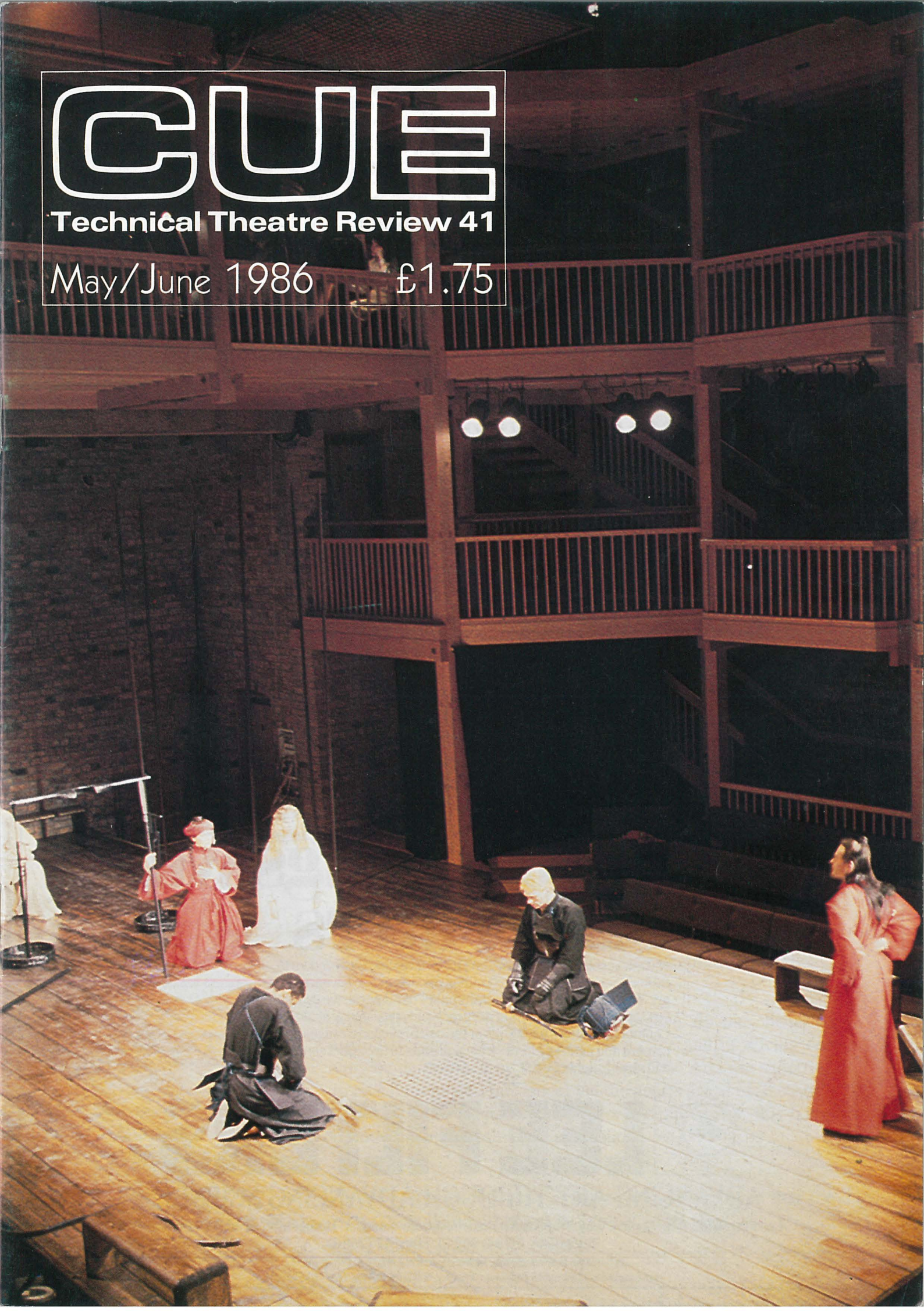


# CUE

Technical Theatre Review 41

May/June 1986 £1.75





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Cover picture

The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon sets out to capture the spirit of Jacobean theatre rather than attempt a historic reconstruction. The aim being to recreate a relationship between audience and players that is close to the original. The opening production of "Two Noble Kinsmen" reflects the RSC's policy of rediscovering drama of the period 1570 - 1750. Photo. Nicholas Sargeant.

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### (IN) SIGNIFICANT CHANGE?

To reflect an important change of emphasis, the Council has agreed to disband its Finance & Policy Committee and replace it, for a six month trial period, by a Policy & Finance Committee.

The Arts Council's Bulletin number 78 names this as one of their *Significant Changes Following Institutional Review*. Surely this is just the sort of thing that gives bureaucracy a bad name?

The Arts Council of Great Britain has been, and has the potential to continue to be, a magnificent catalytic device for developing the quality and accessibility of the Arts. But is its credibility not being severely eroded by two factors, one internal and one external?

Why do the officers have to indulge in such Institutional Pomp as exemplified by this concern over a committee title?

And why, if we may paraphrase Handel, do the clients so furiously rage together? A cake is a cake and its slicing can only be determined by rational debate. The Arts are supposed to be a humanising influence, yet the artists are at each other's throats for the available funds. For the philistines, this is the ultimate triumph of divide and rule.

In such circumstances, it is perhaps understandable that the Arts Council should resort to cynical word play.

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*Editorial Board*

James Twynam (Managing)

Francis Reid

Jeremy Twynam

*Editorial,*

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

# A SWAN FOR THE AVON

Francis Reid

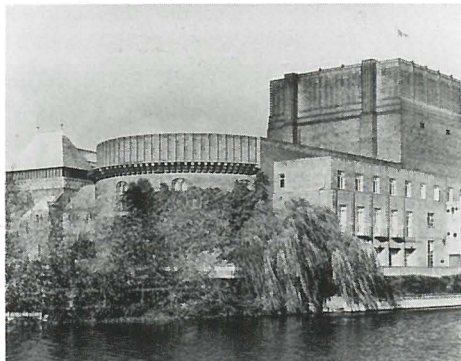
At five minutes to showtime, the Swan Theatre crackled with the buzz of expectancy as I crossed her threshold to find each individual of a full house already absorbed into that corporate identity which enables an audience to properly assist at a performance. The Swan is a throbbing vital place whose intimacy will cherish actors when they are sincere but expose them when they are not.

The Swan achieves an ambience that is

totally different from, but parallel to, the great days of fibrous plaster. It is a very simple space, but totally without that bleak neutrality of the black box which has debased the word 'studio'. It revels in the lightness of fresh new natural timbers set in happy juxtaposition with the old warm mellow brick shell of the original Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. These timbers, including the sixteen Douglas fir trees that provide the main 27ft high support



*The original Shakespeare Memorial Theatre 1879–1926.*



*The Royal Shakespeare Theatre's Conference Hall as it was in 1984.*

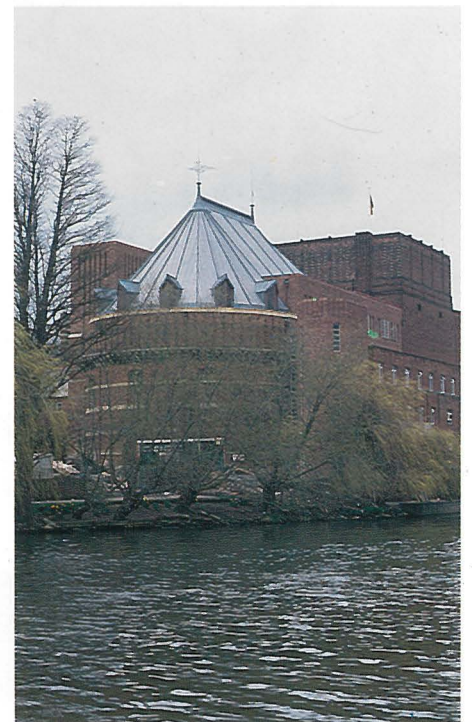
columns for the galleries, are organic. The bricks may be chemically inorganic but they have absorbed life from over a century of housing performances and rehearsals.

The original gothic revival Shakespeare Memorial Theatre of 1879 was destroyed by fire in 1926 and when Elizabeth Scott's replacement opened alongside in 1932, the shell of the old theatre was adapted as a rehearsal room, known as the Conference Hall, presumably to house Shakespeareana conferences associated with the Library and Art Gallery which had survived the fire and have now become foyers and bars for the new Swan.

These refurbished areas will also continue to house the RSC collection of paintings, costumes, props and ephemera. There will be a series of exhibitions, the first one illustrating the progressive changes in staging from the mediaeval performances through to those of today. I had a quick peek at this when it was nearing completion and my appetite was whetted to return shortly wearing my theatric tourist hat — report to follow in a future Cue. The collection will be open during the day to paying visitors, but the Swan's audience will have free access during the intervals.

The Swan sets out to capture the spirit of the jacobean theatre rather than attempt a historic reconstruction. The aim has been to recreate a relationship between audience and players that is as close to the original as can be possible within today's requirements of safety and expectations of comfort.

The Swan is in courtyard form with audience seated at ground level and in shallow galleries wrapping around three sides of the deeply thrusting stage. Audiences in the galleries of a courtyard like to lean forward and indeed their responding



*The Swan Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon February 1986.*

faces are an essential feature of the inter-audience relationship of such theatres. However a comfortable lean brings the seats too close to the balustrade for comfortable leg room. The Swan has an elegant solution in a leaning shelf built within and slightly below the balustrade. The galleries have two rows with the second row raised and provided with a metal leaning and safety rail. The pit seating for the groundlings follows the contour of the gallery curves and the positioning of the access gangways is particularly happy in the way that it avoids any suggestion of dividing the audience.

The stage is a simple thrust of darkly stained boards. It can be trapped according to the needs of particular productions and suspensions can be provided from the darkness of the neutrally painted technical area in the ceiling. For the opening production of 'Two Noble Kinsmen' there were two motorised platforms, a flown hoist and an understage sink. These were in the right place because they were part of the production design (and its budget) rather than a consultant's advance speculation as to

where such devices might possibly be required.

The 'flys' has a wraparound gallery close to the ceiling. Lighting can be hung here and on two transverse lighting bridges. Further lighting positions are provided at middle gallery level on bars tucked into each box. It is a tribute to the design of these neat extruded black boxes from the Strand Symphonic range that they seem to belong naturally among the timber and brick.

The basic lighting rig includes:

- 40 Prelude 16/30
- 36 Harmony 15/28
- 20 Harmony PC
- 30 Prelude F
- 10 Cadenza
- 30 Parblazers

Control, from a high level box with full frontal view of the stage, is by a 288 channel 195 line Galaxy 2 Arena with the following units mounted in a two tier desk:

- 1 Channel Control
- 2 Playbacks
- 1 Memory/Output panel
- 1 Group Masters Unit

- 1 Preset Panel
- 1 Effects Panel
- 1 Special Panel fitted with Tempus 12-way desk

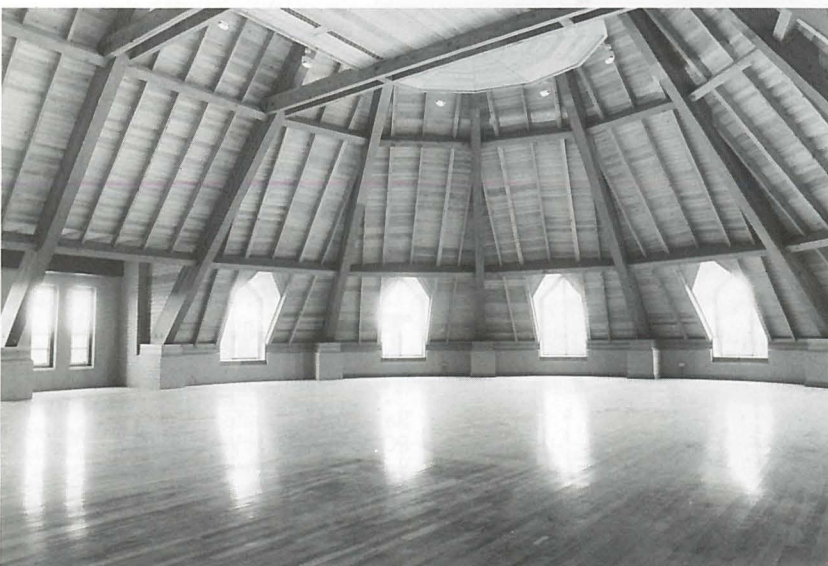
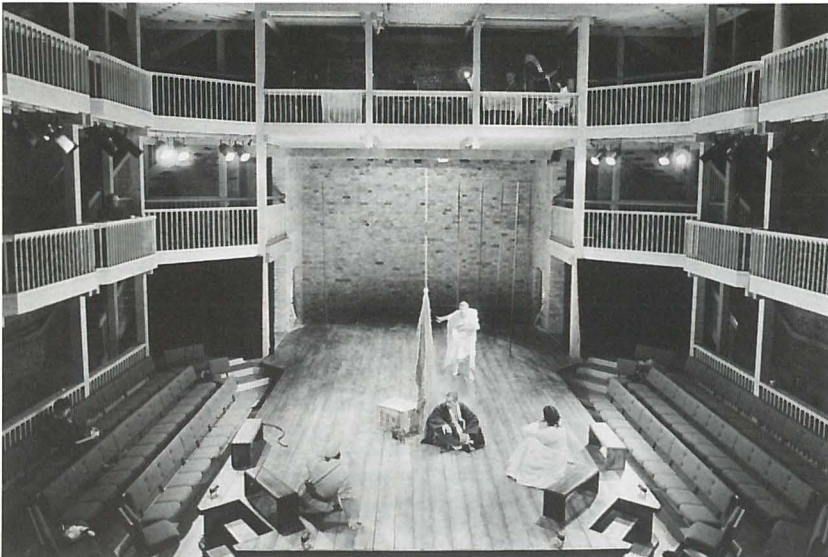
The dimmers are Permus racks (eleven 24 way 10 amp and one 12 way 20 amp).

The auditorium lighting is exemplary. It is nice and bright in the spirit that theatregoing should be a joy rather than a penance, but it falls gently on both the timber and brick surfaces. Admittedly these are sympathetic surfaces to light but whoever chose the fittings and their positions deserves the kind of congratulations that I have withheld from a number of theatres recently, from the new Wilde to the Old Vic.

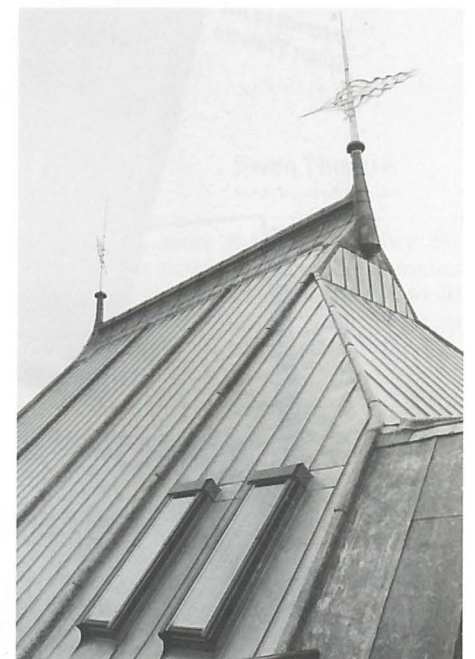
The wood contributes to a glorious sounding box and it is exciting to hear the musicians from where they were in the 17th century: in a gallery above the stage. (I now long to hear Purcell in this theatre). Voices are supported sympathetically whether in passionate declaim or conversational aside.

The Swan has not only sought inspiration from older theatre building forms, it has embraced the older building techniques whereby the carpenter fitted out the mason's shell. The proportions of the old theatre form a sympathetic shell, but a hero of its finishing, standing alongside architect and carpenters, must be the Fire Prevention Officer who allowed such extensive use of timber. He is to be congratulated on recognising the inherent safety of properly treated timber in a controlled environment and we must hope that his positive attitude heralds the dawn of a new enlightenment that will allow the use of materials more sympathetic than the inflexible concrete beloved by building regulations.

A new rehearsal room has been created above the Swan by adding a pitched roof to restore the spirit of the original Memorial Theatre. To place such an addition on top of a building which had been severely



The new rehearsal room. Photo by Nicholas Sargeant



The weather vanes of burnished steel, evoking the movement of a swan in water, are the work of sculptor Anthony Robinson. Photo by Nicholas Sargeant

# Strand Lighting at the new Swan Theatre

Subtle, creative lighting . . . dramatic effects . . . whatever the text demands for Royal Shakespeare Company productions, Strand Galaxy lighting memory controls are available to provide it!

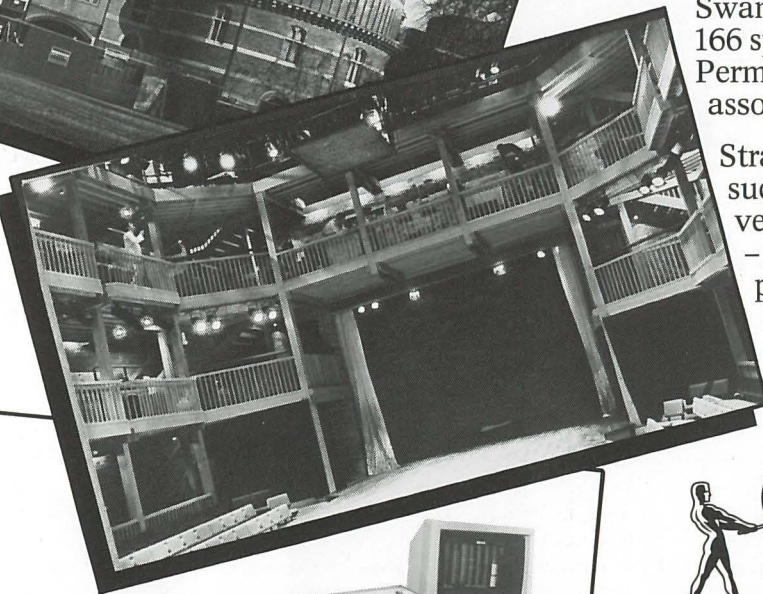
Like the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon, and the RSC Barbican Theatre, London, the new Swan Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon is also equipped with Galaxy. This 200th installation of Galaxy is a 288-channel Galaxy 2 Arena system, fully customised by utilising modular units from a wide range of available facilities. Also supplied for the Swan by Strand Lighting were 166 spotlights, 12 compact Permuss dimmer racks and associated equipment.

Strand Lighting wish all success to the RSC's new venture at the Swan Theatre - to be a centre for the production of works by Shakespeare's contemporaries.



*Stratford-upon-Avon, February 1986.*  
*The Swan Theatre,*

*Interior of the  
Swan Theatre.*



*Galaxy 2 Arena.*



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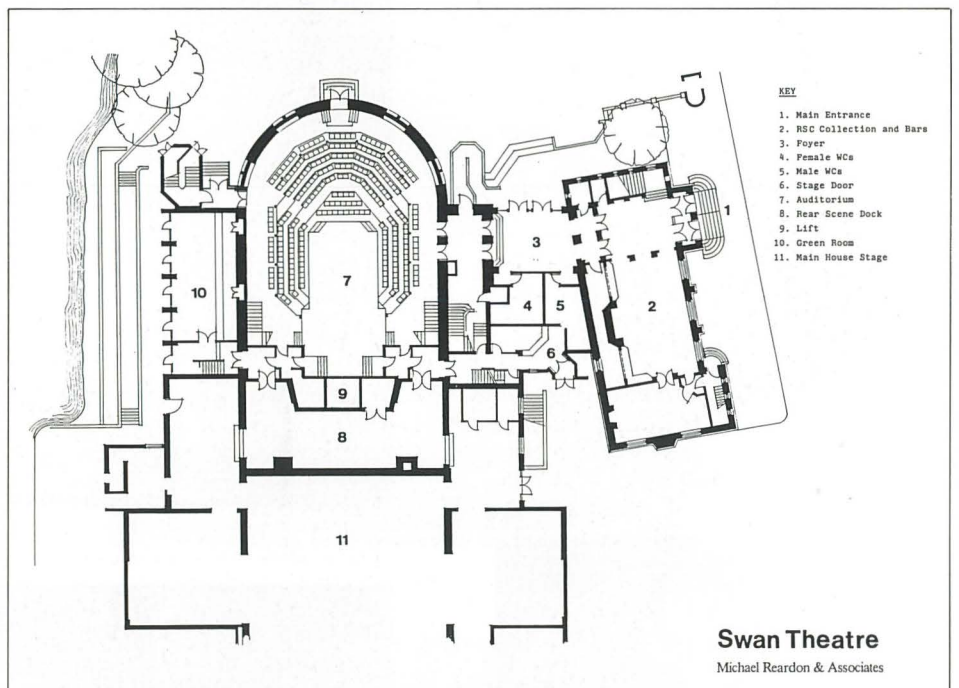
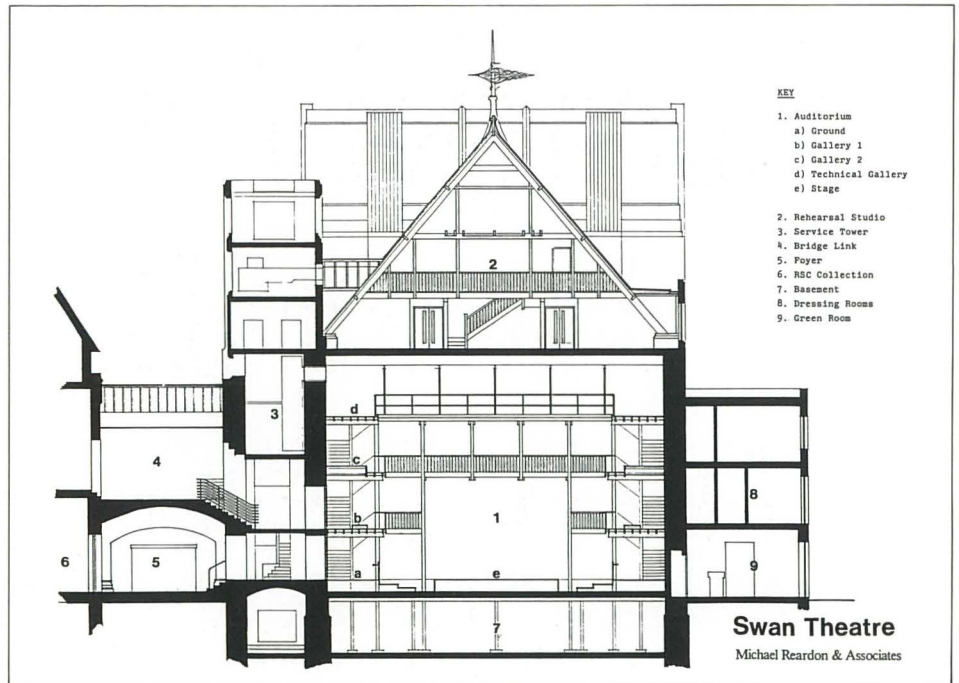
damaged by fire sixty years ago was something of a challenge to the structural engineers: that they were able to do so is something of a tribute to the builders of Victorian Stratford who evidently applied sounder construction techniques than were sometimes the fate of theatres in some of the more metropolitan areas. The whole of the rehearsal room is supported by precast concrete floor units 17.5m long, with each unit weighing 17.5 tonnes. The roof structure uses fifteen laminated timber rafters, each of them made by gluing together smaller timber members to produce a beam 13.5m long, 200mm wide, 500mm deep and weighing three quarters of a ton. Other tricky structural problems, happily resolved, included the need for the balustrades of the galleries to be more slender than envisaged in the latest codes of practice; but patrons can lean without fear, the strength of these balustrades has been justified by load testing.

The rehearsal room sets a new standard for actors working conditions. It is light, airy and with panoramic views of town and country through timbered windows with strong gothic resonances. There is an associated green room and a terrace with an outlook normally a privilege reserved for fly towers. It is to be hoped that the public will be able to share the pleasures of this room and indeed there is strong possibility that it could be licensed for intimate performances involving a hundred or so spectators.

The RSC are reticent about details of the capital costs which have been covered totally by an anonymous donor who was inspired by coming across (when, would you believe, taking shelter on a rainy afternoon) the architect's model commissioned in 1978 but laid aside in financial despair. This American benefactor also requires the extent of his donation to remain secret, so the only figure to be found amongst the press releases is the round '£1.5 million net' tucked away in the architect's c.v. Tax payers, ratepayers and fellow Arts Council clients are assured that any running costs additional to the present RSC budget will be met totally from the Swan's box office. With more reason than ever for theatre lovers to visit Stratford, this should not be a problem.

Until relatively recently, theatre design involved a reaction against the past, often discarding the good as well as the less good. This approach has increasingly been replaced by an analytical looking back to older forms of staging in order to extract the essence of form and function. As the Swan's architect, Michael Reardon, says *You can't make replicas of buildings which once existed; buildings are like producing the great classic plays — they have to be made afresh for each generation.* In Stratford's Swan, Michael Reardon has done this superlatively well. My praise is unequivocal and unstinted.

It could well be argued, and I am certainly prepared to do so, that theatre architecture is reaching something of a maturity in the closing decades of the twentieth century: a



coexistence of many styles, all with their roots in the past yet relevant to the possible parallel styles for staging in terms of today's concepts, both philosophical and visual.

The stated policy is rediscovery of drama of the period between 1570 and 1750. But

the Swan is more than a laboratory for exploring the past: it will be an inspiration to new playwrights, to architects and to all of us who seek from the stage or from the auditorium to communicate through performance.

<i>Architects:</i>	Michael Reardon & Associates
<i>Design Team:</i>	Michael Reardon Reg Ellis Tim Furby John Berrington
<i>Project Architect:</i>	Reg Ellis assisted by Tony Harman
<i>Theatre Consultants:</i>	The Royal Shakespeare Theatre
<i>Structural Engineers:</i>	Gifford & Partners
<i>Mechanical &amp; Electrical Consultants:</i>	Peter Hey & Partners
<i>Quantity Surveyor:</i>	Gordon Cain
<i>Acoustic Consultant:</i>	Dr David Walters
<i>General Contractor:</i>	William Weaver Limited

# STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

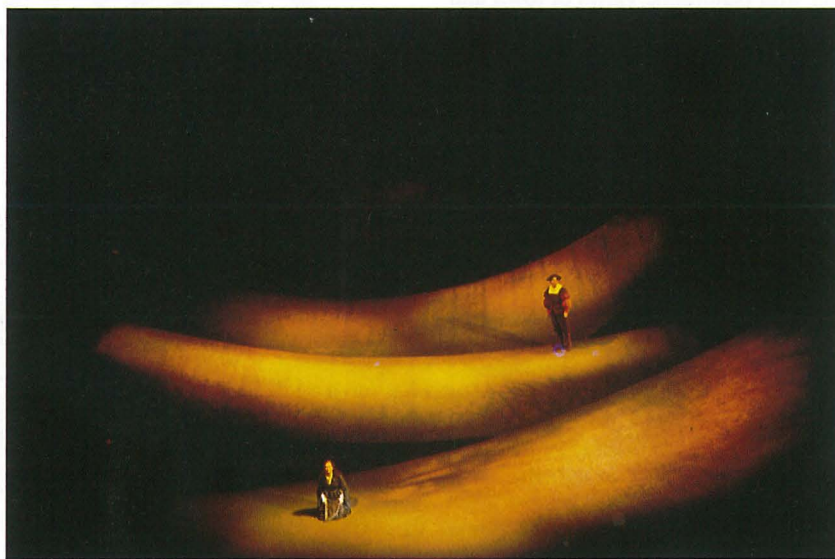
Striking and apposite designs achieve a splendidly integrated *Tannhauser* in Geneva □ Truly inspired staging and magical effects on the smallest budget by English National Opera at the London Coliseum □ Stage technology runs riot in three expensive new West end musicals □ RSC's *Mephisto* somewhat dwarfed at the Barbican □ A triumph for Paul Dart's settings for *Three Sisters* at the Bloomsbury Theatre

It is always a pleasure to see our leading stage designers working abroad, especially when that involves a visit to as agreeable and well-run an opera house as the Grand Theatre, Geneva. It was there that Ralph Koltai had designed and lit a persuasive new production of Wagner's *Tannhauser* which had been staged by the immensely promising 22-year-old American, Martha Galvin, previously assistant to Ken Russell in both his recent operatic and film ventures, now resident Assistant Producer at the Grand Theatre. She and Koltai had worked closely together, and will be doing so again for Wagner's *Flying Dutchman* in Hong Kong at the beginning of next year, and achieved thereby a splendidly integrated *Tannhauser* with a strong sense of community, and one which generated altogether more dramatic tension than is customary in this opera.

This was in fact the third time that Koltai had designed *Tannhauser*, though the first in the Dresden version which is shorn of the Bacchanale ballet in the Venusberg at the opening of Act 1. It was here that he was least successful, at any rate with the rather staid Genevois audience. For having placed *Tannhauser* on a striking stage platform of curved, boomerang-shaped overlapping banks, clothed in green astra turf, he flew in

Venus inside a silver ball whose surface had a pink neon-lit female orifice from which Venus's train dropped down at Tannhauser's feet on stage. The orifice then slid open to reveal Venus in shimmering, clinging silver gown, perched upon a platform within the ball. The sexual debate took place thus, without Venus ever descending from her sphere and making physical con-

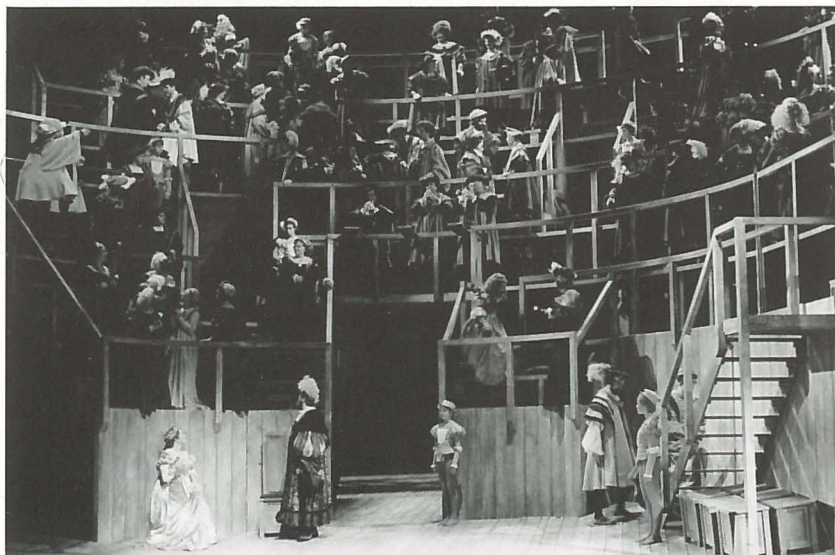
tact with Tannhauser, and meanwhile a series of projections of female secondary, and, I think, primary erogenous zones played upon the cyclorama. The effect may not have pleased the Genevois, but I found it a striking and apposite treatment, and one that held the attention. What it lacked on the opening night was precision in execution, but no doubt that came during the opera's



Ralph Koltai's designs for *Tannhauser* at the Grand Theatre Geneva. Producer: Martha Galvin. Musical Director: Horst Stein. Photograph by Ralph Koltai.



The silver ball inside which they flew in Venus in Act 1 of *Tannhauser*. Photo. Isabelle Meister.



Koltai's terraced structure for the second Act. Annena Stubbs collaborated in the costume designs. Photo. Van Appelghem.



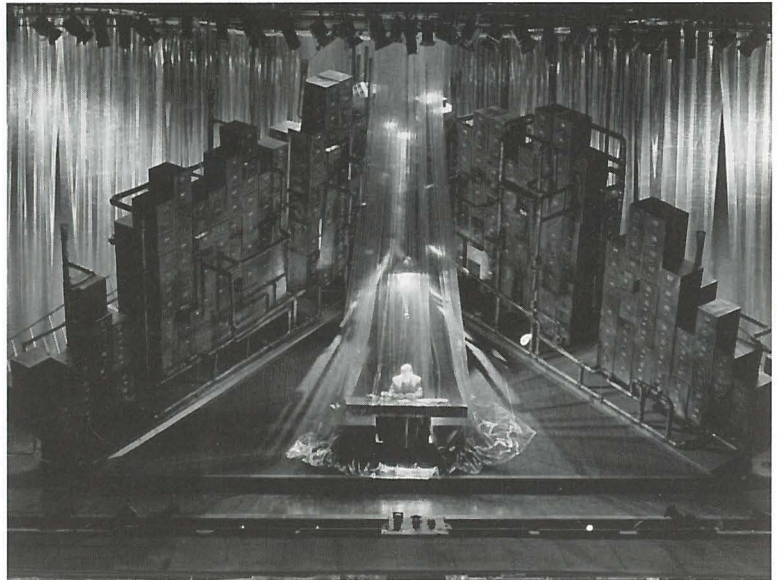
run. For the second act, the Hall of Song, Koltai used a curved wooden, terraced structure, reminiscent of Shakespeare's Globe, upon which the inhabitants of the Wartburg, beautifully played by the Grand Theatre's Chorus, took their seats to watch the song contest. The effect was vivid and made the act come alive to an extent I have not previously experienced, and Koltai's own lighting here, as in the final act, was immensely sensitive, subtle and restrained: there was clearly advantages in having an experienced designer light his own show. In the final act we returned to the curved platform, this time turfed in burnt orange, and again most effective. I did not entirely follow the reason for masking the returning Pilgrims, but costumes otherwise, in which Koltai had been assisted by Annena Stubbs, were apt and persuasive. In all this was a laudable design for an opera that abounds in visual traps: here the design never distracted, and yet one was never bored — a considerable achievement.

There have also been two admirable and exciting stagings of opera in Britain recently, the first from Welsh National Opera which has the great advantage, for the public, of taking its work widely on tour, and the second from English National Opera at the Coliseum. WNO's production of Verdi's *Otello* had the eminent theatrical director, Peter Stein of the Berlin Schaubühne company, in charge, with sets by Lucio Fanti and costumes by Moidele Bickel. Though Stein is a comparative newcomer to opera, he displayed a total grasp of the form as *dramma per musica*, and together with his designers achieved as compelling and satisfying a production of an opera by Verdi as any I have seen since La Scala, Milan visited Covent Garden in 1976 with Giorgio Strehler's magnificent staging of Simone Boccanegra, designed by Ezio Frigerio. The design concept for *Otello* was a picture frame enclosing a boxed platform stage, with a front apron onto which characters could step and reveal their inner thoughts to the audience, having been released from the 'picture'. Within the 'frame' one saw paintings of the Italian renaissance, with appropriately foreshortened perspectives, and with sliding panels to provide hidden entrances, exits and listening posts, as well as revealing a rear cyclorama to add a dimension of stylisation and fantasy to the enclosed drama. The set itself was also roofed, sometimes by a ceiling, sometimes by drapes, and this further compressed the drama and at times produced an almost unbearable sense of claustrophobia. Ms Bickele's costumes were splendid: utterly in period and in character, and looking as though they actually belonged to their wearers; and lighting, by Fanti with WNO's own Chief Electrician, Clive Pleasants, totally supported the design, even on a touring date at Oxford's Apollo Theatre. This production was a superb achievement, and one that was realised on a very small budget: it is great news that Peter Stein will be returning to WNO to stage Verdi's *Falstaff* in 1987.

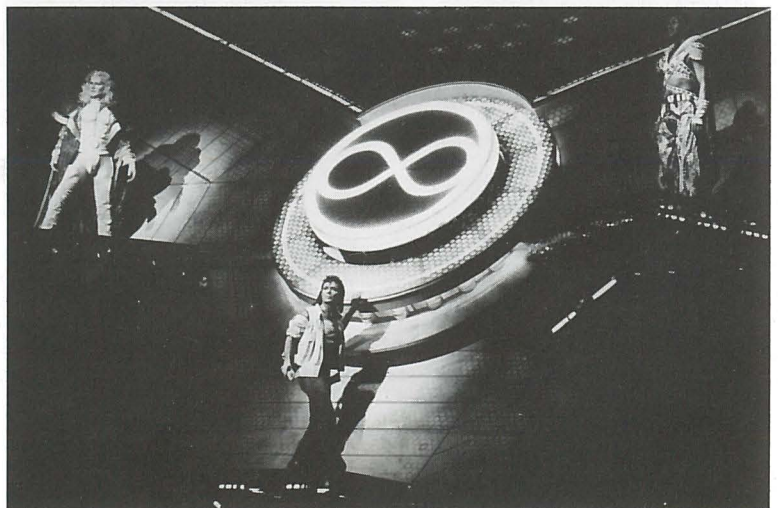
David Pountney's masterly staging of



The picture frame set for Welsh National Opera's *Otello* designed by Lucio Fanti. Costumes by Moidele Bickel. Lighting by Fanti and Clive Pleasants. Director: Peter Stein. Photo: Clive Barda.



ENO's production of Busoni's *Doctor Faust* at the London Coliseum. Designer: Stefanos Lazaridis. Producer: David Pountney. Lighting: Nick Chelton.



Set for *Time* designed by John Napier.



*La Cage Aux Folles*. Settings by David Mitchell and costumes by Theoni Aldredge. Lighting by Jules Fisher. Photo. Catherine Ashmore.



RSC's *Mephisto* at the Barbican directed by Adrian Noble. Designer: John Gunter. Costumes: Deirdre Clancy.



The Shared Experience production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* at the Bloomsbury Theatre. Producer: Mike Alfreds. Set design, costumes and lighting by Paul Dart. Photo. Sarah Ainslie.



*Troilus and Cressida* transferred from Stratford. Directed by Howard Davies. Designer: Ralph Koltai. Costumes: Liz da Costa. Photo. Chris Davies

Busoni's *Doctor Faust*, in fact the British stage premiere of an opera first seen in 1926, was likewise achieved on the lowest of budgets. Pountney proudly told me that the set had cost just £60,000, yet in Stefanos Lazaridis' wonderfully intelligent and inspirational design of triangular moving platform, operated by pulleys, and surrounding catwalks backed by nightmare filing cabinets and iron pipes, it achieved a more spectacular and convincing dramatic power than many a million's worth of hydraulics and lasers spent elsewhere. Some effects were truly magical: the emergence of Mephistopheles as Faust's clone from beneath his cloak was a master-stroke, and the use of conventional traps beneath the stage platform's surface, covered with rubber strips, gave a wholly credible impression of insubstantiality. Nick Chelton's lighting was similarly masterly. This was an opera that truly needed visual support, and in this production it emphatically received it.

Of the three major new musicals to have opened recently in the West End, *Time* relies almost wholly on technological visual effects, *La Cage Aux Folles* uses technology to achieve the smoothest possible presentation of an old-fashioned kind of show, and *Chess* attempts, largely successfully, to blend the two, but was let down by its major computer despite the expenditure of a cool £4 million. *Time* probably cost every bit as much, but is really a pretty wretched affair. We all know John Napier to be a top-class imaginative stage designer, but here he seems only concerned with stage technology. There is a rearing, plunging, circular hydraulic stage platform that can achieve a vertical position; the auditorium side walls have spinning, flashing panels with rotating lights; there are lasers galore, all in that familiar, sickly shade of green; and there is

a computerised projection of Lord Olivier's talking head onto a fibre-glass effigy of his skull. The only trouble with this on the night I was there was that it did not function efficiently or at all, or synchronise with his speech. All this, combined with a sound system of deafening dimensions must do wonders for the revenue of the LEB, may be impressive on its own terms, but not very, and as stage design counts for almost nothing. Not so *Cage Aux Folles* which moves on the best-oiled of wheels, with fine automated trucked setting by David Mitchell, has gloriously lit, exquisitely painted backcloths, a masterly expanding proscenium, and some of the most glamorous costumes, by Theoni V. Aldredge that you could ever wish to see. Jules Fisher's lighting is at a similar level, and the total effect is of the utmost professionalism, skill, and style: a pleasure to watch. So too is *Chess*, or would be if the computer could only be persuaded to function properly. As it is one has the sad sight of trucks being heaved on and off stage manually and an aura of imprecision that is an irritation. But Robin Wagner's sets are admirably conceived, Theoni Aldredge's costumes triumphant once again — the opening *Chess* ballet a gorgeous sight, and her ill-cut suits and shirts on the Russians an example of meticulous detail — and David Hersey's lighting as creative and adventurous as always. The 128 television screens not only enchant with their flexibility and magic, but also serve a genuine dramatic purpose, and the hydraulically controlled stage platform is the soul of discretion. *Chess* is certainly a technological show, but here the technology is applied to the needs of the drama, rather than distracting from it.

At the Barbican the RSC mounted Ariane Mnouchkine's *Mephisto* on the fully extended stage of its main theatre — stripped to the back wall — when it would have come across far more powerfully in The Pit. John Gunter's trucked settings looked lost, especially the tiny cabaret stage of 'The Pepper Mill', and in this space Deirdre Clancy's costumes inevitably looked like coarse caricatures, whether such were required or not. The RSC's other recent offering has been the transfer from Stratford of *Troilus and Cressida* in Howard Davies's Chekhovian, Crimean or Franco-Prussian production with Ralph Koltai's fine unit set of a crumbling baronial hall with surrealist overtones. I'm afraid it told me rather more about the director than about Shakespeare, and whilst it diverted initially, by the second half it had become little more than an irritation: skilful and assured, but precious and mannered to the play's detriment. Not so Shared Experience's recent production of Chekhov's *Three Sisters* at the Bloomsbury Theatre where Paul Dart's fine spacious setting of Mike Alfreds' strong production offered dramatic punch and a genuine, and appropriate concept. With his own precisely considered costumes, and skilful, well-judged white lighting this was a triumph for Dart to add to his Cherry Orchard at the Cottesloe. He is clearly a young designer to watch.

## REIDing SHELF

Charles Castle's **OLIVER MESSEL** is a very important book. It is barely a decade since Oliver died and it is good that this book has been written while his biographer could still consult so many of his subject's friends and associates while their memories were fresh. I was one of the privileged many who had an opportunity of working with Oliver (and so I cannot bring myself to refer to him as Mr Messel or even as Oliver Messel). I arrived at Glyndebourne just in time for his final new production but his designs remained in the repertoire for most of my decade and he usually came to approve their revival. The Oliver I knew is identical with the Oliver described by Charles Castle. However I was fascinated to read of the early life that made him what he was and the architect that he became when he moved to Barbados for the final fifteen years of his life.

Oliver was one of the great theatre designers of the century. He may eventually be recognised as just about the most important perspective stage artist since the Bibienas. He could create enormous depth with a very few pieces hung parallel to the front of the stage and used in combination with an occasional, simply constructed but complexly painted booked flat. It was possible to hang an entire opera seasons' repertoire simultaneously: daily changeovers could be accomplished with a rapidity unknown today, and complete scene changes achieved during the applause for the previous scene. The sets virtually lit themselves provided the lighting designer stuck to 17 or 54 (there was not even a suitable darker blue other than double 17, until 61 came along).


Oliver's style is not fashionable today but on the principle of 'to move forward, first look back' we should continually re-examine his work. Through this well researched and beautifully illustrated book everyone can get to know not only Oliver the Designer but Oliver the Man.

There is nothing quite like a letter about piles to bring a star into focus. Revelations of behavioural peccadilloes, particularly those which pamper to our own secret desires, only help to reinforce a star aura; but it is simpler to assess talent in a climate of life's more mundane warts. Alan Kendall makes very constructive use of his subject's correspondence in **DAVID GARRICK**. In recent years I have found myself growing somewhat resistant to the received belief that Garrick was a super constellation, combining Olivier, Gielgud and Richardson at the very least. But Alan Kendall reminds us

(and documents these reminders) of the near universal acclaim accorded not only by the pit, boxes and gallery but by Garrick's contemporaries during a particularly rich period of creativity. Surely they could not all be wrong, especially in an age when the craft of hype although alive and well lacked the technologies that have developed it into the major influence on human thinking.

Alan Kendall's book is a straightforward sequential life, drawing on the observations of Garrick's contemporaries. There is an illustration on nearly every page to help the reader visualise the age and its theatre. A model biography for the non-specialist reader like me (although doubtless some sycophants of the David Garrick Fan Club will pick over it with cries of delighted rage), just right in length and depth. A welcome relief from the creative, if passingly entertaining, biographic fantasies currently fashionable among playwrights and film makers.

We are going to become a lot more aware of the plays of Shakespeare's contemporaries. The RSC have built a public laboratory to re-examine these texts and test their viability for modern performance. Publication of Judith Cook's **AT THE SIGN OF THE SWAN** is therefore well timed to coincide with the opening of the Swan Theatre as an adjunct to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon. The core of the book is a summary of the lives and works of fifteen seventeenth century English playwrights whose texts are still available to us. Judith Cook places these plays in context by discussing the players, the administrative structure of the companies who organised the performances, and the theatres they performed in. The author identifies various types of play and is particularly interesting



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in her discussion of the drama documentaries where playwrights siezed on such contemporary material as murders, witch trials and lives of the famous and infamous, with plays of famous trials being staged within a few weeks of the verdict.

Judith Cook discusses the place of women in the plays of the period, noting that many of them provide a reliable cross-section of believable women which reflects accurately the position in which women found themselves at that time — indeed, compared with their Victorian counterparts, the women of Middleton, Dekker and Massinger are positively liberated. Interviews with Barry Kyle and Adrian Noble discuss the potential of the work of Shakespeare's contemporaries as plays for today. Certainly we will never be able to experience them in quite the same climate as their original audiences who might well expect to witness a public hanging, drawing and quartering on their way home from the playhouse. On the other hand is there much difference between this and our going home to the television news where the violence and gore is nightly on a par with that in a Jacobean tragedy?

I read **THE SHAKESPEARE WALLAH** shortly after returning from India. I completed it in a day of British Railing during which I became so engrossed that I twice nearly missed my connections. This is high concentration for one who does most of life's thinking while looking out of train windows. Perhaps it was my recent closeness to India that did it. But no I think it was something more than that. Geoffrey Kendall's autobiography is a tale of the mystic power of theatre to enter the soul so that life's compulsive purpose becomes getting the show on. Floods and earthquakes did not stop the curtain going up for the Shakespearana Company; nor did an inflation which raised every cost except seat prices. Every administrator and every Arts Council client should read the tale of how this particular Shakespeare wallah with his family and friends got their bookings and delivered their performances. And gave us the gorgeous Felicity as a bonus. No theatrelover should go on holiday this summer without this wallah's story.

Maybox who have acquired the Albery family theatres and added a restored Whitehall have produced a history of these

theatres as **THEATRE NIGHTS & THEATRE KNIGHTS**. It is in A4 format, about the same thickness as this magazine: the sort of publication that the antiquarian theatre booksellers list as 'festschrift'. The colour is good and if the pictures are a little small they do clearly focus on the important point that they are intended to make. The text unravels the intertwining family trees of the Wyndhams and Albery's, tracing the history of the stages and some of their hits. Just the thing to help increase audience awareness of our theatrical heritage and the need for a Theatres Trust to watch over it. And, of course, it is obligatory for we ephemera nutters.

John Willett's new book is published by Methuen in association with this year's **CASPAR NEHER** exhibition organised by the Arts Council at Riverside Studios and subsequently seen in Manchester, Sheffield and Plymouth. It is copiously illustrated in monochrome with many of Neher's fine drawings which are as economical in their line as were the stage settings in their visual contribution to the productions. A coated paper ensures a high printing quality for these illustrations and Willett's spare text guides us through Neher's life and relates his designs to the plays. The book concentrates on Neher's work with Brecht. Considering the stylistic versatility that Neher demonstrates in his work with other directors, particularly in the opera house, one is tempted to conclude that Neher had more influence on Brecht than Brecht had on Neher.

Macmillan continue to be the most prolific of the theatre publishers. The *Modern Dramatists Series* has acquired **ANTON CHEKHOV** and a volume of **THE 'NEW DRAMA' 1900-1914** in which Jan Macdonald's coverage includes Granville Barker, Galsworthy and Masfield as well as the influence of such theatres as the Court and the early stirrings of the provincial repertory movement in Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow. **SHERIDAN'S COMEDIES** are added to the *Casebook Series*. The playwright is set in his social and professional context and there are essays and reviews on the four key comedies. Two of them, **THE RIVALS** and **THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL** are included in a batch of additions to the *Master Guides* series, and

there are also new guides **HENRY IV PART ONE, ST JOAN** and **THE CRUCIBLE**. In these you can stimulate your discovery of the plays for less than a pound.

**OLIVER MESSEL**. A Biography. Charles Castle. Foreword by Sir John Gielgud. Thames & Hudson. £25 (UK).

**DAVID GARRICK**. A Biography. Alan Kendall. Harrap. £12.95 (UK).

**AT THE SIGN OF THE SWAN**. An Introduction to Shakespeare's Contemporaries. Judith Cook. Foreword by Trevor Nunn. Harrap. £9.95 (UK) £6.95 (paperback) (UK).

**THE SHAKESPEARE WALLAH**. The Autobiography of Geoffrey Kendall with Clare Colvin. Introduction by Felicity Kendall. Sidgwick & Jackson. £12.95 (UK).

**THEATRE NIGHTS & THEATRE KNIGHTS**. A History of the Maybox Theatres. Researched & written by Lindsay Molton. Maybox Marketing, Albery Theatre, St Martin's Lane, London WC2N 4AH.

**CASPER NEHER**. Brecht's Designer. John Willett. Methuen. £5.95 (paperback) (UK).

**ANTON CHEKHOV**. Laurence Senelick. £15 (UK) £4.95 (paperback) (UK).

**THE 'NEW DRAMA' 1900-1914**. Jan Macdonald. £18 (UK) £5.95 (paperback) (UK). Both in Macmillan (*Modern Dramatists Series*).

**SHERIDAN: COMEDIES**. A Casebook edited by Peter Davison. Macmillan (*Casebook Series*) £20 (UK) £6.95 (paperback) (UK).

**THE RIVALS**. Jeremy Row. **THE SCHOOL FOR SCANDAL**. Paul Ranger. **HENRY IV PART ONE**. Helen Morris. **ST JOAN**. Leonee Ormond.

**THE CRUCIBLE**. Leonard Smith. All Macmillan (*Master Guides Series*) 99p (paperback) (UK).

# NoTT 86

On the evening of Saturday 24th May a special train left Oslo for a four-hour spectacularly dramatic climb up, over and through the mountains that rise out of Norway's fiords. On board the train were five hundred theatre technicians from the Scandinavian countries, together with forty guest speakers and twenty interpreters. This was NoTT 86 and we were heading for four days of discussing theatre technology amidst the heady mountain air of Geilo.

Ignoring the seven British, two Italians and solitary Austrian and American as statistically insignificant, the breakdown was:

Norwegians .....	33%
Swedes .....	28%
Finns .....	26%
Danes .....	10%
Icelanders .....	3%
and:	
Lighting .....	24%
Machinery .....	19%
Costume .....	16%
Make-up .....	10%
Props .....	9%
Stage Management .....	8%
Scene Painting .....	8%
Sound .....	8%

On the train, and on a couple of station platforms at passing loops on the mainly single line, we renewed old friendships and made new ones. By the time that we took over Geilo, occupying most of its beds and bars, we had gelled into something rather more than the sum of our parts. Alas, and this was the only weak part of an otherwise excellent get together, we then tended to split into our specialist areas. Light talked with light, sound argued over which knobs to computerise and the prime movers debated hydraulics versus pneumatics. Costumes, props and painters had some shared experiences in common areas such as masks. But there could have perhaps been a little more cross discussion on mutual problems on the lines of the proposed colour seminar for which a time slot could not be found. However this is a matter of fine balance for any conference and we have all known events where an overstress of interdisciplinary sessions has led to an excess of surface discussion. The key sessions will always be those where each speciality takes a deep look into the recesses of the state of its own particular technology. And here NoTT 86 did its participants, and their industry, proud.

There being no theatre in Geilo, a resort where apres ski in the hotel is the preferred form of culture, NoTT 86 erected a tent. But spring arrived a little late this year and, after a chilling opening which was warmed by a satirical but realistic contribution from a non-present minister of culture, followed by a freezing evening of 'Waiting for Godot',



the tent was abandoned when the ice-capped mountains disappeared in a flurry that became a blizzard. (I, having waited for Godot on many occasions, particularly recently in Malayalam, decided that if he/she/it really wanted to wait upon me in Finnish Swedish, the bar of the Highland Hotel would be as appropriate as a tent.)

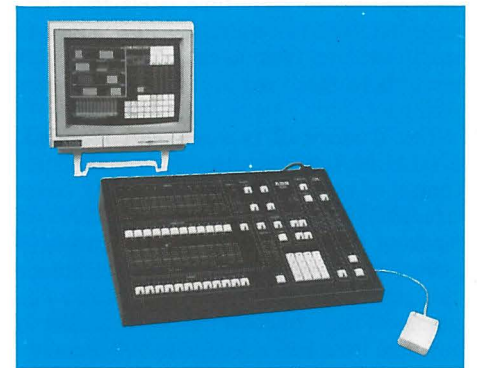
However there was a multipurpose hall that could become a cinema and there, at midnight, I became a fan of the Swedish film *Brodrene Mozart*. I may have missed some of the niceties of dialogue (the Norwegian subtitles seemed very close to the Swedish words, although I understand neither) but there was no missing the realities of the modern opera producer who sets out to reveal the inner core of Don Giovanni, seducing singers, orchestra and the stage door keeper into accepting his interpretation. He becomes the Don but Mozart is his Commendatore. Simultaneously funny and philosophic, this is a great film for those of us whose world is theatre, or who view the theatre as a metaphor for the world.

There was a trade show where the Scandinavian firms and the local agents of the overseas big boys had laid out their latest goodies to tempt us. There was a lot of sound gear: the only trend perceptible to my unsophisticated eye was more knobs. My ear is not unsophisticated but trade shows do not provide a proper opportunity to hear sound or see light. The lighting manufacturers are now entering a period of desperation as they struggle to make their controls seem new and different. All the traditional modes of access were represented plus some newer ones. If you want to use a mouse activated cursor, ADB can accommodate you. I don't think its for me but I do acknowledge that this mode works well in computer graphics and so I suspect that any future in theatre lighting is dependent upon designers using the machine themselves rather than by talking to its operator. However I personally feel quite strongly that to use a typewriter keyboard to talk to

lights is a misuse of language. Nevertheless Grossmann seems to be selling well, both with this kind of board and also with one where the wheels seem to me to be ergonomically misplaced.

But surely survival will be the reward for manufacturers who can resist the pundits whose only objective seems to be to discover what a system cannot do, irrespective of whether that function is a truly positive requirement. As a lighting designer I very rarely need anything more sophisticated than an M24, and when it gets its remainder dim push it will work faster than I can think. However I want my operator to have whatever brings happiness.

Finely tuned lighting marketing men are in any case no longer dabbling in control refinements but are seeking the prizes in cost-effective positioning and colouring. They are debating mechanically dimmed discharge lamps and electronically transformed low voltage tungsten. Any alive lighting manufacturer is envious of Varilite, sees the demise of TBA as only a short respite, and is relieved that Rosco have channeled their imagination towards peripherals.



The "MAUS" a computer graphics device seen here successfully applied to stage lighting control in the latest ADB system.

Other trade stands included make-up, fabrics and all kinds of assorted hardware. And one could watch, transfixed, as an AVAB flying system demonstrated continuously that computer control can now set limits to within the thickness of an egg shell.

Touring was advertised as the main theme of the conference — yet, rather than becoming a linking theme throughout, its discussion was mostly reserved for the final day. By then many delegates had started their homeward journey — including this tourist who had the scent of the Oslo Theatre Museum in his theatric nostrils.

So it only remains to report that of all the many theatre conferences I have attended, this one was by far the tops for gastronomy. Never were the fruits of the sea and the river consumed with such pleasure as by the participants in NoTT 86. The NoTT tradition started in Stockholm in 83, rumour has it that Finland will host NoTT 89. Until then, Skol!

FRANCIS REID

# The Telescan II

A Review by Steve Kemp

In the lighting business, 1985 was the year of the "moving beam" and I think 1986 will be even more so. Sky Channel and Music-box are crammed full of videos showing moving theme lighting effects. These are extremely spectacular and thanks to some wonderfully creative lighting design, add enormous visual excitement to a rock band's performance. But up until now, the equipment providing these effects, although computer controlled, revolutionary and sophisticated in design, has not been able to produce the subtlety required for theatre and opera performances. Here at last is a lumière that can not only cope with the "Razzle Dazzle" needed for large rock shows, but can also provide extreme subtlety. For instance, a slow colour change from the very palest amber to steel blue and at the same time move from up-stage left to downstage right and a change of size in say twenty minutes!! The Telescan II meets both these requirements and moves with ease.

The Telescan II is a remote controlled, 1200 H.M.I. followspot offering computer control of beam position (x & y axis), beam size (iris), focus (sharp or soft), dimmer and blackout shutter, optional gobo changer (5 gobos) and of course, a trichromatic colour changer offering a choice of any colour. The timing of any function can be recorded in any time from half a second to 999 seconds. Preset can be replayed manually or automatically. In short, this is a precision made lighting instrument which is a new and exciting tool for the professional lighting designer.

The most interesting design feature of the Telescan II is the fact that the lantern itself does not move. The beam is reflected to the stage via a mirror and it is the mirror that does the moving. This, of course, allows the mechanics controlling the movement to be small and compact and therefore extremely accurate. Other moving beam systems move the complete lantern in both pan and tilt mode and therefore require much heavier and less accurate mechanical control. The fact that the mirror moves, and not the lamp, allows a standard, extremely bright H.M.I. light source to be used. It is not impossible in later versions of the Telescan to envisage a 2K or even a 4K option.

Telescan II units can be placed on conventional stage bars or trusses. They can be mounted horizontally or vertically. They can also stand on the floor. They can be placed on stage bridges or side galleries or in the house to be used as conventional but remote controlled follow spots.

As can be seen from the technical specification, the Telescan II is an extremely

sophisticated lighting instrument. Its possibilities are being explored in all aspects of the performing arts. It has been used by numerous rock bands on tour including Prince, Stevie Wonder, The Police and Spandau Ballet. It has been used in large revues in Paris at the Crazy Horse Saloon and the Rock 'n Roll Circus. It has also been used on theatre productions of "La Penchole" and "Cyrano de Bergerac". In Holland, great interest has been shown by television lighting designers at the NOS and a nine way system was used on the "Platengala 85" for AVRO television. Also in Holland, a sixteen way system has been used as a complete lighting concept on a major musical, "IK JAN CREMER".

Although Telescan II is a strange, delicate looking creation, it has proved to be able to withstand the rigours of one night stand touring and proves to be reliable "on the road".

Telescan II is a revolutionary piece of equipment and it is hoped that ongoing development will maintain its high standard.

Like most of us mere mortals, the Telescan II computer can suffer from limited memory capacity and large systems used in complicated performances may require "memory reloads" from the floppy disk. This, in itself, is not a great problem but it demands that the operator plans carefully when to complete this fifteen second reload in mid-performance, without interrupting existing sequences.

A designer's dream you may think! Yes, it certainly is. This is a wonderful new tool.

One now has the possibility of sculpting the stage, not just painting it.

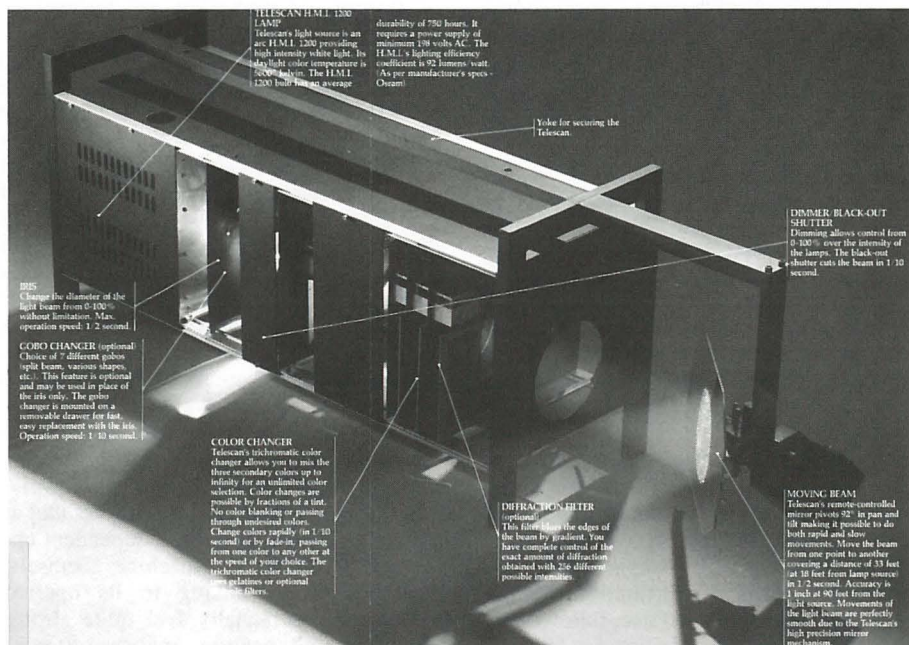
However, this added dimension of space and movement needs a little more consideration than conventional lighting, especially if music is involved. It is now possible to expand one's design parameters to such an enormous degree, but this can create a new series of challenges because of the sheer range of the possibilities provided by the system. It's like the Englishman who goes to a Dutch sweetshop wanting liquorice and is faced with the enormous selection of "drops". So many temptations. What to choose . . .??

(An un-named lighting designer with liquorice stained teeth and a coat pocket full of "drops" has recently been seen in the stalls of an Amsterdam theatre, sitting on the floor, staring at the wall, sucking his thumb and rocking gently, mumbling something about the wonders of modern technology!!)

It should be noted that the use of a Telescan II system is not cheap, but in terms of replacement of, or addition to, conventional lighting units, speed of fitup, spectacle ease of use, they are certainly cost effective.

In my opinion, the Telescan II is one of the most exciting innovations available to lighting designers at the moment. Who of us has not dreamed of having any number of follow spots in any position, focus, colour and size available at the touch of a button?

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# AN INDIAN JOURNAL

Francis Reid

I would have liked to have made my first passage to India in the gentler mode of 'Port out Starboard Home' with my wake fluorescing under the moon throughout a series of starry romantic nights. But today's passage is accomplished in a single short night. There are some stars but the moon softens only some woolly cloud far below the droning albatross in whose belly I contemplate, stimulated by Remy Martin and relaxed by Mogadon, a three week experience which may change my perception of life. I have overflowed India many times, with or without an hour's refuelling at Delhi, but never setting foot on this most mystic of ancient soils. Now the British Council have invited me to share experiences of design and technology with my theatric colleagues in Southern India.

## SUNRISE IN BOMBAY

Arrival in Bombay is no anticlimax. Immigration, baggage retrieval, customs clearance and currency exchange are all carried out with a labour intensive bazaar bustle involving Dickensian clerical processes with ledgers and multiplied papers requiring sequential rubber stamping. Then onwards to that sea of meeters and greeters who inhabit every point of departure and arrival anywhere in India. It includes eager representatives of Thomas Cook waving a wooden flag bearing my name. They present a letter of welcome from the local cultural representatives of Her Britannic Majesty and whisk me off for bath and breakfast before my onward flight. The ten

minute taxi ride to the hotel at the domestic terminal carries me past many of the expected stock images of urban India — little shops for every possible entrepreneurial activity, housing of every construction from plastic to concrete, loads borne on heads and washing being flailed in any available water. A concerto grosso of motor horns obeying the command, painted on every tailboard, that following vehicles should sound off. Dawn temperatures, in the seventies and rising, contrast with the near zero of Heathrow. The bliss of a shower, fresh orange juice and crispy bacon to accompany the eggs with which I demonstrate respect for my ancient digestive system which has never let me down yet — but which I am resolved to lead into new and spicy experiences.

## ONWARD TO HYDERABAD

A lunchtime Airbus to Hyderabad for an enthusiastic welcome from Professors Swarna and Ramdass of Osmania University. They taxi me to the Ritz Hotel through an urban landscape of eye widening fascination. The Ritz was sometime the Hill Fort

Palace and it perches above the city in whitewashed crenellated majesty with an ambience of an earlier more relaxed, more spacious age. I wander around the streets as dusk falls. The air is alive with survival, entrepreneurial activity everywhere. But my overriding impression of Day 1 is that the urban music of India is the motor horn, with every driver an aspiring virtuoso intent on practising his own personal cadenza. Dining early I have solo occupation of the dining room whose ancient waiters make me feel rather young whereas the band, with their extensive Glenn Miller repertoire, make me feel particularly old. And so to bed with Handel on my walkman: I cannot hope to see India through anything other than western eyes, so have resolved to use Handel's Italian Cantatas and Concerti Grossi plus the novels of David Lodge, as a daily reference datum for my experiences.

## ALADDIN AT THE RAVINDRA BHARATI

Mrs Grace Krishnaswami, the British Council Cultural Activities Officer in Madras, flies in for breakfast. An enthusiast

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with an understanding and critical appreciation of all the arts, both visual and performing. Grace is also a brilliant stage manager, paying meticulous attention to the smallest details, anticipating where arrangements might just possibly go awry and taking action to ensure that difficulties just do not arise. Throughout my tour, whether with me or back in the office, Grace Krishnaswami made sure that I saw as much as possible in the easiest possible way.

At the **Ravindra Bharati theatre**, Calcutta Puppet Theatre play a morning Aladdin for a young audience. This theatre is a chunky 1500 seater with stalls and single circle, focussing with cinematic sightlines to a wide deep stage. I have the benefit of a seat in the front row (one of the comfortable recliners that are common in Indian theatres) but the response behind me indicates that the puppets are having no trouble in projecting to all parts of the house. These puppets have an incredible subtlety of movement. I think that this is the first time in my life that I have achieved a suspension of disbelief that I am watching manipulated puppets rather than human actors. Going backstage afterwards, Suresh Dutta and his puppeteers show me at close quarters just what can be done with a stick in the hands of a sympathetic operator. The curve of the carved hand coordinates with the curve of the face so that both appear to quiver with muscular life as they touch.

**OSMANIA UNIVERSITY**

The Department of Theatre Arts is a post-graduate school where, to enable students to support their studies with employment, teaching is concentrated into evenings and weekends. The buildings are old, relaxed and shady. Portraits of former principals, all Cambridge men, hang from each of the many columns in the long hall used for

productions. Temporary stages are used to explore various actor/audience relationships. Lighting positions are good but the spots need careful nurturing, particularly in lamp and reflector centering, to give optimum light. And patching twenty spots to six autotransformer dimmers brings my own past into sharp focus. When I remember . . . gosh, today we really do have an incredibly easy life with modern control systems! Exploring lighting situations as a group once again proves that it is not so much the equipment that you use but where you put it and point it that is important. We use the department's forthcoming production of an anti-war play in the Ravinda Bharati theatre as a vehicle for discussions on the total design process.

**SALAR JUNG**

Take refreshment with the director of the Salar Jung Museum which houses the personal collection assembled by the Nawab Salar Jung III. Some 35,000 exhibits displayed in 35 rooms. Items from all over the world but one area of particular strength is English Paintings, many of which have only recently been identified. But I am, naturally at this point, much more hooked on the Indian art whose images are influencing me in a way that they have never been able to do previously. It is, I suppose, the immediacy of being with the people, their life, landscape and light.

**LIGHT MYSTICISM**

Discussing the design process at an open lecture at the university, I talk of the non-logical decisions that are central to any art. My suggestion that my soul is located in my gut leads to a debate on the extent to which mysticism is involved in the process of theatre design in general and lighting in particular. Much later tonight I hear that 'the

proscenium arch was one of the more unfortunate imports from Victorian England'.

**AUTO RICKSHAWS**

Transport in Hyderabad is by 'auto' rickshaws with three wheels to their chassis and two strokes to their engines. They weave, horns trumpeting, through a dense traffic that frequently includes herds of cattle who leisurely stroll along the main streets, particularly during the evening rush hour. There is a generally agreed declaration of intent to drive on the left but this does not preclude making a U-turn in one's own lane if that seems apt. I place my trust in my drivers and concentrate on absorbing the kaleidoscope of life that passes my eyes, screwed up against the glare since discarding sun glasses because they distort the delicate colours.

It is an auto that takes me to climb the famed 16th century **Charminar** and to the stage of the recently completed **Telegu Larita Kala Thorana** outdoor theatre for 4,000 audience. Essentially a cinema but with a potential for epic stagings and built in, yes, three months. I have two final images of Hyderabad. The sunset of the last evening high above the city from the new Hindu temple, gloriously carved from white marble. And the make-up seller squatting on the pavement behind his little mounds of richly coloured, finely ground cosmetic powders.

**AVRO TO BANGALORE**

The advantage of unpressurised propeller aeroplanes is that they fly low enough to study the terrain while breakfasting on grapes, croissants and spicy fried balls with chutney. The drive through Bangalore from airport to hotel shows an immediate difference from Hyderabad. But then India is a union of states and I have moved from Andhra Pradesh to Karnataka. Moreover Hyderabad was ruled by the Nizams, alone among the Indian Princes given the distinction of being called His Exalted Highness by the British, whereas Bangalore was a hill station of the Raj. It is still a major military centre and the roads are laid out wide, straight and tree lined. The West End Hotel is a series of verandahed buildings set amidst trees alive with birdsong. The beer, like the pool, is cool, the papaya delicious, and the service discreetly relaxed but impeccable. It would be easy to develop a taste for the highness of this life.

**VIOLIN THEATRE**

Grace Krishnaswami is very secretive about the **Chowdiah Memorial Hall**. I am driven to a bridge where I will get a sudden and complete view and, now, I understand why. Unique is an overused word but it certainly applies to this theatre built in the form of a violin as a dedication to the virtuoso who invented a seven stringed violin. The shape of the instrument lends itself rather well to the requirements of a theatre — indeed it does so rather more successfully than many of the geometric modules much favoured by the architectural profession. This theatre is reported to have been designed by an artist

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rather than a fully qualified architect. The fingerboard provides a splendid covered walkway to the entrance. Foyers and the single tiered auditorium of 1000 comfortable seats sloping towards a wide stage are all contained within the belly of the instrument.

### LEATHER PUPPETS

The **Karnataka Chitrakala Parishati** art centre has a splendid collection of leather puppets from the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Some are articulated but many contain an entire narrative within the static figure groupings. The centre has a delightful performance space formed by natural rock outcrops under a spreading banyan tree.

### KARNATAKA THEATRES

Mr K.C. Shivappa, director of Kannada (the language of Karnataka) and Culture escorts me around some of the Bangalore theatres. The **Ravindra Kalakshetra** is a two tier 1000 seater with cinematic sightlines to a wide stage with pit convertible to apron. Good foh lighting positions and a lighting control room that is something of a standard: four 12-way interlocking auto-transformer boards that are reaching the end of their lives. India has a rapidly growing electronics industry and it is likely that the thyristor and memory revolutions in control technology will be telescoped into taking place simultaneously. On the opposite side of the street a 400-500 new drama house, in the style of a 1970s British regional rep, is under construction for the Amateur Drama Association.

Nearby is the **Town Hall**. It looks 1912 but dates from 1932. The British in India tended to build in the style of their memories of home and such a twenty year gap is not at all unusual. This is typical of British town halls in that it has a big non-equipped stage and a poor acoustic. However it is a very pleasant auditorium full of atmosphere and charm, with elegant if uncomfortable seating. The **Youth Centre Theatre** is an intimate thrust playing space in a pleasantly timbered auditorium which would also be wonderful for chamber music.

### BANGALORE UNIVERSITY

The Department of Drama is part of a small faculty of Dance, Drama and Music housed in a delightful old house which provides lecture rooms around an open courtyard. I have talked about light in many situations but this is the first time that I do so sitting cross-legged and garlanded. Nor am I normally rewarded with a personal vocal and instrumental concert.

### AT HOME

Teddy White is an English coffee planter with an Indian wife, Malini, who shares my admiration for Emma Kirkby. They are much more in touch with the London theatre scene than I am, but they organise an at home for me to meet the amateurs who play English drama in Bangalore. (Teddy's heart is, I suspect, much more in acting than in coffee). The drinks flow, I talk with slides



*Chowdiah Memorial Hall, Bangalore.*



*Ravindra Kalakshetra Theatre, Bangalore.*



*Variac dimmers, Madras.*

about visual aspects of theatre, and the supper is magnificent. We are nearly all Indians, but I feel strong resonances of the Raj. There will forever be something of an Anglo-India.

#### LIGHT PATRIOTISM

The heat and humidity of Madras hits like a steamy blanket as soon as the plane door opens. This is sea level and, beyond the air conditioned cocoons of the Connemara Hotel and the British Council car, comfort depends on sea breezes. Where the wind does not blow, the air must be encouraged to flow and ceilings are dedicated to forests of fans with blades like aircraft propellers. A short walk along the main street reveals the meeting of the old and new worlds. Trucks negotiate bullock carts while cars hoot at tricycle rickshaws. Sand emerges through fragmented pavements on which tradesmen ply their crafts of make and mend. Much read paperbacks are everywhere laid out for resale. The old has a thirst for knowledge about the new.

In the courtyard of the British Council HQ. I am billed to talk about the new in theatre lighting. The moon is at the wrong angle so I am lit by a pattern 60 flood which is rather too vertical for my eyes and teeth. However it does make a point, even if I have to spend the evening with my chin up. Grow quite passionate about the potential of the new technologies when used properly, and even patriotic about Britain's role in the development of the latest theatre design and technology. Good questions afterwards.

#### INDIA OF CLIVE

St Mary's, the earliest protestant church east of Suez, was consecrated in 1680 and its memorial tablets encompass the British influence from the beginnings of the East India Company to the end of the Raj. How many minds, enduring endless sermons in stiff starched collars on these wicker pews, must have wandered towards these tributes to lives shortened by cholera. St Mary's is situated within the Fort St George compound where every stone breathes the spirit of Clive and in the Sunday afternoon heat the empty square seems alive with the ghostly drill of the military boot — especially after emerging from the museum that records over two centuries of anglo governance of Madras.

#### AN ART SCHOOL . . .

The **College of Arts and Crafts** of 1865 was the first art school in India. Principal Munuswamy takes me on a tour of the high airy studios set in a lovely garden where the trees provide a gentle shade for the sculptors and the life drawing classes. Everywhere students working in paint, ceramics, textiles, wood and metal are producing work of the highest quality in both its design and craftsmanship. The atmosphere is one of peaceful purposeful dedication.

#### . . . AND AN ARTS CENTRE

Professional artists receive three-way support from the **Lalit Kala Akademi**. Studio facilities, particularly for ceramics

and print making, are made available for concentrated periods of work. Illustrated monographs are published on the work of contemporary Indian artists. And there are exhibition spaces.

#### IN SEARCH OF THE DARK GOD

A morning at the Madras Museum enjoying the bronzes and (see last Cue) the Museum Theatre. In the garden, preparations are underway for an evening performance by CULT (Calicut University Little Theatre). The spreading horizontal branch of a tree makes a convenient spot bar to which spotlights can be lashed. Variac dimmers are laid out on tables concealed behind a hedge. Return at dusk for Sankara Pillai's 'Karutha Daivathe Thedi' (In Search of the Dark God). This is total theatre: the movement, the music, the lighting are all so integrated with the acting that I forget that I have absolutely no understanding of the Malayalam language. A couple of simple ramps are set within the clearing in the trees: the actors feed our imagination with bamboo sticks which become vertical forests or horizontal undulating water.

#### THE ROAD TO MAHABALIPURAM

Along the coastal road the villagers are drying their hay on the road surface and bashing it patiently in bundles to extract the seed. Every few miles there are roadside shelters 'for natural disasters'. Although the sun is high, it is not difficult to imagine storm, tempest and flood. Refreshment against the humid heat is provided by the roadside piles of young coconuts whose sellers, with a deftly handled knife chop off just enough to insert a straw. When the milk has been drained, you return your nut for opening with a second chop: for the lucky there is a nibble of freshly deposited coconut.

At **Cholamandal Artists Village** thirty painters and sculptors have bought land to build studio houses to live and work. There is creative calm. Their theatre is an exquisitely simple circle under the trees. At Mahabalipuram, the temple sculptures were cut from solid rock in 5AD. They are not to be described in words: one can only stand in awe. The traditions are carried on, formally at the **School of Sculpture** and informally by the many roadside sculptors working the local bluestone to sell to visitors like me. Three miles north, by a lonely shore, is the **Tiger Cave**, a carved rock backing what appears to be an amphitheatre and now occasionally used for festivals. What performances took place here in 5AD?!

#### GODOT IN MALAYALAM

Calicut University Little Theatre play 'Waiting for Godot' in a small hall at the Alliance Francaise. Despite not understanding the dialogue in Malayalam, I feel I have moved closer to this play tonight.

#### STAGES OF MADRAS

The **Music Academy** has a good big stage with a width which allows most of the 1600 seats to be reasonably near to the stage. On the other hand, the **Rani Seethai Hall** has a

long tunnel auditorium which makes this theatre seem much less intimate than its 642 seating would suggest. These are conventional westward looking theatres. I get much more excited by the **Kalakshetra**, a rather lovely piece of Kerala style architecture. This is a dance theatre with an extensive forestage backed by a proscenium with full flying. And I fell in love with the **Mandela Theatre** set in a dancer's garden which includes several performance spaces including a simply roofed proscenium stage house facing an open walled courtyard with an optional central acting area.

#### A NIGHT ON THE COCHIN EXPRESS

Wake up without my voice. The pharmacist in Spencers — a department store in a building inspired by memories of St Pancras Station on a scale of about 1:5 — recommends herbal lozenges from a sweetie jar. I don't know what's in them but never was a cure so instant. Wish I had bought up the entire stock! At dusk Suresh Jayavant from the British Council escorts me to the railway station for the Madras-Cochin Express. It seems that half the city is going on tonight's trains and the other half has come to see them off. The general spirit of chaos is not helped by an intermittent electricity supply which plunges everything into a series of short blackouts. Armed with an official letter, Suresh goes off to organise my bedding roll. Returns in some anguish to report that no bedrolls available on trains as humble as mine. I am assuring him that 22741945 Corporal Reid F. Royal Signals (retired) is well capable of sleeping with his head on his knapsack when a little procession appears on the platform. Upward referral of the letter has reached a level where authority can be given for an official in brass buttons and paperwork to precede a bearer carrying a bedroll on his head to be signed for by Professor Reid of the British High Commission. This assures that I become a person of no small importance in the eyes of the staff of the Southern Railway in whose sleeping car I doze between crisp sheets under not one but four sweeping fans as we saunter between moonlit paddy fields. In the couple of hours after dawn I have, through the bars of the open



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window, a fascinating panorama of early morning rural life which, of course includes using the railway track as a pedestrian highway when not immediately required by trains.

#### TRICHUR

Overnight I have crossed India from east to west. I will not see another European, or indeed another westener, for over a week. On the way to the hotel I meet a working elephant going to work; he is carrying his lunch with his trunk. There is no question of midday straying from the shade, but I love wandering slowly around the streets of Trichur each evening as dusk falls. Life is a rich kaleidoscope of colours and textures with everywhere the different spices adding a wide aromatic spectrum between the extremes of pungent smell and delicate fragrance. Everyone is totally occupied by the business of survival. For most life is hard, yet there seems to be a relaxed serenity that is rarely to be found amidst the affluence of consumer oriented societies.

#### UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT

Calicut University's Department of Drama is located in an idyllic country setting about half-an-hour's drive from Trichur. The gracious old house and its extensive grounds

were left to the university by Dr John Matthai. A research centre and dormitories have been built in the gardens where several performance areas have emerged naturally among the trees. The journey, four times a day, along the aptly named Poothole Road, passing through villages of trimly painted houses set in a richly verdant landscape, has become part of the routine in which I share experience with a group of people whose talent and dedication I so admired in their Madras performances. Now I cherish their friendship and together we explore the design process of visual theatre, searching for visual metaphors for the Macbeth that is a thread motivating our workshop sessions. Or seek the optimum angles and colour for a light that supports, sculpts, reveals and yet conceals. With such people under such conditions, mutual discovery is the pleasure of the 'professor' and his student colleagues whose welcome is spelled out daily, in flowers, at the top of the stairs leading to our studio.

#### TRADITIONAL ARTS PROJECT

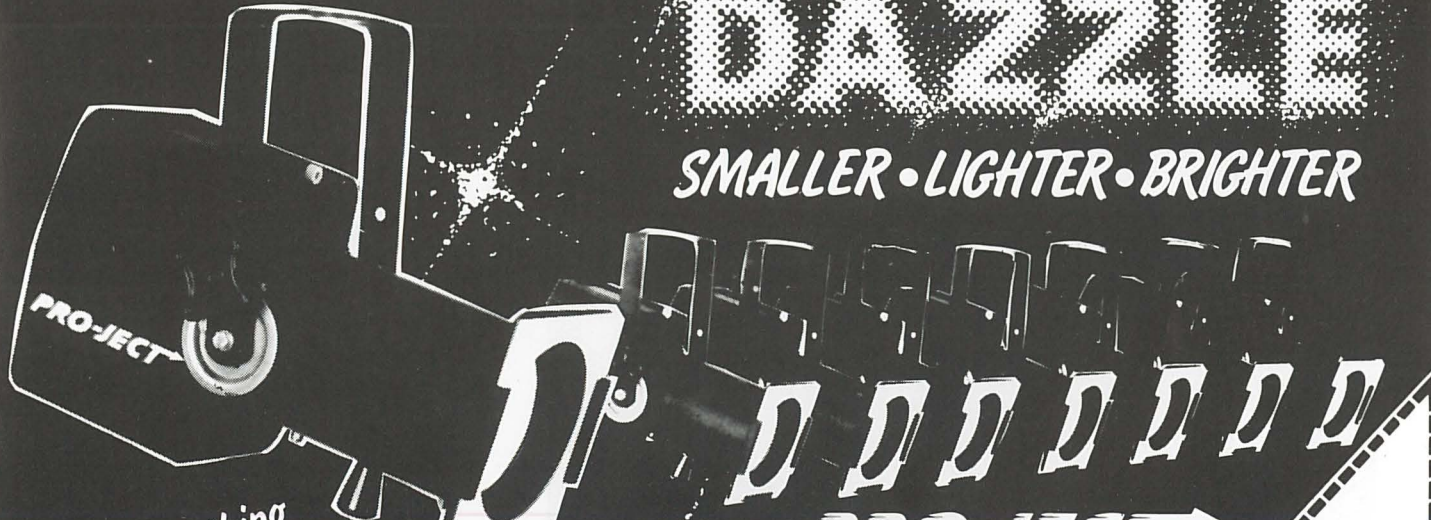
On Sunday we rest and I watch videos from the school's **Traditional Arts Project** undertaken with Ford Foundation funding. Using many techniques including photography and video recording under the direction

of Sankhara Pillai, traditional dramatic rituals from all over the state of Kerala have been researched and documented. The details of complex make-up procedures, the ground drawings and the 'performances' — all unchanged since the dawn of human behaviour — have been preserved just in time. With electricity penetrating even further into rural areas and television aerials sprouting, cultural change is inevitable. The rituals will no doubt continue to be enacted in some form, possibly homogenized for tourists. But for how long can a man continue to be transformed into a god eating a live chicken? I have never, never ever, seen acting with the total reality of the man playing a hissing serpent eating eggs, as recorded here on video. The origins of drama became clearer to me this morning.

#### POORAM

And they also become clearer to me this evening. After dinner we set off for the village of Arrattupuzha, our taxi joining the sundry vehicles weaving through the hundred, nay thousands, walking purposefully in the same direction. Our progress through the night is accompanied by our taxi playing the opening bars of 'Happy Birthday to You' everytime the driver takes his foot off the accelerator. He only ever

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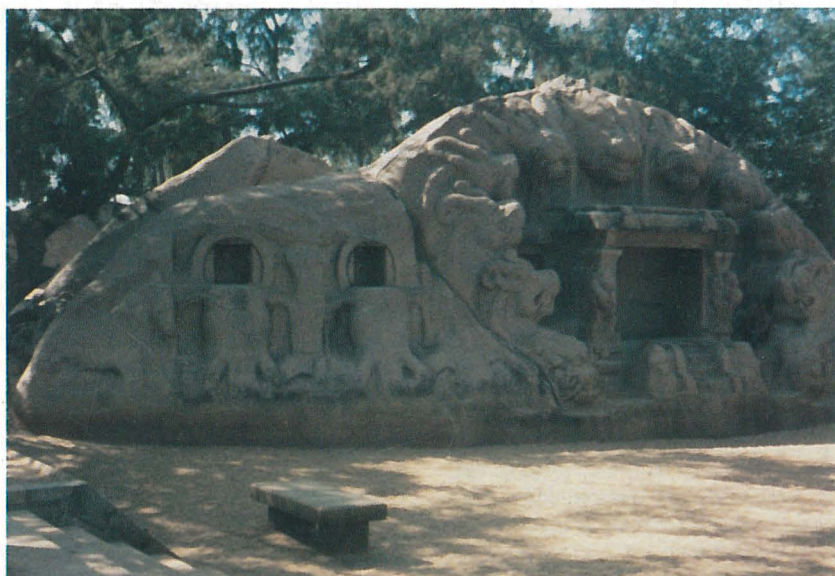
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*Tiger Cave – a 5th century theatre.*



*Kalakshetra Dance Theatre, Madras.*



*Department of Drama, University of Calicut, Trichur.*



*Students welcome spelled out daily, in flowers*

takes it off momentarily so we hardly ever reach the end of the tune. From time to time we overtake an elephant. When we arrive the landscape is peopled as far as the horizon. Five caparisoned elephants, richly decorated, bejewelled and umbrellad stand in line lit by oil flares. (Temple elephants are said to get very temperamental if any of their decorations are left off). On musical cues the boys on the elephant's backs stand up and swing heavy silver mounted fans. The crescendo of reeds and drums builds and builds until a climax upon which the elephants move forward a few places and the whole thing starts again. Sellers of food are everywhere. At midnight the fireworks go off — a long way away but the ground trembles: the elephants are unperturbed. We go to bed but by dawn 54 elephants had arrived.

#### FAREWELL TO CALICUT

After our final session, the students thank me with a tea party, songs and dances. I am touched and moist eyed. In the evening they perform another of Sankara Pillai's plays. His work, in these performances, must, just simply must be seen in the West

#### WORLD THEATRE DAY IN COCHIN

My Indian Experience ends on World Theatre Day and to mark the occasion I am invited to speak to a morning gathering of painters, sculptors, architects, writers and poets at the Kalapeetom arts centre in Cochin. The sun filters through the trees shading a delightfully intimate courtyard theatre/cinema and I find it easy to enthuse over the importance of theatre in our quest for a more humanitarian world. Then I take to the sky feeling (and, I hope, actually being) a wiser and more understanding person than when I landed.