but media representatives on the scaffold included shorthand reporters who



*Baroque Dancers of the English Bach Festival performing in the Banqueting House.*



*Purcell's King Arthur designed by Neil Tully as a project at the Central School of Art and Design to explore how the spirit of baroque production might today be evoked in the Banqueting Hall. Photograph by Don Lawson*



have recorded actions and words worthy of the finest writers and directors. As the king 'with a cheerful countenance' passed through the hall of the Banqueting House, surely a montage of masque moments would have been amongst the memories recalled during that final walk to the scaffold.

The first masque was performed in the Banqueting House on Twelfth Night 1622. Not for the first time in the history of theatre architecture, the building was barely finished in time for the opening performance. And, simultaneously with completion of the fabric, the carpenters and painters were at work on the temporary seating and staging for the masque. All the theatrical furnishings, including the complex machinery for the elaborate stagings, was in the nature of a temporary free-standing structure set within the permanent framework of the building. And devised so that it could be dismantled and stored until the next 'fit-up'.

Inigo Jones was more than merely the building's architect or the masque's designer — certainly in the narrow decorator sense that would apply from the death of the masque until the birth of our own tomorrow's theatre. He was a producer/director/scenographer wrestling with his writer in a way that would soon become characteristic of many an opera's composer and librettist. Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones had been collaborating for some seventeen years prior to the *Masque of Augurs* which inaugurated entertainment in the new Hall in 1622. Initially Jonson acknowledged Inigo Jones's ingenious devices writing "the structure and the ornament . . . were entirely Master Jones's invention and design . . . all of which I willingly acknowledge for him." This generosity later dwindled and Jonson turned against him either from envy or possibly from distaste at the art philosophy to which Jones had become increasingly attached, particularly following Italian visits (including the Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza) where he was influenced by Palladio. By the time of the last masque in the Banqueting House, the *Temple of Love* in 1635, Inigo Jones's collaborator was Sir William Davenant.

A new timber Masqueing House was built nearby in 1639 but the Banqueting House remained as a focal point in the life of the seventeenth century court including state ceremonies which are now distributed between Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace, the Mansion House and Westminster Abbey. The Rubens ceiling miraculously survived Cromwell — the seventy foot height presumably discouraged the disfiguration of these painted tributes to the Stuart monarchy — and was the scene first for the formalities of the Restoration and subsequently for the offer of the throne to the house of Orange.

With the burning of the rest of the Palace of Whitehall in 1698, the ceremonial importance of the Banqueting House declined and it spent most of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries fitted out as a chapel by Wren (there is a Rowlandson

drawing recording the end of the eighteenth century), with a refacing of the facade by Sir John Soane in 1829. From then until 1963 it housed the museum of the Royal United Services Association and in 1973 the interior was restored as far as possible to its original condition, with double glazing to keep the modern Whitehall traffic noise at bay. There were some subtle acoustic treatments included in the wall decoration to make the adjustments that would have been originally achieved by hanging tapestries as required for each particular function.

Today the great hall may be visited for fifty pence. I found it helpful to sing (very sotto voce) Purcell even if he more properly

belongs, a little later, to the Dorset Gardens Theatre. There are angled mirrors on castored trucks for studying the ceiling — rather more comfortably than craning the neck, although I have found that after attending concerts I do tend to have a stiff neck since the Rubens goes so well with Handel on original instruments. However, of late and particularly in the current Handel commemorations, there have been performances in costume with re-created baroque dances. Under such circumstances there are flash moments when one is transported to what one feels intuitively to be a microsecond of ambient performance conditions in England after the Renaissance.



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# The Mysteries OF and AT the Lyceum Theatre

FREDERICK BENTHAM

The instruction was unequivocal: "Bring cotton-wool, you will need it." So we did, and we did. Entering by a tiny door in the North West tower of St Pauls Cathedral and climbing up the umpteen winding steps to the ringing chamber all was well. There twelve College Youths, ranging in age from my own downwards stood in a circle and pulled away with the stern concentration that real hobbies demand if you are to enjoy them. More winding steps, this time without any kind of handrail brought us to the belfry itself and that was where the cotton-wool did its work and very effectively too. One was able to enjoy the great bells, the tenor is 62-cwt, resting upside down and swinging through 360° at the hands of the rope and sally below. There is also a jolly good view out of those big circular holes which are occupied by the clock face on the opposite tower.

Sitting immediately opposite the Bishop of Fulham ten minutes later in the Grinling Gibbons choir stalls with nothing between me and the high altar except a couple of great candlesticks and a few marble steps, my mind wandered as evensong progressed that Sunday. Why did Iain Mackintosh not warn me to take cotton-wool to the Lyceum? Why is it that we can take so much sound so long as it does not come out of loudspeakers? Full organ at St Paul's which we were treated to, dome sections and all, in the concluding voluntary is very loud indeed; you feel it as well as hear it but it is thrilling. The same level 'amped' out at one as it is in so many of our theatres does not thrill, it terrifies those who respect their eardrums or at the very least annoys. It is a nuisance and like all nuisances merely represents incompetence or self indulgence. I have written of such things before<sup>1</sup> so will not go on here except to say that my latest complaint arises from the excruciating level of amplification of the music the night I saw *Doomsday*, the last of the mediaeval *Mysteries*, at the Lyceum.

Iain said I must go there and located me in a key seat to appreciate the wonders all around. I had seen the earlier instalments in their real home, the NT Cottesloe — apologies to York of course; but the reader will know what I mean. Frankly, I did not find that anything was gained by the transfer; except as we are led to believe prolonged life, since the *Glory of the Garden*<sup>2</sup> tipped the Cottesloe the black spot. There is one bonus; the lighting up of the Lyceum auditorium hitherto dark beyond the *Mystery* structure as a visual coda, an effect impossible in the Cottesloe. The

linking of the Lyceum theatre, so much a part of my own early life, with *Doomsday* had especial significance for me. What is to be that theatre's future? The place where more than any other I saw Christmas pantomimes as a boy, Cochran's *The Miracle* just before joining Strand Electric, and the miracle of its conversion back to the Lyceum for Archie de Bear's *Here we are again* not long after joining Strand.

The Lyceum used for the *Mysteries* on this occasion was not a theatre but a ballroom — and a pretty tawdry makeshift one at that. The production could not have gone there but for the very ballroom floor which has lain a curse on the great theatre all around, for forty years. However, but for Mecca dancing and the Miss UK's strutting in their briefs for an hour upon the stage, the building might have been supplanted on this key site by some commercial tower now in the last stages of concrete cancer. So here at least Mecca has been a good thing but will it be in the future? That is the question, for they want to improve and develop the Lyceum as a ballroom — spend money and rid the place of its air of decaying makeshift. But if they do as their plans show, it means the end of the Lyceum as a real theatre even though its distinctive plasterwork and portico may remain.

The Lyceum as I knew it in my 'teens had

a vast seating capacity. According to Parker's *Who's Who* of 1925 it seated approximately 3000. This may err on the high side but in those days before the Pit became the Rear Stalls and benches were replaced by tip-ups seating capacities could be high indeed and the Lyceum outshone them all in this respect. I still recall my surprise when I first began to be interested in such things in finding that the Palladium did better than Drury Lane or the Coliseum in this respect and the Lyceum did better than them all, and could rank alongside my beloved Shepherd's Bush Pavilion by Verity. The architect of this Lyceum was Bertie Crewe and it opened in 1904. The classical portico and part of the shell however dates from 1834 so we are told in *Curtains!!!*<sup>3</sup>. But let us get back to the Lyceum as I have known it, since I prefer to write from personal experience.

The Lyceum was the pantomime house during my schooldays. It had taken on the role of Drury Lane, about whose pre-war pantos my parents and their contemporaries spoke with bated awe. My first in the Lyceum was *Jack & the Beanstalk* Xmas 1923 as viewed from the Upper Circle; this as near the front row as possible was our target for the West End. For the next three years however my brother and I found ourselves in the front rows of the stalls. A school friend's father was the Secretary of the LMS railway so an annual expedition began with lunch at Frascati's, followed by the Lyceum matinee and back to our long table in the otherwise deserted unlit Frascati's for an Xmas tea party. All of which introduced us to a style of life we had

<sup>3</sup> John Offord Publications



Fig. 1 The Lyceum Theatre; c.1905 but still the auditorium of the twenties and thirties.

<sup>1</sup> Cue 28 April 84; Sonus ex Machina or Don't Amplify the Gentle Lark

<sup>2</sup> published by the Arts Council 1984



not even read about. More important it presented me with a close-up of the art of the transformation scene: and they were wonderfully complex, going on change after change for a long time. The technique can be described as lift and/or slide to confuse or reveal.

There were other scenic effects, particularly in *Dick Whittington*. The change which swept away the town out through the P. side wings to be replaced by the billowing sea as it went (not a lighting effect) memory says was breathtaking. Before long we were looking at a cross-section of the ship 'afloat' thereon. It happened to be the comedians cabin and the antics as the ship began to roll from side to side more and more violently until it went into complete rotation can readily be imagined. What is not so easy to imagine these days is the fact that there was no amplification whatever. Nat Jackley the comedian had a sort of Tommy Trinder voice but did not need a mike at all to overtop any laugh from the vast house.

Mind you the acoustics of this vast theatre must have been good; as it was not restricted to spectacle and musicals. Straight plays were put on, for example Edgar Wallace's *The Terror* his worst play, I remember it well having done it as an amateur, ran for 246 performances in 1927. A glance at the photo (fig. 1) shows the theatre with its distinctive above pros. wall — a sort of permanent plaster border. This I did not like when young, being used to more broken-up arrangements of pediment, angels or other devices up there: now it is so distinctive of the Lyceum that I love it.

All this vanished overnight when Cochran staged *The Miracle* in April 1932. The original Rheinhardt production he had put on in Olympia and it opened on the 23rd of December exactly two months after I was born. This one I did see however and from the LH block of row M stalls. Everything from that point on was cathedral. John Brunskill "were responsible for the whole of the work" and the "special light and hardened fibrous plaster & steel bracketing" was by F. de Jong & Co. Ltd.

Looking at these months in the records the thing that sticks out is the amount that C. B. Cochran undertook; no two shows alike in any way and always with great personal involvement. The previous autumn ended with the opening of *Cavalcade* at the Lane, then *Helen* at the Adelphi in the January, *The Cat* and *The Fiddle* at the Palace early March and *The Miracle* one month later.

The lighting of *The Miracle* required a new 80-way 'Grand-master' and there were no battens. Instead there were 48 Arena floods (Patt. 35) of 1000-watts and twelve spots of the same watts on the no. 1 bar. These would have been the old Patt. 23 focus lamps. Out front were 26 of these but there were also 16 2-kW spots out there and three of these each side backstage on the perches. There was also the matter of rear lighting of stained glass windows — "In one instance where accessibility is difficult, the lamps are wired in triplicate, with relays to bring in another lamp should one fail."

Granted that a young Fred was going to find all this equipment in a matter of weeks very inefficient, even the 2-kWs only had 6-inch diam. PC lenses, nevertheless 108 individual sources may do something to correct the notion that lighting was always primitive all over stuff. Quite a number of 2-kW's would have been manned or at any rate redirected during the show. Strand also "made 185 candle fittings, 100 torches, and fitted telephone and signals so that instant communication can be made . . .".

My most vivid memory of the show itself was of Massine as the Spielmann. I knew virtually nothing about ballet and his performance got me hooked until well after the war. Mind you there were *some* things better left to Colour Music! The run was of 136 performances, not as long as expected — *Cavalcade* ran for 405 at the Lane and *Helen* for 194 at the Adelphi — so the Lyceum had to be de-cathedralised. This was done with breath taking rapidity. Presented with a couple of briefs I found myself in the Dress circle of a theatre which showed no trace of ever having been

anything else — and that show; what a contrast with the semi-religious Mystery drama which had preceded it!

I can't refrain from going into some detail for it is a proper period piece. The cast of *Here we are again* included Stanley Holloway, Gillie Potter, Polly Ward, Jane Carr, Bobbie Mills, Nat Mills, Flotsam & Jetsam, the 16 Jackson Girls and the Eight Lancashire Lads, with Hal Swain & his band overall. Scenically it can't have amounted to much and all I can recall are the famous radio personalities in that list. Associating the Lyceum with spectacle it was interesting to receive a reminder recently as to how limited things really were backstage. The grid only 48ft 6ins and was only hems. The pros. width of 43ft lines up near enough with the Opera house and Drury Lane. Another stage which was of that width was the old Stoll theatre in Kingsway. This last proved a convenient means of extending the run of *Oklahoma* and yet allow the new show *Carousel* to open on time at the Lane.

The Lyceum stage depth at grid height is

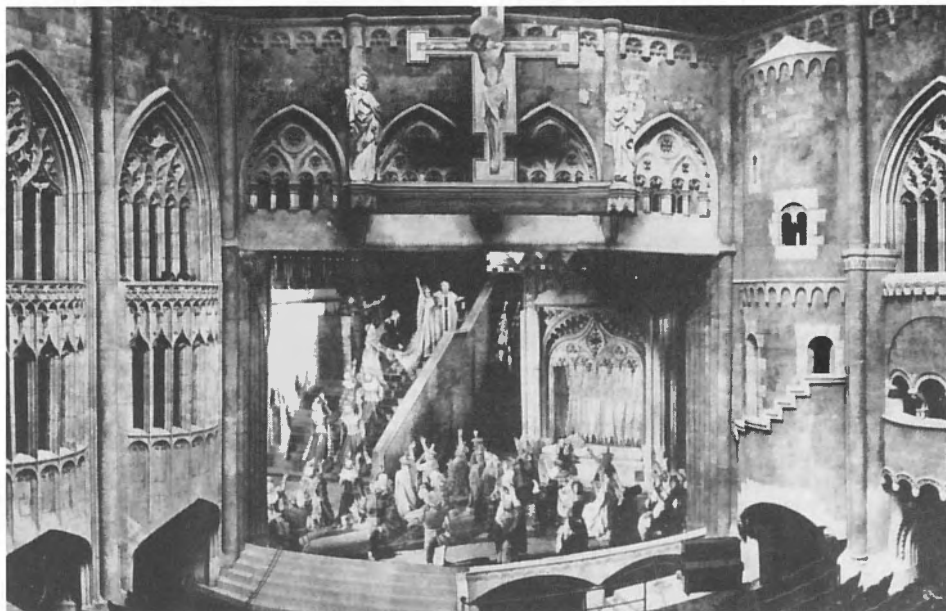


Fig. 2 The Miracle in the Lyceum 1932; note treatment of area above pros. opening.



Fig. 3 The Miracle; close-up of stage when set as part of the cathedral.



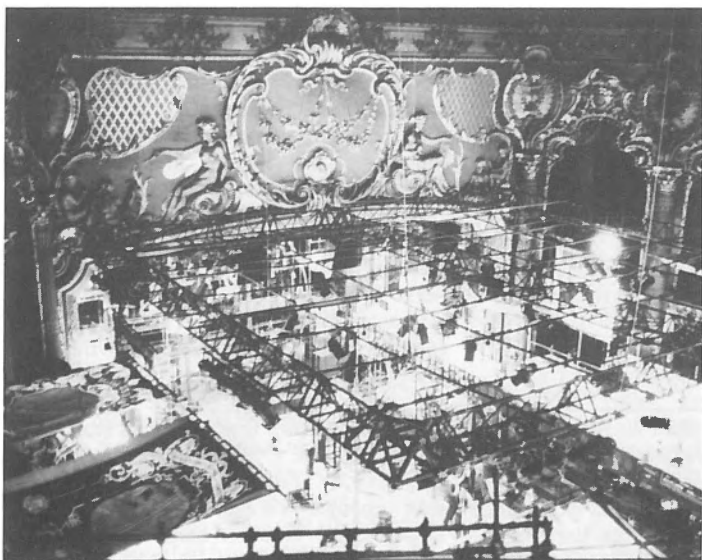


Fig. 4 The Mysteries in the Lyceum 1985; lighting rig over arena, aerial view.



Fig. 5 The 1985 Mysteries close-up; which are the members of Equity?

38ft with an extra 13ft rear stage and the overall width 82ft 6ins. Not used for theatre for forty-six years it would certainly need a great deal done to bring it up to present standards but the space is there. It is of course the auditorium which underlines the need to conserve this building as a large theatre; and large theatres are scarce in the West End. We may think of the Olivier and the Barbican as large theatres but with seating capacities of 1160 and 1162 that is nonsense. Of course there can be no question of the near 3000 seat Lyceum I knew so well; there were seventeen rows with a rake of 34° on the second balcony, making 885 seats in all up there. However there should be no difficulty in achieving a capacity of around 2300 to match the Lane and the Palladium. And the stage *could* be an improvement on the latter with its angled rear wall giving a minimum depth O.P. of 32ft and no wing space on the P. side.

In a sense the fact that the Mysteries made such good use of the Lyceum because of the presence of the ballroom floor confuses the question of conservation of the theatre itself. Will or should the theatre of the future still require a proscenium opening with row upon row of seating confronting it with but a token embrace. Looking at the 'promenaders', some squatting on the floor or getting up to stand or shift positions as Doomsday progressed, one couldn't help wondering how many, how often and for how long in age would they enjoy it that way. There is so much talk of the kind of theatre the young require, yet the population grows older and older. It is not the young in front of the TV set you have to worry about as they may well tire of that; but attracting the 'old' and tired to make the effort to get away from it and go out to the theatre.

Looking back over sixty years of interest in theatre buildings the constant factor is no matter what arises the vast bulk of theatres remain all too like what I knew as a boy; furthermore they are often the very same buildings, said to have been threatened by the cinema and then the television in its turn. The only enduring change perhaps is the

way audiences have come to expect all to go in together by the front door — and they and the architects learnt that from the cinema!

The original Reinhardt production at Olympia went on at a time when, according to Ernst Stern its designer, "Sprængung des Bühnenrahmens was a favourite slogan" and "it meant breaking down and extending the physical limits of the stage, extending the action beyond the footlights." Stern then goes on to mention<sup>4</sup> a number of venues, non-theatres, that he and Reinhardt were involved in on the Continent. All of which, and they were not the only ones at it, makes a nonsense of any notion that the bursting-out of our time is a reaction against the cinema or television screen. "The hall (Olympia) was long and wide and its two

sides and one end had rising tiers of seats. The other end was without seating and there were a number of large openings which permitted the entry of riders and guns at tournaments." So the venue would be as, we who went to the Royal Tournament or Horse Show before the Hitler war, knew well — and indeed not much different from them as now staged in Earls Court. He then describes in detail and at length the plot of *The Miracle*. But there is a lovely change of gear when he comments: "Our job was to put on that ephemeral airy-fairy confection of sugar candy in the great hall of Olympia . . . to stage a fairy story realistically and convincingly in a railway terminus."

Cochran's 1932 production did not take this arena form; for all that the plaster cathedral covered the boxes on either side it was an end stage show with a mild use of the

<sup>4</sup> My Life, My Stage. pub. Gollancz 1951



Fig. 6 Doomsday; showing complete arena with promenaders and actors with the great globe on the stage beyond.



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## COLOUR EFFECT FILTERS

Product	Effect Colour
101 Yellow	Sunlight and window effect – pleasant in acting areas
102 Light Amber	Lamplight effects – dawn sun effects – pleasant in acting areas
103 Straw	Pale sunlight through window effect – warm winter effect
104 Deep Amber	Mood effect on backings. Backlighting of floor and colour effect
105 Orange	Mainly light entertainment, functions. Fire effect if used with 106, 166, 104
106 Primary Red	Strong red effect
107 Light Rose	As for 104
109 Light Salmon	Interesting back lighting
110 Middle Rose	Pleasing effects for theatrical lighting
111 Dark Pink	Good for cycloramas
113 Magenta	Very strong – used carefully for small areas on set
115 Peacock Blue	Pleasing effect on sets, cyclorama cloths backlighting (ice rinks, galas, etc.)
116 Medium Blue Green	Pleasing effects for theatrical lighting
117 Steel Blue	Night effect used on sets – cycloramas
118 Light Blue	Strong night effect
119 Dark Blue	Mood effects – jazz clubs etc., back projection. Travelling matt blue
120 Deep Blue	Pleasing effects for theatrical lighting
121 Lee Green	Cycloramas
122 Fern Green	Cycloramas – good for mood effect
124 Dark Green	Cycloramas – good for back lighting
126 Mauve	Cycloramas – good for back lighting
127 Smokey Pink	Cycloramas – set lighting, disco's
128 Bright Pink	Cycloramas – good for back lighting – strong effect
130 Clear	Used in animation and projection work
132 Medium Blue	Set lighting – travelling matt blue
134 Golden Amber	Set lighting – amber with a touch of pink
136 Pale Lavender	Set lighting – the subtlest of the lavenders
137 Special Lavender	Set lighting – lavender with blue overtones
138 Pale Green	Set lighting – less than half strength 121
139 Primary Green	Set lighting
141 Bright Blue	Set lighting – slightly darker than 118
142 Pale Violet	Set lighting
143 Pale Navy Blue	Set lighting – reduces intensity without too much blue
144 No Colour Blue	Set lighting
147 Apricot	Pleasing effects for theatrical lighting
148 Bright Rose	Set lighting – half the strength of 113
151 Gold Tint	Pleasing effects for theatrical lighting
152 Pale Gold	Set lighting – subtle warm effect
153 Pale Salmon	Set lighting
154 Pale Rose	Pleasing effects for theatrical lighting
156 Chocolate	Cyclorama cloths – ¾ back for dark skin tones
157 Pink	Dance sequences. (Useful for softening white costumes without affecting skin tones)
158 Deep Orange	Fire effect – sun sets
159 No Colour Straw	Warm effect – pale tones
161 Slate Blue	Set lighting – a very cold blue
162 Bastard Amber	Set lighting – half the strength of 152
164 Flame Red	Disco effect – developed for hell fire scenes
165 Daylight Blue	Set lighting – keylight for moonlight effect
166 Pale Red	Good for light entertainment
170 Deep Lavender	Set lighting – disco's – theatres
174 Dark Steel Blue	Set lighting – creates good moonlight shadows
176 Loving Amber	Set lighting – pale pink enhances skin tones
179 Chrome Orange	Combination of ½ CTO & double strength 104
180 Dark Lavender	Pleasing effects for theatrical lighting
181 Congo Blue	Theatre and television effect lighting
182 Light Red	Theatre and television effect lighting
183 Moonlight Blue	Theatre and television effect lighting
184 Cosmetic Peach	Pale tints complimentary to Key lighting
185 Cosmetic Burgundy	Pale tints complimentary to Key lighting
186 Cosmetic Silver Rose	Pale tints complimentary to Key lighting
187 Cosmetic Rouge	Pale tints complimentary to Key lighting
188 Cosmetic Highlight	Pale tints complimentary to Key lighting
189 Cosmetic Silver Moss	Pale tints complimentary to Key lighting
190 Cosmetic Emerald	Pale tints complimentary to Key lighting
191 Cosmetic Aqua Blue	Pale tints complimentary to Key lighting

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auditorium gangways for processions. The designer was Oscar Strnad and he had an ingenious solution to the problem of cathedralisation of the above-pros, which I hope is clear from the photo (fig.2). The whole of Act I was played inside the cathedral: but in Act II there were six different changes of scene on the stage

## SPOT-LIGHT HALO

### Illumination Marvels of "The Miracle"

Probably the most interesting and elaborate experiment in theatrical illumination ever carried out in this country is the lighting of "The Miracle."

The lighting is so subtle, so full of variety, that few visitors to the Lyceum Theatre realise that throughout the performance the stage is illuminated by spot-lights and by nothing else. Footlights, of course, are out of the question with an apron stage in use.

It is astonishing how skilfully the lighting is used to vary the emotional intensity of the scenes, especially since it is so unobtrusive.

One feature of particular interest is the glass trap-door in the floor of the stage. It is on this spot that the Nun dies and a light shining through provides a beautiful and amazingly natural halo.

The striking stained-glass effects are obtained by spotlights shining through coloured screens. Not the least beautiful of the lighting achievements is the golden radiance behind the altar, with the scores of burning candles in front.

Hypercritical people have complained that the candles are electric lights. But real candles are prohibited by the regulations against fire.

(The Evening News 28/4/32)

numbered 1800 — certainly the arena format of the Olympia Miracle. There are other similarities: "great doors — a hundred feet high — opened . . ." to allow scenic escape from the cathedral; while in Doomsday the great globe which forms the coda is revealed to draw attention away from the arena to the stage itself.

At the Cottesloe 400 were admitted, some of whom could find their way to seats. At the Lyceum the capacity was 508 promenaders with a further 448 seated making a full house of 956 in all. The arena was 62-ft by 34-ft compared with 48-ft by 32-ft.6 at the Cottesloe. An article on the transfer of the Mysteries to the Lyceum, by Jason Barnes the Cottesloe's production manager, is to appear in this Winter's *Sightline*<sup>5</sup> which makes it unnecessary to go into technical details here. However, it is interesting to compare the lighting installation with that of the Miracle of 1932. Instead of the 80 dimmers then we find 120 feeding 152 units — 112 1-kW spots, four 2-kWs, 14 'effects' and 22 500-W spots. From 102 plus 'stained glass windows' and other effects in 1932 on an 80-way board to 138 plus effects on a 120-way Kliegl Performer in 1985 hardly represents the increase one might have expected after over a half-century of 'progress' — even granted that the sources of light are now that much more efficient.

<sup>5</sup> *Sightline* Vol.19 No.2 to be published by the ABTT

To my mind the real contrast lies not in the technology but in the visual currency used. In those far off days everything and everyone, both on stage and in the audience, would have been so neat and tidy. The costumes were, for example, by Oliver Messel and it is difficult to imagine him permitting a fold or a rag out of place. But the Bill Bryden *Mysteries* productions of 1985 depend on it all looking rather a casual mess; and most members of the audience have only to turn up in their everyday costume to fit in perfectly. It is the 'coarse' acting and presentation in uncouth (but clever) decor by William Dudley which draws the audiences to see, and all but take part in, the show.

But two miles away at St. Paul's cathedral it is the sheer perfection, order and craftsmanship of what is to be seen and heard that provides the draw for the sightseers, for that was what the bulk of the congregation that Sunday evensong undoubtedly were. Some readers may be wondering how I came to be sitting up there opposite the officiating bishop, I certainly do. It is true that I designed the cathedral switchboard way back in 1967 (the specification stated that it must last 100 years!); but I hardly think that rates escort past row upon row of expectant public in the nave and under the dome, up the chancel steps and past the choir. No; it must have been that I was one of the very few men among the crowd that hot Summer afternoon, that the verger could find who was wearing a tie!

## REIDing SHELF

before the final quick-change back into the cathedral, for the happy ending with the death of the errant Nun at the forgiving feet of the Madonna. And it was all the Spielmann's fault really!

The Lyceum ended its career as a theatre in the summer of 1939, with John Gielgud in *Hamlet*. Fay Compton played Ophelia, Jack Hawkins the Ghost & the King and Andrew Cruickshank was Rosencrantz. Marius Goring was also in it and before long was destined to become the very personification of Adolf Hitler on BBC radio. Altogether the 28th June was not auspicious for any first night. *Hamlet* then thought "doomsday near" but it did not in fact arrive there for forty-six years; but I can attest that it was most enjoyable when it did turn up!

There was the familiar flicker (but it ought not to be so regular, there is no excuse these electronic days) and smoke of the Cottesloe productions; but the venue although at first appearing much the same is greater being arranged for a capacity of three times the Cottesloe. This is done in part by using some of the Lyceum seating in places like the front rows of the grand circle as well as on the staging erected around on the dance floor. So this 'religious' play returns if not to the scale — that cast

John Pick is our national Guru of Arts Administration Education. Therefore the question of whether he is a monetarist or merely a devil's advocate must be a matter of pressing consequence for our aesthetic futures. When reviewing his *West End Theatre: Mismanagement and Snobbery* (in Cue 28) I noted that his conclusions were surprisingly polemical for an academic of his stature, but concluded that teacher was providing something for his pupils to react against. After reading **THE THEATRE INDUSTRY** I am not so sure. Once again his researched facts fascinate: it is his conclusions that send me scurrying yet again for my worry beads.

John Pick's latest is an A/4 paperback of 55 pages. Basic facts about changes in audiences, programme income and expenditure are clearly charted, with particular emphasis on where the cookie comes from and how it is crumbled amongst the various contributors to a performance. While it is possible to apply objective analysis to the basic statistical facts of an arts industry's manufacturing and retailing operation, the criteria for assessing quality

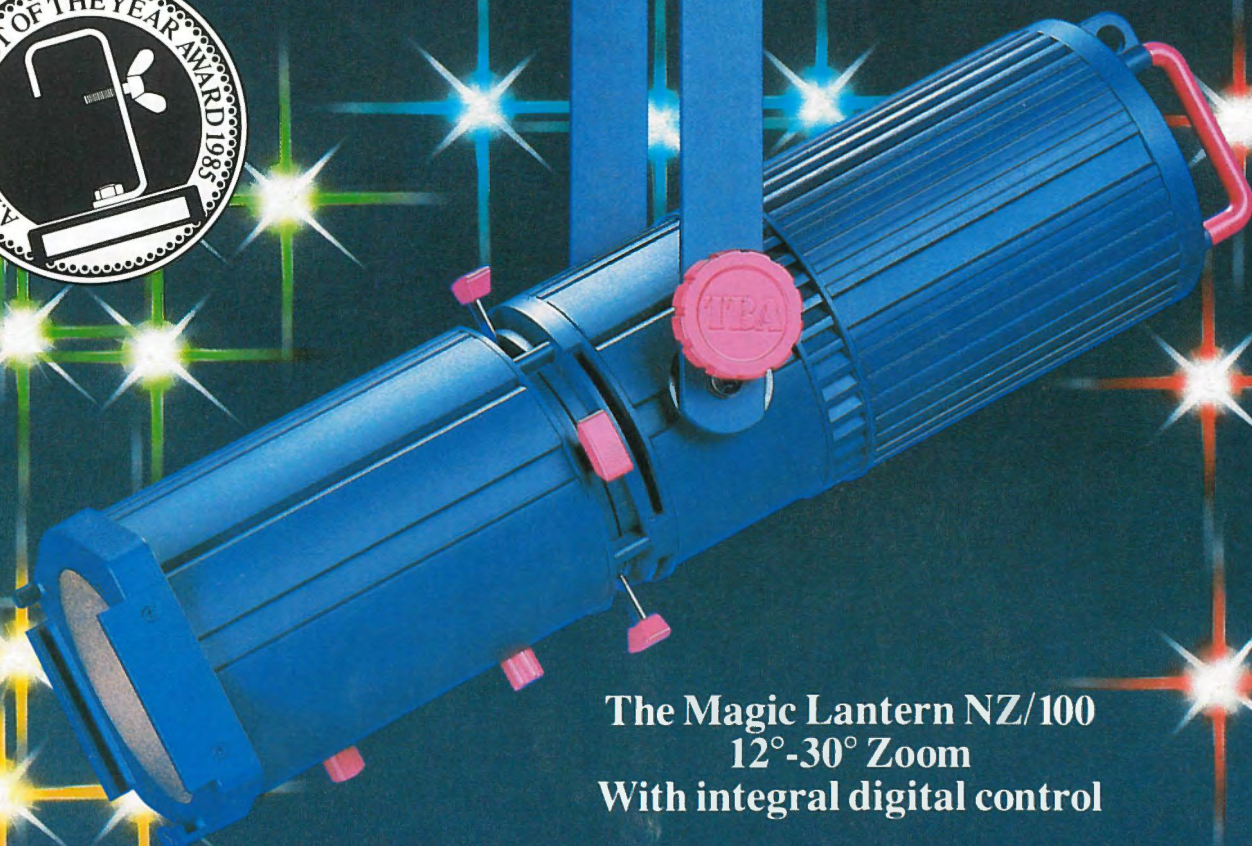
are inevitably subjective. Anyone working in theatre is constantly required to make cost-effective judgements in order to gain maximum quality from minimum expenditure. John Pick identifies several areas in this debate. Alas his case for a rational approach to establishing the priorities with which we pragmatise our ideals is reduced somewhat (or even more than somewhat) by the polemic flavour of his own opinions.

I believe that both this book and its author would have gained in stature if John Pick had presented his statements as questions. Because they are questions which do need to be debated. So I find myself giving him the benefit of doubt. I shall assume that he intends his polemic statements to be received as rhetorical questions. And therefore welcome this book as a contribution to the ongoing debate about the quality of life.

**THEATRES OF THE LEFT 1880-1935** is an anthology of essays on workers' theatre movements in Britain and America. The period comes alive in Ewan MacColl's



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recall of the Manchester that spawned Theatre Workshop. His chapter is past the middle of a chunky book, but I would have liked to read it first so that I could have approached the more analytical chapters with a better gut understanding of the radical theatreworkers in a period that nearly includes my own earlier stirrings towards a life in the theatre. Throughout the various contributions, whether analyses, reminiscences, documents or scripts, there is an overriding impression of a simpler political age when them and us were clearly defined. The political drama reflected this: unsubtle, even naive, it was a theatre of statement rather than debate.

However, if debate was rarely present in the scripts, its agonies were rarely absent from the production processes. The British continually argued about whether agitprop plays were an appropriate use of revolutionary energies and professional dedication in actors was viewed with aggressive suspicion — unlike America where Shock Troupe's intensive training schedule included "At four o'clock there is individual rehearsal wherein comrades study their shortcomings". The flavour throughout indicates humourless dedication: it makes me feel privileged to have lived through 'That Was The Week That Was'.

Cue specialist readers should turn straight to page 247 where they will be intrigued by Alf Armit who learned French to translate Appia not just into English but into practice. Alf's resourcefulness included "hanging out of a window and connecting our board to the electric trolley cable which supplied power for the trams. It's true the lights dimmed every time a tram passed, but apart from that it was perfectly effective".

It is difficult to separate theatre from politics: the stage will sometimes anticipate and sometimes reflect — just as life may imitate art and vice versa. This book will supply the academic world with a plethora of ideas for essays: for the rest of us it will help fill in one of the less documented areas of relatively recent theatre history.

1985 is centenary year for the O.U.D.S. and Humphrey Carpenter has provided a history book. The Oxbridge universities do not have drama departments and cynics have been known to suggest this as a reason for the eminence achieved by so many of the graduates in directing, administrating and performing in professional theatre and television. Indeed it is particularly interesting to observe, throughout this book, the way in which student actors have gradually moved forward from merely reflecting British theatre towards providing it with leadership. Oddly enough, however, more recent productions — with the possible exception of the Burton-Taylor 'Faustus' — attract rather less media coverage than those of earlier years when not only the gossip columnists but the entire brigade of top critics would descend upon Oxford. Humphrey Carpenter is therefore able to draw upon Agate, Darlington, Ivor Brown and the then anonymous Charles

Morgan of the Times, in addition to the likes of Osbert Lancaster, Ken Tynan and Michael Billington who are all particularly articulate in their observation of the Ouds from within.

The author suggests that the golden ages of Ouds occurred, firstly, in the mid twenties when visiting professionals of the order of Komisarjevsky and John Gielgud were invited to direct and, secondly, when the post-war graduates were mature servicemen at a time when Ken Tynan and Tony Richardson dominated. The book ends with a short debate on quality. Michael York, Giles Havergal, Patrick Garland and Ronald Eyre welcome Oxford's unstructured informality of learning to act by doing it. But Frank Hauser seeks an input of mature experience, primarily in the form of professional direction, claiming that "it's like two virgins going to bed and expecting they'll know what to do". But surely, say I (not an Oxbridge man, but for many years an undergraduate at Edinburgh) this bedding of virgins is precisely the strength of Oxbridge theatre — a process of discovery free from the formulated positions of the established thinking of the professional directors, the drama schools or the analytic academics of university drama departments.

In Cue 12, I described a visit to an exhibition about the Fisher Theatre Circuit, held in the arts centre of one of the circuit towns, Wells-next-the-Sea. That exhibition was **THE LAMPLIT STAGE** and there is now a book with the same title from Moira Field, the curator of the David and Charles Fisher Collections which formed the core of the material displayed. The Fisher circuit began in 1792 and disbanded in 1844 following the national recession in provincial theatre, although management had been so sound that there were no outstanding debts at the time of the sale of the family theatres.

Between 1812 and 1828 the Fishers built new theatres and adapted existing ones in ten of the number two towns of Norfolk and Suffolk, providing a secondary circuit to that based on Norwich Royal. The most tantalising item in the Fisher collections is the outside cover of a small green leather management notebook dated 1832, entitled on one cover 'Plans of Audience Part of Theatres', and on the other (the other way up) 'Order of Scenes, Inventory of Scenes and Various Articles Left at Different Theatres'. The missing pages would have been a primary source of information that could surely have filled in some of the gaps in our knowledge of the technology of the small (300–400 seat) Georgian theatres — especially as David Fisher senior, who designed and supervised the building of his theatres, was trained as a carpenter and builder. Many of the Fisher theatre facades remain but their interiors have been totally remodelled for commercial purposes. G. T. Plumbly, host of the Angel Inn at North Walsham, and a violinist in the pit when the Fishers came to town, has left a pair of watercolours which are our only record

(apart from press reports) of David Fisher's interior furnishing, but that theatre's first night prologue of 1828 indicates just how much East Anglia's minor playhouses were transformed

When two years since on this same spot we met,  
In cold clay walls, with roof of thatch ye sat;  
Then Richard, Richmond marshall'd their proud  
ranks  
On stage no bigger than a mountebank's;  
Then Scotland's tyrant barely fought his squadron  
In space scarce larger than the witches' cauldron;  
Here, as we oft portray'd their furious ire,  
The eddy winds damp'd our theatric fire.  
Look round, my gen'rous friends, and you'll view  
Instead of barn, an edifice quite new;  
One more deserving of your lib'ral aid,  
One where our Drama may be best displayed.  
On spacious stage our harmless combats fight  
And Richard be himself again each night.

The Fishers were a self-sufficient family. They toured their own printing press, were variously trained as painters and musicians, and with the aid of their wives and children required few hired actors to complete the casting of their extensive repertoire. Moira Field's little book captures the spirit of the players, their theatres and their performances. Illustrations are based on items from the collections which will be on show in a Fisher Theatre Exhibition during this summer at Holkham Hall on the North Norfolk coast. I shall go. And I think I might even go further: I might just be prepared to do a Faustus with my soul to be transported back to the Fishers' 1830 performance of Barber of Seville in North Walsham, complete with 'The celebrated OVERTURE to the Opera, composed by Rossini' but with the interpolated arias by Paesello and Henry Bishop.

While the Fisher family were touring their own theatres in relative comfort (several of their theatres had adjacent family houses and at Dereham there was even an interconnecting door to the wings) Mr and Mrs Deans played Jedburgh "where we fitted up a large barn and covered the interstices of the roof with scenery to conceal the cobwebs that were abundant, our ceiling was a collection of variously grouped paintings of palaces, libraries, waterfalls, streets, etc." This, alas, is just about the only positive description of theatre architecture that Mrs Charlotte Deans offers in her memoirs which are full of tantalising references to the venues in the couple of hundred towns and villages where she toured in Scotland and Northern England for some fifty years from the late 1780s. There are, however, frequent harrowing accounts of travelling conditions — "after crossing the Firth of Forth, on a very tempestuous day, we had to walk ten miles with the children, up to the knees in melting snow, and at every hundred yards Mr Deans had to bear us across swollen brooks; we must have perished at one place, but for the kindness of a traveller from Galashiels, the water taking his horse to the shoulders as he carried us across." But the show, if they could rent a theatre or fit-up a barn went on — except on one or two occasions when Mrs Deans, having no understudy, went



inconveniently into labour when the curtain was due to rise. Mrs Deans bore to her two husbands a total of seventeen children.

Her memoirs have been newly published in a facsimile of the original 1837 edition as **A TRAVELLING ACTRESS IN THE NORTH AND SCOTLAND** with a commentary by Frances Marshall whose diligent research in newspapers and other contemporary documents fleshes out many of the passing references in the text. The Charlotte Deans story is one of highs and lows, of commodious proper theatres alternating with hastily fitted up barns, houses sometimes full but more often not – and music occasionally provided by the full band of a regiment of bespeaking militia, but more likely to be as at the performance when “our orchestra consisted of one blind musician who drew from a French officer (there being many upon parole) this remark: you be a very good comedia, but your theatre be von stable, and your musician no look” Charlotte Deans was a loser but she was also a survivor. Since reading her memoirs I have become, if not quite a fan, then certainly an admirer.

Having discovered at an early age that Shakespeare may be enjoyed (and, at a slightly later age, lit) without textual analysis, I had never heard of A. C. Bradley’s **SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY** until the latest reprint (the twentieth) dropped through my letterbox the day before I read in Malcolm Bradbury’s *Stepping Westward* that this 1904 Shakespearean classic was indeed the lavatory book of that incomparable American scholar Dr Harris Bourbon of Benedict Arnold college where the carillon’s repertoire includes “I’m sitting on Top of the World.” (Theatre Factbooks rather than novels are the currency of this cue shelf, but I must take this opportunity of confirming that my short excursions within the groves of academia reveal that the realism of Bradbury’s novels is only barely heightened.)

I do not think that it would be appropriate to read Bradley from cover to cover or

indeed to read a specific play’s chapter unless one was studying for an exam, was about to do a production or held for Shakespeare the sort of passion that I reserve for Handel, for the minor dykes of the Norfolk Broads and for the ambience of the late eighteenth century opera house. Each to his own. But I did dip into the sole area of Shakespeare where I feel any trace of expertise – the supernatural in Macbeth, the one and only topic that I prepared for each and every school exam. It never failed to come up as a question and so, ever since, I have been prepared to live dangerously (Mentally of course, never physically). Bradley passes the supernatural test and indeed would have been an asset to my vocabulary on the subject whether in the examination room or rehearsal hall.

I also read John Russell Brown’s new introduction and I add my support to his view that “it widens our view of the issues implicit in the tragedies and deepens our understanding of Shakespeare’s art”. A new dimension is always added by studying the greats through someone else’s eyes, as well as through one’s own. I studied my Shakespeare through Verdi. But I might equally have chosen Bradley.

From the same publisher comes more on **MACBETH** along with companion slender volumes on **TWELFTH NIGHT** and **VOLPONE**. The series *Text and Performance* is just that: an analysis of the text followed by descriptive discussions on the approach of several major productions of recent years. A useful thought stimulator for anyone about to be exposed to examiners or to an audience.

In the same analytical vein, Macmillan add **ALFRED JARRY AND GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE** to their *Modern Dramatists* series with Claude Schumacher discussing their plays within their production and wider social context.

In the midst of so much budget trimming, euphemistically presented as development, it is a particular relief to find a theatrical phoenix. *Theatre Quarterly* died in 1981 (for want of a little subsidy) but **NEW THEATRE QUARTERLY** arises in 1985 (thanks to the broad specialist journal resource base of Cambridge University Press).

In the first issue I found articles to which I could relate with pleasure and understanding (from Peter Brook at his Bouffes to Footsbarn in their tent), but there is a lot, particularly on semiotics, which is analytical beyond my limited intellectual resources – even though I am entrusted with the academic leadership of one of the most highly respected BA degree courses in this country. However I shall plough through the semiotic sections of NTQ in the hope that my threshold of understanding will increase in order that I can glimpse the way ahead.

Theatre will develop from gut decisions

made by individuals whose subconscious has been fed by a debate. A debate that has to start with definition of a few basic maltreated words like ‘elitism’ and ‘quality’. And that debate will have to include theatre workers as well as theatre commentators. I hope that it is only as a result of chance and expediency that the first NTQ seems exclusively written by those who live by the pen and the lecture.

**THE THEATRE INDUSTRY.** Subsidy, Profit & the Search for New Audiences. John Pick. Comedia Research Consultancy Publishing, 9 Poland Street, London W1V 3DG. £15 (UK) \$25 (Paperback)

**THEATRES OF THE LEFT 1880–1935.** Worker’s Theatre Movements in Britain and America. Raphael Samuel, Ewan MacColl & Stuart Cosgrove. Routledge & Kegan Paul (History Workshop Series). £8.95 (paperback) (UK).

**OUDS.** A Centenary History of the Oxford University Dramatic Society 1885–1985. Humphrey Carpenter. Oxford University Press. £12.95 (UK).

**THE LAMPLIT STAGE.** The Fisher Theatre Circuit 1792–1844. Moira Field. Illustrated from the David and Charles Fisher Collections. Running Angel (55 Telegraph Lane East, Norwich NR1 4AA) £4.15 (Paperback) (UK).

**A TRAVELLING ACTRESS IN THE NORTH AND SCOTLAND.** Memoirs of the Life of Mrs Charlotte Deans from her Earliest Infancy, comprising the periods when she was Miss Charlotte Lowes, Mrs Johnston, and Mrs Deans; being a Journal of a Seventy Years Pilgrimage, with Anecdotes of many with whom it has been her good fortune to Associate. Facsimile of the 1837 edition with a Commentary by Frances Marshall. £5 (Paperback) (UK) from Brynthwaite, Charney Road, Grange-Over-Sands, LA11 6BP.

**SHAKESPEAREAN TRAGEDY.** A. C. Bradley. New Introduction by John Russell Brown. Macmillan. £15 (UK). £4.50 (paperback) (UK).

**ALFRED JARRY AND GUILLAUME APOLLINAIRE.** Claud Schumacher. Macmillan (Modern Dramatists Series). £15 (UK). £4.95 (Paperback) (UK).

**MACBETH.** Gordon Williams. **TWELFTH NIGHT.** Lois Potter. **VOLPONE.** Arnold P. Hinchliffe. All in Macmillan (Text and Performance Series). £2.95 (Paperback) (UK).

**NTQ NEW THEATRE QUARTERLY.** Edited by Clive Barker and Simon Trussler. Cambridge University Press. Single copies £5 (\$10). Annual Subscription £19 (\$39) for institutions, £10 (\$19) for individuals.



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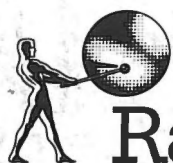


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