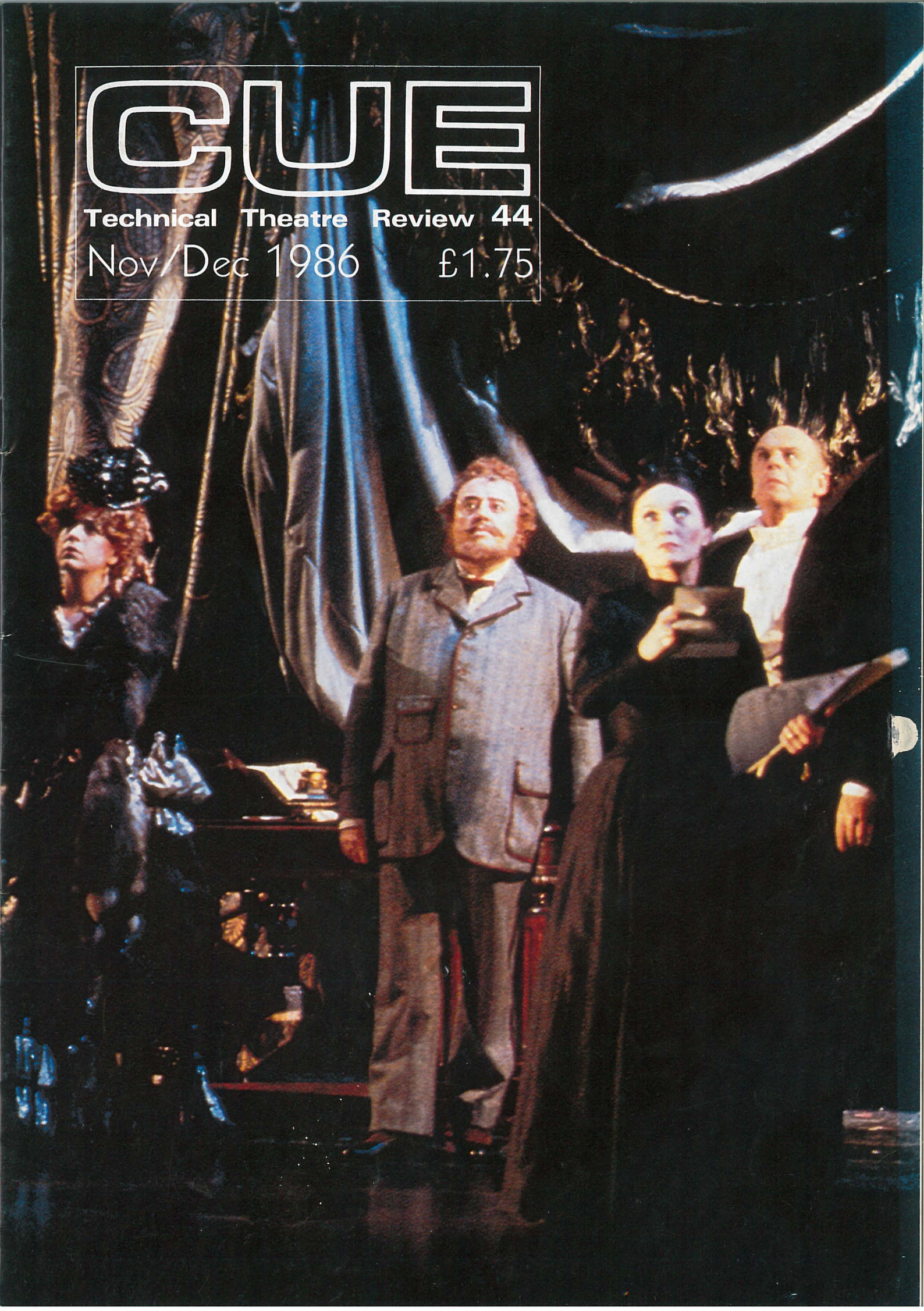


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Cover.

Lloyd Webber's 'Phantom of the Opera', it must be admitted, owes much of its success to Maria Bjornson's superb designs. As David Fingleton comments on another page 'Phantom' may have cost a bomb, but at least the budget has been spent with taste, imagination and skill.

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# cue

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## Distracting or Diverting?

If the aim is to expand your opera audiences, and surely this is what some of the Arts Council's money is intended to do, then a better understanding by non-linguistic audiences of the libretto and plot becomes a worthwhile objective.

For several years now English translations in performance, as given by ENO, have already made for a wider public enjoyment of Italian and German operas.

But excellent though they are these translated performances are thought by some to lack the musical flow and poetry of an aria sung in its original language.

For these more finely attuned opera enthusiasts, albeit unversed in foreign tongues, the advent of surtitles to explain the action and the burden of the singing must be a welcome innovation.

However, the cognoscente, some reviewers and critics among them, feel strongly otherwise, maintaining as they do that surtitles are an abominable distraction.

That could be so for a few purists. But for the rest of us we read as we run. And so engrossed in the performance do we become that far from distracting our attention from the stage we sometimes miss that despised, almost subliminal translation so helpfully and discreetly provided above the proscenium.

Perhaps the purists, as some have already threatened should stay away. The loss will be theirs because there are always many more of us waiting to fill the empty seats who will appreciate the more diverting entertainment provided by opera with surtitles.

So, well done Touring Glyndebourne and the R O H

# STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

Stimulating productions by Royal Opera and Welsh National Opera  
□ Suspended judgement on surtitles □ A stylish MIKADO with inspired settings □ A fresh look at CAV and PAG □ Outstanding set designs, the making of the Phantom.

Despite the gloomy economic outlook for the arts in general, in which opera in particular, as the most costly of theatrical art forms, is threatened with being the hardest hit, this has been operatically an enterprising and stimulating autumn at both of London's major houses. At Covent Garden there has been the first of this season's new productions by the Royal Opera, of Janacek's *Jenufa*, as well as a memorable visit by the Welsh National Opera to present their admirable Ring Cycle, and at the Coliseum there have been interesting and provocative new stagings of Gilbert and Sullivan's *The Mikado*, and those operatic 'terrible twins' *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *Pagliacci*.

The staging of *Jenufa* was in the hands of the distinguished Russian director Yuri Lyubimov, formerly of Moscow's Taganka Theatre, where he regularly displeased the authorities with his expressionistic, idiosyncratic productions, strongly influenced by Christianity, but at Covent Garden both his set and costume designers were British artists who have previously worked with Lyubimov in the West, Paul Heron and Clare Mitchell. As might have been expected, Lyubimov's production was expressionistic, taking *Jenufa* some way from its Moravian village folklore setting and into a world of more universal proletarian suffering, imbued with strongly religious elements. There was also much use of symbolism, with a movement group employed to enact tableaux during the preludes to each act—scattering autumn leaves, snowflakes and spring blossoms as appropriate for each succeeding season—as well as during the opera itself. The stage was framed on either side by a row of revolving doors, or screens, painted white on one side and black on the other: an interesting idea initially, which subsequently became mannered and tiresome. There was also much play made with the cross, powerfully silhouetted at what Lyubimov took to be appropriate points in the action. Within this controversial framework Heron's stark set design, with an instantly collapsible or erectable hut at its centre and a dividing rear black flat revealing a white cyclorama beyond, was clear, uncluttered and strongly atmospheric, and Clare Mitchell's naturalistic costumes for the singers, if not her more stylised ones for the movement group, were highly effective.

So too was the strong, largely back, lighting, designed jointly by Paul Heron and Robert Bryan. One might not positively like this production, nor necessarily feel that it was what Janacek's opera required, but on its own terms it was designed most effectively and made telling use of the stage as well as keeping the eyes fixed upon it.

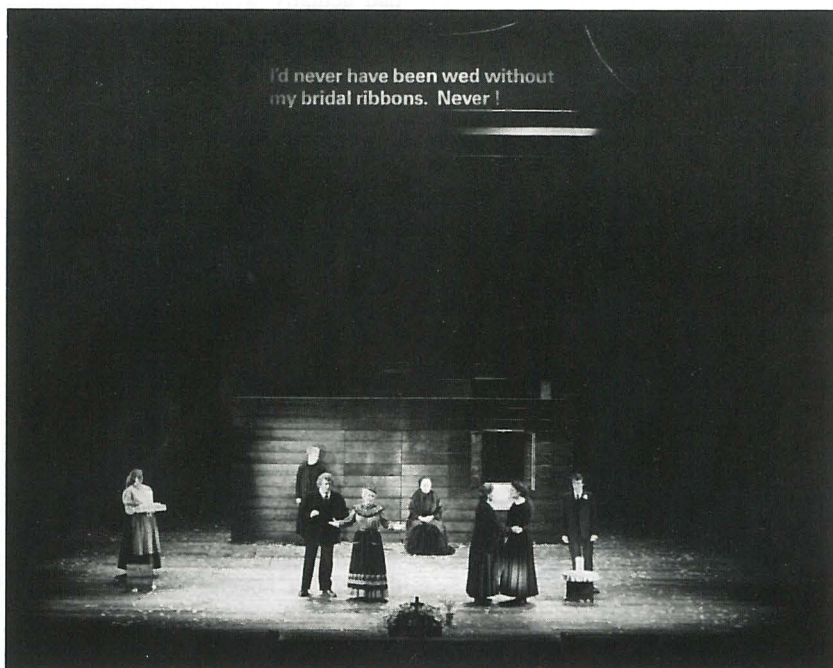
It needed to do that for there was competition above the proscenium arch in the shape of the Royal Opera's first use of 'Surtitles'. These were projected onto a black graphite screen, 10' wide by 3' high, using white text with a maximum height of one foot and a maximum of two lines at a time. Obviously there is benefit in an instant translation of an opera sung in Czech—though the English was awkward and antiquated—and it was still possible to watch the stage without looking at the surtitles. But the temptation to look up was always there, and to do so destroyed concentration. I am not

convinced that surtitles are a benefit to opera-going: better to do one's homework on the plot in advance and to rely on producer and singers to get the message across in whatever language is my present view.

Earlier at Covent Garden we had been privileged to see Welsh National Opera's Wagner *Ring Cycle*, directed by Swedish Göran Järvefelt and designed by German Carl Friedrich Oberle, with lighting once again by Robert Bryan. This may not have been the most original or visually exciting Ring to be seen in recent years, but the designs had clearly been planned with the exigencies of touring to theatres of varying size and suitability in mind, as well as on an obviously limited budget. In any case a simple and straightforward staging that avoided the technological wizardry of several recent Rings I have seen was in itself to be commended, in that it left one to



Sets and costumes for the Yuri Lyubimov production of "Jenufa" were designed by Paul Heron and Clare Mitchell. Lighting by Robert Bryan.



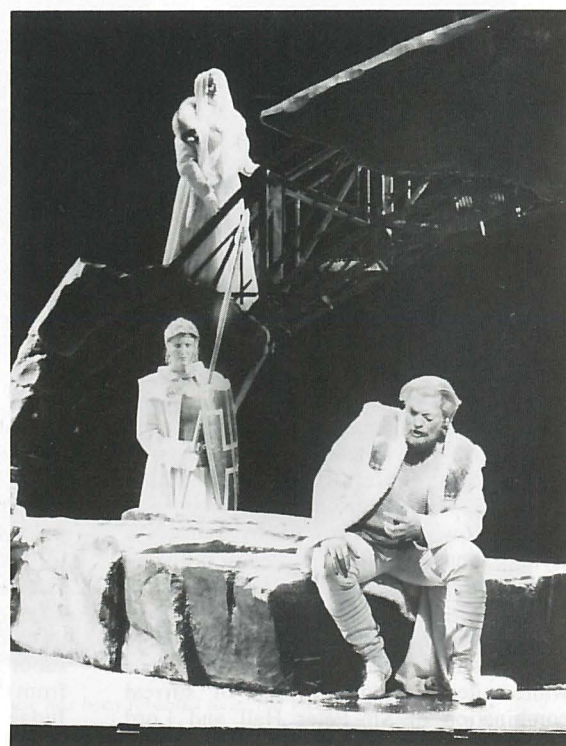
*The Mayor's wife in "Jenufa". The gist of her song can be seen if not heard in the surtitle. Photo Zoë Dominic.*



*Clare Mitchell's "Village Ladies" for "Jenufa". Photo Donald Southern.*



*Götterdämmerung and The Valkyrie from Welsh National Opera's "Ring Cycle" at Covent Garden. Producer—Göran Järvefelt. Designer—Carl Friedrich. Lighting—Robert Bryan. Photos Clive Barda and Zoë Dominic.*



concentrate on the music and the drama, undistracted by visual tours de force. What did rather puzzle me was that producer and designer in Rhinegold, the first opera of the four, seemed to have opted for the kind of politicised, industrial revolution concept that had characterised Patrice Chereau's Ring in Bayreuth. There were thus iron-girdered railway arches, frockcoated gods, and Welsh navy giants. But thereafter, although the girders continued to hang mistily around the proscenium, the cycle continued along altogether more conventional and timeless lines. As Rhinegold, with its absence of any tenable suggestion of the Rhine and anaemic Nibelheim, was by some way the least satisfactory staging of the four, this was no bad thing, and thereafter things improved mightily with a fine opening act to Valkyrie, strong work in Siegfried and a well-evoked Gibichung Hall in Götterdämmerung. Sadly the final scene of this opera, the immolation of Brünnhilde and destruction of Valhalla, was muddled and feeble, but at least here, as elsewhere, it left singers with room to move and space to sing, which they did to our very considerable pleasure. This may have been a Ring on a shoestring, and with some visual punches pulled, but it was nevertheless enormously satisfying, and I would be happy to see it again.

At the Coliseum the first production of English National Opera's new season was Jonathan Miller's staging of The Mikado, designed by Stefanos Lazaridis, with costumes by Sue Blane. For style, polish and skill in execution it is very probably the finest looking musical in town, and Dr Miller's decision to set Gilbert and Sullivan's Japanese operetta fairly and squarely in England, and to move its period forward to the 1920's was admirably served by his designers' wit and skill. Lazaridis' setting was inspired: a surreal version of the



*Jonathan Miller's staging of the MIKADO at the Coliseum for English National Opera. Designer: Stefanos Lazaridis. Costumes: Sue Blane. Choreographer: Anthony van Laast. Lighting by David Cunninghame. Photo Zoë Dominic.*



*Cavalleria Rusticana/Pagliacci was produced by Ian Judge for the E.N.O. at the Coliseum. Designer: Gerard Howland. Costumes: Deirdre Clancy. Lighting by David Cunninghame. Photo. Clive Barda.*

lobby of a colossal grand hotel, its adjacent public rooms still in the process of refurbishment, with such embellishments as palms, grand piano, colossal cocktail glass, and equally colossal horned phonograph, plus a central working fountain surrounded by a circular banquet. Everything is in white, and Sue Blane's equally inspired costumes are entirely in black and white, with a supplementary chorus of maids and pageboys who perform Busby Berkeley-style routines. The frock-coated or military-uniformed Gentlemen of Japan, debby Three Little Maids, straight from the pages of 'Vogue', 'masher', then Tory grandee, Lord High Executioner, and enormous white-suited Mikado—a kind of surreal combination of Sir Peter Hall and Lord Goodman—all combined to focus the work

and to give it a wit, vitality and theatrical incisiveness that it took it far from the realms of pious resuscitation, yet did not destroy the spirit of the work. For this producer, designers, lighting designer David Cunninghame, and choreographer Anthony van Laast are all heartily to be thanked.

ENO's other new production, of Cav and Pag, also shifted both location and period. Indeed producer Ian Judge went a good deal further than that. As well as moving Cavalleria Rusticana and Pagliacci from, respectively, Sicily and Calabria where their librettists set them, to an industrial suburb in Northern Italy, and their period from the 1890's to around World War 1, Ian Judge also linked the two works, as though their composers, Mascagni and Leoncavallo

had actually written them in conjunction. The programme announced that "the action of the two operas takes place over an Easter weekend in an Italian town," and the Pagliacci strolling players were thus to be seen rehearsing during the Intermezzo of Cavalleria, and the survivors from that opera were amongst the audience for the enactment of Pagliacci's grisly final scene. Designer Gerard Howland's setting was a gloomy industrial landscape with pit wheel, overhead gantries and railway trucks, producing an almost Lowryesque atmosphere, and Howland's ingenuity was further to be seen in his turning of Cav's Easter Procession into the stylised interior of the church, with banners and emblems of the Virgin Mary 'flown' for the purpose, and by unfurling a proscenium and drop curtain from the gantry to provide a stage for Pag. I was less convinced by his two sharply angled theatre walls that enclosed the set throughout, not entirely understanding their relevance. Deirdre's Clancy's well-observed costumes and David Cunninghame's precise, well-controlled and largely 'white' lighting also made their effect in a production of strong theatricality. What made me less happy was the relevance of setting to music, for both operas' scores speak of the warm, sun-baked south where high emotions contrast with the sunlight, rather than emerging from dank, dismal industrial surroundings. But at least, on what was clearly a carefully controlled budget, we were made to look afresh at two very familiar works, and thus stimulated by them.

In the world of the West End musical budgets are less controlled, and visual and dramatic stimulation is at an altogether greater premium. Andrew Lloyd Webber's latest blockbuster, at Her Majesty's, *Phantom of the Opera*, is a sub-operatic piece, set in the Paris Opera House itself and with its book taken from Gaston Leroux' splendid melodrama of that title. Alas, neither book, lyrics, nor, most surprisingly, Lloyd Webber's music, achieve any very compelling drama or atmosphere, but Maria Bjornson's superb designs certainly do. Set in 1861, the period of Meyerbeer, Ms Bjornson has created a truly magnificent pastiche of grand opera in the grandest of opera houses. Her use of the 19th century theatre's existing machinery and traps is as imaginative as it is skilful, and the Phantom's subterranean dwelling, across the lake beneath the Paris Opera's stage, was stunningly achieved, though that famous self-destructing chandelier was actually rather less impressive. There was a marvellous authenticity of stage effects, furniture, and decorations, with exquisitely exact costumes, and gorgeous use of those heavy, very French 19th century swagged curtains. Phantom may have cost a bomb, and may look as though it did; but at least the budget has been spent with taste, imagination and skill. What a pity the show itself cannot attain the strength of its designs.

# Restoration Of An Opera House

J. R. PARKER

As built by Matcham the Wakefield Theatre Royal and Opera House was a typical touring theatre on a tight site. Backstage was a scene dock directly off the side road and minimal dressing room accommodation stacked on the side. No workshop or other facilities whatsoever.

Front of House the auditorium occupied almost all the remaining site area. Pit, Dress Circle and Gallery each had its discrete entrance with no connection between them. Entrance foyers were non-existent. Each level had one small "saloon" about 25'-0" x 10'-0" and toilet facilities were woefully inadequate. Luckily there was the auditorium. Typical Matcham; elaborate fibrous plaster work, very coarsely detailed, wrap around circle and gallery, two strange but delightful little boxes, all with good sight-lines and above all that marvellous relationship between audience and stage of which Matcham was the master.

Hemp lines served the flying system with a grid height at 40'-0". There had obviously been stage bridges but these must have been removed a long time ago and the only remaining evidence was the sinking to accommodate them in the understage floor.

The main entrance facade to Westgate was in fair-faced brickwork with decorative details in hard cast concrete. Coarsely detailed—the circle level windows look as if replaced by some cheap jobbing carpenter but they are as original—the overall street effect is in scale and pleasant.

When the theatre was converted into a cinema in 1954 the projection box was built in the gallery. It had to be of the usual strong fireproof construction and it was necessary to considerably alter the gallery rake structure in order to support the r.c. floor of the box. Eventually the cinema closed and that saviour of so many theatre buildings, Bingo, was operated until 1982. Major structural changes for that use involved the building of a "first floor" at circle level on the stage, carrying through into the scene dock, the necessary vertical circulation which that

required and the formation of new toilet facilities in what had been dressing room accommodation. Over the mezzanine floor over the stage a ceiling was suspended between the fly galleries. The iron curtain had been removed. The front of the stage was altered and the front half of the stalls floor levelled. Doorways had been knocked through walls, a cheap but extensive heating system had been spaghetti'd around but essentially the auditorium was reasonably intact and recoverable. Most of the fibrous plaster work was, like all else dilapidated, but still in existence.

Externally the original main entrance facade to Westgate had had its original cast iron and glass pavement canopy removed and replaced by a flat horror in appalling taste and, whatever were the original Matcham entrance details below it, they had been obliterated under dreadful yellow tiles and aluminium doors in a quite incompetent attempt to satisfy the Local Authority's proper requirement for the doors to open outwards. Above the canopy the whole elevation had been sprayed with a thick, grey plastic film; clearly someone's idea of improvement. The human mind is enigmatic.

When it was known that the Bingo operation was to close a group of theatre enthusiasts formed a Trust committed to acquiring and re-furbishing the Opera House.

In 1982 TACP Design were commissioned as architects, theatre consultants, engineers, quantity surveyors and interior designers by the Trust to that end.

The operation has been wholly a private operation by the Trustees and the fact that the Theatre is in operation today is due wholly to a singleness of purpose and ener-

getic application by them, and particularly by the Chairman, Rodney Walker.

The Arts Council, with its usual great wisdom, was not able to provide any funds at all at any stage. It has of course been a period in which Local Authorities have been strapped for cash. Nevertheless, the Wakefield City Council has given considerable assistance and servicing support. The saving of the project was the Metropolitan County Council which shortly before abolition found the funds to enable completion. Not just the shortage of funds but also their availability only as a slow drip has made the project quite extraordinarily difficult.

It is pretty easy to carry out such a job with funding of £8,000,000 or £2,000,000.

The Wakefield Theatre Royal & Opera House is a delightful theatre, in operation and an asset to the City at a contract cost of some £600,000.

Apart from straightforward refurbishment certain additions and alterations were essential:

The mezzanine floor over stage and workshop to be removed. New dressing rooms built on a small site available behind the stage back wall. New public toilet facilities to be formed. Cinema projection box removed. Internal facilities produced in the small available areas.

High priority was attached to altering the entrance arrangements so as to provide one entrance to all three auditorium levels.

The scheme as produced incorporated a thin, 10'-0" wide property adjacent to the theatre which had been a hairdresser's forming the corner of the site. A new entrance here and remaking the circle and gallery stairs solved the access problems. Shortly after, it became obvious that funds were not going to be available to carry it out. Re-design left the entrance to the gallery separate from stalls and circle.

The area of the hairdresser's shop on the corner and the old stalls saloon space were re-built completely to provide an entrance and cafe, doubling as stalls refreshment area. The shop front itself has been com-



*The refurbished Wakefield Opera House has been returned to its old glory with much improved backstage facilities including a new stage lighting system and Gemini memory control.*

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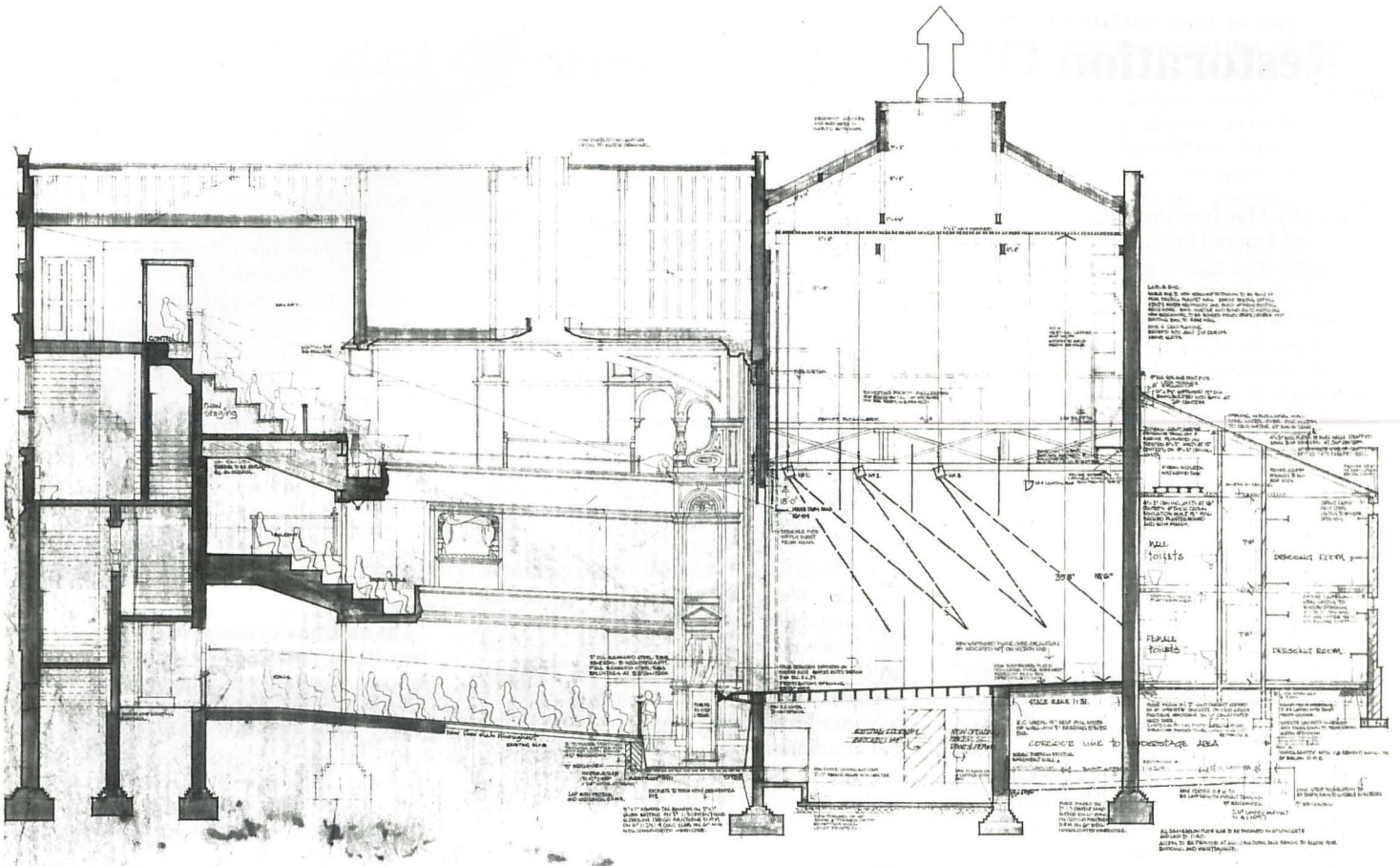
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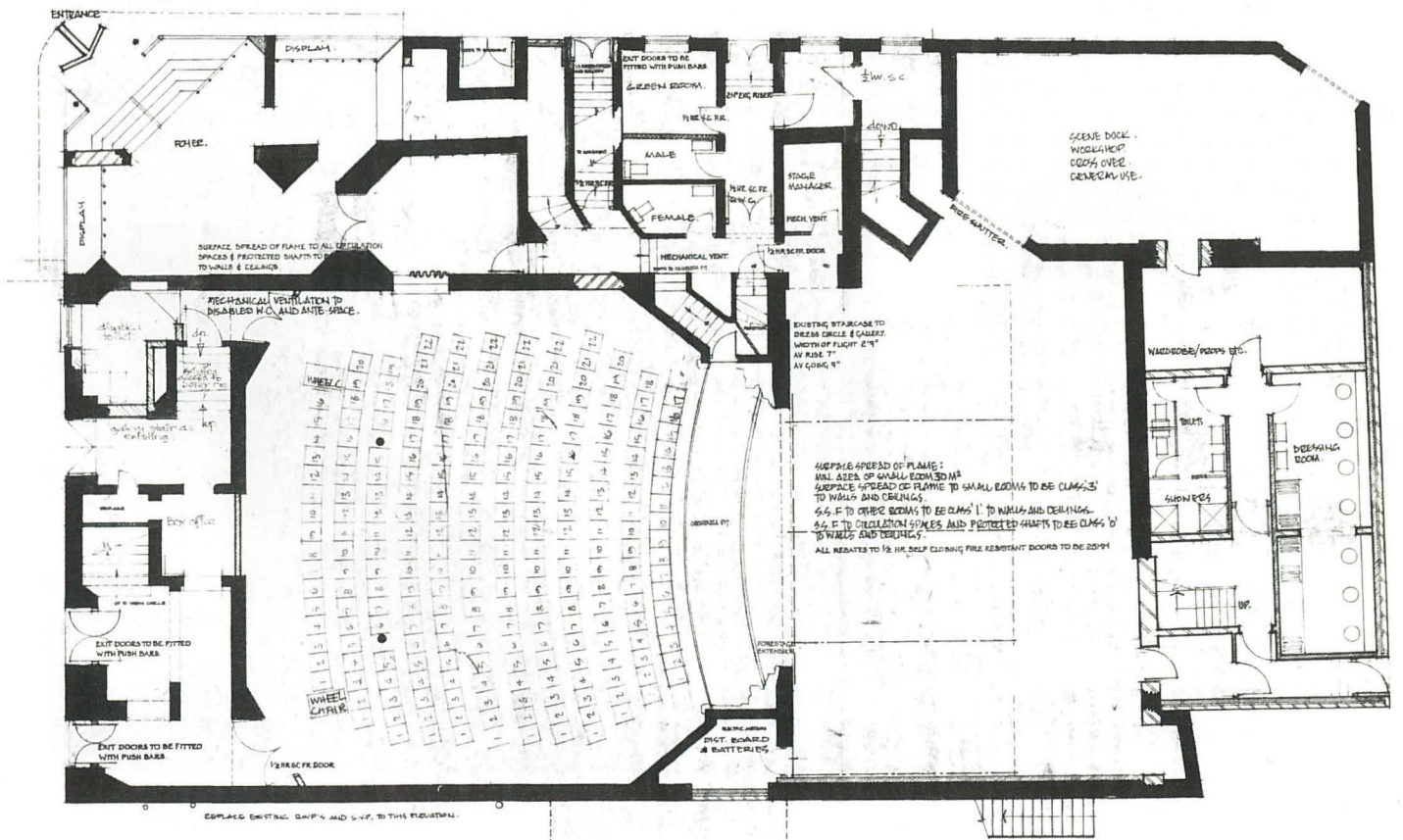
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*These drawings as prepared in 1982 may not correspond exactly to the restoration work actually carried out. Some of the architects most desirable recommendations such as raising the fly tower roof had to be abandoned so as to keep within the very modest budget. Nonetheless Wakefield has been well served by this competent restoration and the trustees who made it all happen.*





pletely refurbished to original details but the interior is new and modern as a deliberate contrast to the auditorium in style and colour.

At circle level the space over the hair-dressers has also been absorbed into the original saloon area, but the re-build here has been designed as a Victorian bar.

Major restoration of the fibrous plaster work in the auditorium was needed, much of it requiring the re-fixing of large areas and the re-casting of many details.

The whole of the concrete stalls floor had to be taken up and relaid. Matcham had made it with an ash aggregate and it was rapidly turning to soggy powder.

Colours are various shades of cream with terra cotta and dark amber house tabs and drapes. With as much gold as we could afford on the limited budget. I believe strongly that auditoria should be warm in feeling and do not care for what seems to be becoming a fashion for architecturally pleasant but cold colours. Light fittings are period pieces. A sunburner still existed but inoperative. They are quite impractical to use now and in view of the cash shortage there seemed no point in restoring it. However, although this is no auditorium for a chandelier, "centre brilliance" is required. After much deliberation some sixteen PAR56<sup>s</sup> shining down through the fibrous plaster filigree surrounding the sunburner produce the required effect.

Backstage is full of compromise. No money to raise the fly-tower roof and grid. Twenty double-purchase counterweight sets were bought second-hand and refurbished. The stage lighting system was non-existent and a complete installation was necessary: 100 dimmer channels, most doubled-up plus the usual extras have been fitted.

New dressing accommodation has been built on two floors behind the back wall of the stage. At stage level it acts as a not too convenient cross-over. It had been intended that the understage would be the cross-over: wing space being much too cramped stage left for a stair there was to be a basement corridor cut into the new block. The start of the dig soon disclosed that Matchams 45 foot high rear wall of the fly tower had no foundation and the understage corridor had to be abandoned.

Because the cash was being raised by hard efforts of the Trust and available in small tranches there could never be a Contract and a General Contractor. Many separate contracts all with differing start and finish times made administration a nightmare. But it made possible the re-opening of a fine theatre at a ludicrously low capital cost. And it works.

## Starlight Magic

"Twinkle, Twinkle little Star. How I wonder what you are." That is a question which may well be asked not only by children but also by their parents in the audience at many shows this Christmas. The answer of course is FIBRE OPTIC, and this medium is being used more and more to capture the ethereal magic of a starlit sky and reproduce it on a theatre backcloth.

Prior to the advent of Fibre Optics, the most successful method of creating stars was by means of Pea Bulbs inserted into the backcloth. The lamps could be made to flash but it was never really possible to create the true spacious feeling of an outdoor sky at night. By using Fibre Optics however, individual stars can be made to vary in size, colour and brilliance, and most importantly they can be made to sparkle in a way that no other medium can equal.

"How is all this achieved? You may ask." "Why is Fibre Optic lighting so different from any other form? How do I use it?"

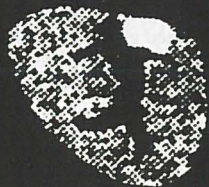
Fibre Optic Cable is simply a means of conducting light from a conveniently placed

light source to the point at which the light is required. In America, the cables are often referred to as "Light Pipes" and this is perhaps not a bad description, the fibres carrying light, in much the same way that a hosepipe carries water! Optical Fibres are constructed from two different glasses moulded together to form a core and outer cladding. The light is carried within the core by TOTAL INTERNAL REFLECTION and each time a beam of light hits the interface between the two glasses it is refracted back into the core. Only light is carried so there is no risk of electrical shock or fire.

These are several different types of Optical Fibre and it is important to distinguish between them. Data Communication Fibres are normally made of Silica or Quartz, have a very small core with a relatively thick cladding and are very expensive. These are not suitable for backdrop illumination.

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Doncaster, who have a division specialising in the production of fibre optic lighting for the theatre.

For maximum effect, it is important that the fibres should be correctly illuminated, and EUROTEC have specially designed units containing a Tungsten Halogen Dichroic light source, modulated by a motor driven colour wheel, and focussing on the Optical Fibre. The flex is supplied ready assembled into a "HARNES" complete with a quick rebase fitting on to the light source at the common end, and individual alloy ferrules on each of the tails. Up to 500 size 1 tails can be accommodated by one light source, and multiple light sources can be combined. Any length of tail can be supplied in one Harness.

To create a Star Cloth, the first step is to work out the area of the cloth and the density of stars required, usually somewhere in-between 10- per square metre.

Next decide on the best location for the light source. For maximum economy aim to position the units as near to the centre of the cloth as possible, as this reduces the length

(and cost) of fibre needed. The units can of course be stood on the stage or suspended from a light bar as required.

Having decided on the light source location, work out the lengths of fibre required to reach each star position, and order tailored Harnesses. (If you would rather have this part done for you, just send a sketch of your design to EUROTEC, they will do the rest.)

For fixing to the backcloth it is recommended that two people should work together. One stands behind the cloth and pushes the Fibre through, after placing the flat half of the curtain fixing set over the ferrule. He then holds the ferrule whilst number two pushes the "Top Hat" over the ferrule from the front, sandwiching the curtain and fixing the tail rigidly at right angles to the drop. After the Tails are fixed, the flex should be lightly tucked to the back of the drop and taken in neat runs to the light source.

The light source can be quickly attached or removed, and the backdrop can be quite safely flown or rolled.

To achieve a natural star effect, the light source is usually fitted with a blue sparkle wheel, but of course, any other colours can be used and a whole range of special effects including programmed firework effects can be created. Different sizes of fibre can be mixed in the same harness to vary star sizes, and an especially appealing effect can be created by suspending a gauze approximately 30 m/m in front of the fibre optics.

Eurotecs fibres can currently be seen in many productions, including Starlight Express, Cats, Charlie Girl, Time and Singing in the Rain in the West End. Peter Pan on tour, Cinderella at the King's Theatre, Edinburgh and the Leicester Haymarket production of High Society.

Fibre Optics are an exciting and innovative way of enhancing many production sets. New applications are continuously being developed and sought, the only limitation often being imagination. Why not "Reach for the Stars"!

BARRY GREGSON

#### ADVERTISEMENT

## ADB appoint Furse to handle full range line up

ADB, Europe's leading manufacturer of theatre and television lighting and control equipment has appointed Furse Theatre Products as their sole UK distributor.



The Furse UK Sales and Marketing team.

Left to right:

J.R. Widdison, General Manager, L. McCall, N.J. Fathers, C.R. Smith, A. Marks, R.M. Massey, R.M. Atkins, D.J. Griffiths, E. Owen, J. McAlonan, S.L. Niblett, G. Dudley, N. Newton.

Absent: R. Holmes, N.R. Kenton, I.M. Hume

Jeff Widdison, Furse Theatre Products General Manager commented, "We are absolutely delighted that ADB has formed this partnership with Furse. Although we are the oldest manufacturer of theatre equipment in Britain, with over 50 years experience, we have been unable, until now, to compete with the market leaders in all sectors of the rapidly changing and ever more sophisticated theatre equipment market. With ADB at our elbow, we now have the

resources of a company at the very forefront of technology, with a range of advanced lighting and computer based control systems which the competition will be hard pressed to match, in terms of performance, price and service back up".

### Back to School

Every member of the Crown House Furse Theatre Products sales and development team will, over the next two weeks, be attending an initial series of intensive product familiarisation courses at ADB's head office at Zaventem in Belgium. The company's installation and service engineers will be trained by ADB's own engineers at Furse head office in Nottingham.

### First Chinese Theatre Contract

Over the last few years, Furse Theatre Products of Nottingham have been particularly active in both the Middle East and Far East markets through nominated distributors. However, the Peoples' Republic of China, whilst offering huge potential, has proved to be an extremely difficult market to enter—an experience shared by many other UK manufacturers.

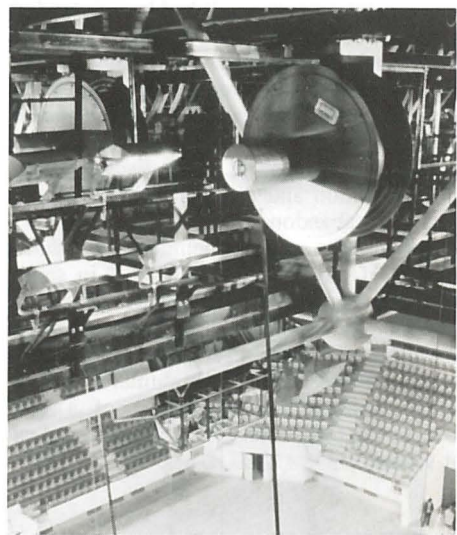
It was, therefore, particularly pleasing for the Company to win a £130,000 order for the manufacture and supply of specialist lighting and control equipment for the Shenzhen Coliseum in Canton.

The order included a series of spotlight bars which can be raised or lowered from a central electronic control to provide a wide range of lighting effects over the stage area.

Long range, high performance spotlights have also been supplied and these were mounted in the roof of the structure to highlight performing groups or individual artists. The new Furse equipment now enables presentations to take place in both Eastern and Western styles.

A sophisticated control system with memory facilities was also included to enable individual lighting units to be controlled independently or collectively.

As with many contracts undertaken for customers in the UK and throughout the world, Furse were responsible for the complete design and engineering services.



Specialist lighting and control equipment supplied and installed by Furse at the Shenzhen Coliseum, Canton, China.

Crown House Furse Theatre Products Wilford Rd.  
Nottingham NG2 1EB UK Tel: (0602) 863 471  
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# PRODUCT NEWS

BOB ANDERSON

## ELTEC launch SCEPTRE

*Would you like a memory lighting system?  
Think you can afford it?*

So goes the teaser on the front of the glossy ELTEC leaflet for their new memory lighting control aimed at the schools and small amateur and professional markets.

Now, there are still some people who are frightened of memory lighting systems and there are also many more who are quite satisfied, for the moment, with the memory system they have got. But Eltec clearly believe that there are lots of small theatres that would be delighted to buy a memory control if only they could raise the money. So, what is it about the price?

Can ELTEC really be offering a 24 way SCEPTRE for £999 rising to £2239 for 120 ways, and can such a low price provide a system that will be worth buying?



*Sceptre Control by Eltec for up to 120 dimmers.*

As a lighting board SCEPTRE has a lot to offer. 199 memories with stored fade times, manual or automatic fades, link and sequence for chases, simple but clear VDU display, memory mixing and that useful new idea, Help messages available on the screen for quick reference to important bits of the handbook when you need to double check that you know what you are about to do. The specification is well able to stand comparison with the old Strand Duet, their more recent M-24 and the smaller boards from Eurolight, AVAB etc. Software and the operating philosophy were designed in-house by their Technical Director Peter Wiggins, himself an accomplished professional lighting designer, in close co-operation with many theatre and educational experts. Of course, there are shortcomings. Channel adjustment uses up-a-bit, down-a-bit keys like the early Colortrack and Kliegle boards which, though workable, are much less satisfactory than the wheel controls now standard on the higher cost systems. Only one fade time can be stored for auto-fades so upward and downward moving components have to be simultaneous. And, for no apparent reason, the

keypad is arranged with 1 at the top like a telephone instead of at bottom-left like all other lighting controls, pocket calculators and computers designed for repeated numerical entry; an aberration which can only encourage operating errors.

So, re-stating the question: for the many lighting people who will decide that SCEPTRE is a control that they would be pleased to use, does it really only cost £999 for 24 channels? The answer depends on whether you already own a BBC computer, monitor and disk drive. If you do, then SCEPTRE is specifically designed to add on to the BBC to use its computing power and the £999 is all you have to fork out for full memory control of your existing 24 dimmers. Eltec have targeted their product on schools, who nearly all nowadays have one or more BBC computers in their classrooms, and are confident that their idea will be welcomed with enthusiasm both as a way of saving money and as a working practical example of computing in action. However, even if you do not already own a BBC you will only have to add about £500 to this cost to buy the missing items and will then, if you take a little trouble to learn how to use it, have a powerful, flexible and provenly reliable computing tool to do all manner of other useful jobs about the theatre.

Eltec demonstrated SCEPTRE extensively during November and the control is available immediately through their usual agents.

## Lee Colortran 12kW HMI Spotlight

At the other end of the affordability range, in the world of no-expense-spared television and film production, Lee Colortran have launched a 12kW HMI spotlight. When you realise that HMI metal arc lamps produce two or three times as much light per kilowatt as an incandescent lamp this is a big lamp!

Lee say that their 12kW luminaire easily beats the existing largest available source, the 250amp 'Brute' carbon arc—the mainstay of indoor and outdoor filming throughout the world for over half a century. A special feature that adds greatly to the usefulness of the design is the flicker and strobe free lightweight semiconductor ballast. Lee have paid special attention to this feature because film cameras are especially prone to exaggerate flicker produced by beats between light from an ordinary a.c. supply and the camera shutter. In the past whole takes have had to be scrapped because the problem had not been anticipated. Another advantage is that the semiconductor ballast, weighing a mere 39kg (the lamphead weighs 49kg) is very much lighter than wire wound choke ballasts used by other manufacturers.

Not a lamp likely to be used in theatres of any sort unless brought in by a film company but of interest as an example of the tools that the top professional lighting director can now call on when needed.

## Eurolight Move Factory

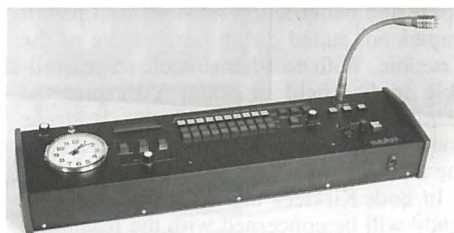
Lighting control system manufacturer Eurolight Ltd. have recently moved to a new purpose built factory at Feltham, Middlesex so that they can expand their manufacturing operations.



*Eurolight Micron Memory Control with built in teaching functions for schools.*

Eurolight have been around for over fourteen years and are widely known for their Micron and Microlite range of professional memory lighting controls. Essentially a firm with engineering and computing skills they see their future in development of new control systems for all aspects of theatre and are putting most of their design resources into a revolutionary new theatre management system due for launch next year.

The company continues to manufacture hardware for the Micron and Microlite and a range of stage management consoles, paging and show relay systems, lighting



*Eurolight Stage Management Panel*

bars and grids. Recent improvements to Micron include menu guided self teaching facilities for ILEA schools offering the new theatre technology options in their syllabus.

They also market Green Ginger dimmers and controls and Technical Projects/Canford Audio intercom systems. Like many manufacturers, Eurolight have found that their customers need a wide range of advice and assistance with the general design of the technical installation and so have built up a consultancy service for entertainment venues. Current projects are for a new media centre in Norway with

theatres, cinemas and a concert hall, and the refurbishment of a theatre in Spain. Installation services can also be provided and the company are in the process of finishing television studios for the Inland Revenue, Henley College and Austin Rover and have completed systems at Coventry Cable and for Clyde Cable Television. Production lighting design is also undertaken with a recent notable success at a mammoth fashion show in Vienna attended by Prince Charles and Princess Diana.

Coupled with their move to Feltham, Eurolight have decided to make a complete but amicable break with the short lived joint venture Eurolight (MSL) Ltd. which will continue under the management of Mike Sweetland under the name M.S.L.

### TPC Successes

Theatre Projects Consultants have also been telling the world about their successes. Now that the call for new high technology national type super theatres has more or less dried up the contest for the available work among the top reputation theatre consultants gets tougher.

TPC have always been able to impress with their knowledge of market potential, running costs, theatre politics and fund raising required for the realistic feasibility studies needed by city Councils and preservation trusts. TPC now announce that they have been appointed as sole advisers to the Lyceum Trust in Sheffield, advisers to the Kirklees Theatres Trust and to undertake a joint feasibility study for the Milton Keynes Development Corporation in collaboration with Coopers & Lybrand Associates.

In Sheffield the trust hopes to restore the Lyceum, built in 1897 by Sprague, and last used as a live theatre in 1968. The Lyceum stands next to the highly successful Crucible Theatre for which Theatre Projects were also consultants in 1971. The feasibility study will investigate the possibility of restoring the Lyceum as a venue for national opera and ballet tours, musicals and pantomimes not suited to the thrust stage of the Crucible. With no other suitable stage available in Sheffield or south Yorkshire the team hope that the needs of the local citizens and benefits from the tourism will persuade the EEC to contribute funds for the project.

In both Kirklees and Milton Keynes the study will be concerned with the feasibility of providing new buildings. In Kirklees, the metropolitan area around Huddersfield, the aim is to fund the creation of a new theatre to be designed by the council's Architects in the Technical Services department, while in Milton Keynes the new building is described as a joint auditorium/concert facility.

Richard Pilbrow, Iain Mackintosh, David Staples and Tony Field will provide the expert advice.

Abroad, TPC have had a considerable success with a technical and artistic enterprise. Alan Russel and David Taylor of TPC specialise in lighting design consultancy for prestige buildings where quality and spectacular effect are required to enhance the status and thus the profitability of public spaces. With considerable success and

experience already to their credit in the far east, TPC joined with Accent Lighting Services of Malaysia to design and win a lighting competition for atrium lighting for the Metroplex Mall shopping complex in Kuala Lumpur. The prize shared between the two companies was worth 100,000 Malay dollars, about £30,000.

The lighting scheme is for a covered public space in one of Kuala Lumpur's biggest shopping precincts which also features Funland with a roller coaster ride and a Viking Boat swing. Entitled "Light in Motion - a Timeless Piece of Art" the design uses coloured cold cathode tubes fixed to the trusses of the contoured glass canopy of the 30 m high, 50 m wide and 23 m deep space. Computerised dimmers control some 24 different effects in the form of light waterfalls, curtains and ripples. The constantly changing lighting entertains the shoppers inside the building and, visible from outside through the glass roof, provides an intriguing focus in the Kuala Lumpur landscape.

### FURSE LINK UP WITH ADB (and Mice)

Furse Theatre Products, who claim to be the oldest theatre manufacturers in Britain, have just announced their "link-up" with ADB, who claim to be Europe's largest manufacturers of theatre equipment. The occasion was celebrated in late November with presentations in London, Southampton and Nottingham.

ADB products have been obtainable in a small way in Britain for many years but visitors who saw their impressive display at the ABTT trade show last Spring will have realised that, in the field of spotlights and floodlights at least, the Belgian company can match nearly everything on offer from CCT and Strand. ADB marketing arrangements over here have been low key in recent years but Furse intend that this will now change. In the past Furse have themselves been content to keep a small but steady business going supplying small lighting systems for schools and amateurs but they now fear that this may become a declining market and have decided to go after the big customers. Jeff Widdison, the newly appointed Furse Sales/Commercial manager for theatre products intends that his team of distributors and service engineers will now go flat out to offer personal service and competitive prices in close co-operation with Raph. Janssens and the factory in Brussels.

To arouse interest and to set the lighting world talking Furse/ADB brought a mouse to the party, firmly attached by the tail to the ADB S20 lighting control desk—the first ever mouse operated lighting board!

Mice, as students of galactical hitch-hiking already know, are a lot more important than you might think, and that is only the furry rodent sort. Mice in the computer world are hand held gadgets that can, more or less, totally do away with all those push buttons and indicators that have seemed unavoidable since the demise of the Grand Master dinosaur.

Briefly, although the S20 has got lots of faders and buttons for the traditional conservative methods of operation, most can be ignored if the mouse is used. Simply push the mouse around the table top and a pointer moves around on the VDU (TV) screen. No need to look at the mouse, look at the screen and guide the pointer to a picture of the control you want to use, click the button on the mouse and, if the control is a switch, the switch operates. If you want to move a fader the mouse becomes a remote handle for the picture of the fader on the screen and the display changes exactly as you expect. Much better and faster than using real buttons or faders because you look at the screen and move one hand at top speed to do everything; although, as always, it is still essential to pay proper attention to the real lighting out on the stage. It's a proven system with excellent facilities for up to 120 dimmers and over 70 have already been sold. The VDU layout is, of course, critically important and ADB have done a good job for a first try though this is a new branch of ergonomics that must develop rapidly once users ideas and opinions make themselves heard.

Mice, then, may yet rule the lighting (and sound) worlds. Mac mice, Beeb mice, Amstrad mice and others are all close relations and all should by now be properly house trained. Make friends with a mouse today, or just as soon as you can get an introduction.

### New Rosco Colour Guide

Most people known to be interested in lighting effects for theatre and television will have recently received a free personal copy of the new Rosco SUPERGEL guide. This little booklet does not contain the usual few square centimetre sample of each tint but instead lists all the Supergel colours grouped by probable application and described in terms of general effect.

For example: Under the heading Acting Areas/Warm; colour 01 Light Bastard Amber is said to enhance fair skin tones or suggest strong sunlight and colour 04 Medium Bastard Amber is said to be especially useful when cross lit with a cool colour and is excellent for natural light.

There are eleven main headings with a dozen or so colours suggested under each. Now nobody expects that any two lighting designers will agree with all the advice given, but for beginners and as a reminder for the experienced the idea seems eminently useful and long overdue.

For copies, if you have not already received one, or to get a poster sized version for hanging in the lighting store or design office contact David Casey.

# REIDing SHELF

**HOLLYWOOD: LEGEND AND REALITY** is just the sort of book that most of us would be delighted to find in our stockings on christmas morning. It is beautifully produced on a top quality coated paper that allows the illustrations to be presented to a standard which comes close to that of the photographer's darkroom. Most of these illustrations are publicity stills from the film studios and while many of them lack the spontaneity of today's action approach to photography, the technical quality of their carefully prepared moments is high indeed. This is particularly enjoyable in the monochrome stills which depend on lighting for their contrasts.

This is the book of an exhibition, originating at the Smithsonian Institute in Washington for a United States tour. I would dearly love to see it. Having been a sucker for Hollywood hokum since my schooldays, I tend to admire Busby Berkeley rather more than Bertolt Brecht. But then I don't think that I have ever succeeded in disentangling the mythology of Hollywood from the reality of life. (I guess that is why I work on the stage against my logical, if not better, judgement.)

And so I am pleased and comforted by a book that can include Edward Hopper's painting *New York Movie* along with a photograph of Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers escaping the realities of the depression by dancing across a 1935 confectioner's concept of Venice. A wondrous collection of images of the movie making process—production, screenwriting, directing, design, cinematography, editing, scoring, special effects and the star power that holds (held?) it all together—gorgeous images accompanied by a spare text mostly constructed from quotes of the movie makers. Did I say hokum? Hollywood a legend? Seems real to me!

Franco Zeffirelli is a director for those (and I am one) who prefer an approach that is based on lavish images and emotions rather than logical analysis of motivational detail. In his words. . . .

I'm always extremely wary of taking opera too literally, of trying for psychological insights through some sort of realism. Any truths that opera may have to teach us seem to me to emerge from the unreality. Short men in armour and large ladies in chiffon singing about ancient Egypt don't make much sense at one level—when elevated by music and grandeur they can absorb us and reveal to us the confusions of emotion and loyalty, the nature of power and pity, that could not be movingly expressed in any other way.

This quote is from **ZEFFIRELLI** an autobiography to which I am happy to apply all the words that his publishers will hope to hear—fascinating, enjoyable, entertaining, stimulating. If you want more such adjectives,

look them up in Roget and I am sure that I will agree.

If I declare that Franco Zeffirelli has been luckier than most, I am not referring to his talent but to the luck that has allowed him to remain alive to share it with us. His survival includes an early search for identity and a couple of firing squads, not to mention a car crash where he was for a time left for dead. But Zeffirelli always does things with style—the driver was Gina Lollobrigida. An early meeting with Visconti might also be classified as luck, but only in so far as it accelerated his career development at that particular point by placing him in a situation for intensive observation and discovery. With such a strong visual imagination supported by drawing skills and an ability to inspire people, success as a designer-director was surely inevitable.

I only lit one opera for Franco but he taught me a lot about integrating light with paint and varnishing with filters. The really great directors draw out the best in their casts and crews. They are totally supportive in a profession which alas has some other practitioners who tend to operate destructively, producing results which are only superficially successful. Zeffirelli handles people with just the right mixture of sincerity and old hokum. His book records much of the flavour of a theatric age now fading, adding to our understanding of the nature of the talent of such great artists as Callas, Olivier and Lila de Nobili. Not to forget that of Zeffirelli himself.

Forty years of **WELSH NATIONAL OPERA** are marked by a plump history book from Richard Fawkes. At two years to a chapter, this is a strict tempo chronology of the development of the company from an idea to an institution. An appendix lists the casts and conductor/director/designer teams for the hundred and forty or so productions, and the text discusses the genesis of each and every one of them together with a summary of critical and audience response. But the book is rather more than just a straight history. It is a story of determination versus deficits. People with vision and single-mindedness founding and developing a company against all odds. A universal story that could be an account of the ups and downs of any successful arts organisation in Britain.

The tale reads well. Richard Fawkes has a happy knack of selecting from contemporary reviews just the right phrase to catch the flavour of the performance. A developing organisation outgrows many of its key personnel from time to time. Fawkes understands this cycle-of-usefulness syndrome and charts very sympathetically how various people's strengths became inappropriate and the way personnel changes were brought about. He is very fair, serious and balanced towards the pros and cons of every such situation. Only once did I detect a slip in his mask of impartiality. Writing of a certain director who threatened several times to leave rehearsals and return home, he adds "The threat was always received by a chorus of offers to drive him to the airport." But then, as I have already suggested, this book is on a rather more universal theme than just Welsh National Opera!

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Another chronology of a national lyric company is to be enjoyed in **THE ROYAL BALLET**, Katherine Sorley Walker and Sarah C. Woodcock's picture history, now in a second revised edition timed to gladden Christmas for the new generation of balletomanes who have evolved since the book was first published in celebration of the Royal Ballet's fiftieth anniversary in 1981. The Company rightly dates itself from the first full evening of ballet at the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells theatres in 1931, and the book starts with 1920 images of the key figures, including Ninette de Valois, Frederick Ashton Constant Lambert and Billy Chappell, who were part of a surging gestation that almost made inevitable the emergence of a British ballet tradition.

Factually captioned photographs (over 300 of them) are linked chronologically by a spare text which records success and the people who generated it. If the Royal Ballet companies have known traumas and deficits, they are not mentioned here. But what comes through strongly, yet again, is that the only catalyst for creating performance companies is single minded determination on the part of dedicated individuals. Pictures and listings (productions, choreographers and dancers) combine to make an essential reference and an enjoyable browse.

While the movies do talk, as advertised, they haven't anything to say wrote an early critic of the talkers. That they were originally called talkers rather than talkies is the kind of detail revealed by Alexander Walker's **THE SHATTERED SILENTS** which chronicles the transitional years during which silence was tentatively then totally abandoned. "Quit while you've still got your looks and be thankful for the trust fund

that mother set up" is the sort of cable that Noel Coward might have sent—but it was advice to Norma Talmadge from her sister. A message whose generous wordage would not have met with approval from the studio who ordered the elimination of the word 'regards' from all telegrams as an economy measure as they grappled with budgeting for the new technology. Alexander Walker takes us chronologically through an intense three years, sifting the scattered evidence for a masterly reconstruction of a crazy period when the significant events overlapped in multiple layers due to the frenzied pace of development. Of the many strands in the tale, the most fascinating is perhaps the struggle for the art to absorb, yet overcome, the technology; particularly as film first succumbed to, and then freed itself from, the grips of "The Monitor Man"—a role of metaphorical significance for all technological developments in the arts!

Macmillan continue to provide expert help in getting to the core of dramatic texts. The contributors to the *Casebook* Series volume on **HAROLD PINTER** read like a roll call of the leading interpreters, commentators and critics of the post-war era. An essential contribution to the research programme of anyone concerned with preparing a staging of *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker* or *The Homecoming*.

The *Text & Performance* series analyses the text and considers interpretation on the basis of specific recent productions. Graham Nicholls considers **MEASURE FOR MEASURE** through the RSC of 1970 & 1975, Charles Marowitz's *Open Space* of 1975, and the BBC TV of 1979. He amply demonstrates the validity and practicality of this approach.

My copy of Rosco's **SUPERGEL GUIDE** arrived on the day that I had scheduled myself to gel a pantomime plan. So I decided that for the first time in my life I would colour an entire show with supergel. I was weaned on Strand gelatine and educated on Cinemoid. With maturity I increasingly introduced Roscolene. The arrival of high temperature filters brought confusion and frustration: lovely stuff, but Rosco and Strand opted for wildly different numbers for a product that appears to come from the same source (neither have formally agreed this—but then they have never denied it). When Cinemoid shrank to the point of losing even 61 and 38 (and nowhere can I find a 38 lookalike) I decided to call it a day: a decision softened by the disappearance of the word Cinemoid in one of these marketing flurries which may invigorate the sales force but don't half alienate we grandpas among the customers.

So I set about converting the cool/warm/neutral and tint/saturated codes on my plan into specific supergel numbers. The well tried ones were easy but for the rest I looked at the light transmission through the samples in my swatch book. I chose a lot of filters for the first time (after all, I do tell my students to live dangerously and take risks—artistically of course, not with ladders!) And in doing so I let my response to the coloured light be tempered by the advice in the *Supergel Guide*.

Did it work? I don't know yet, so this book review will have to be completed in CUE 45. Meanwhile why not get your own copy of the *Supergel Guide*: its free from Rosco.

**HOLLYWOOD: LEGEND AND REALITY.** Edited by Michael Webb. Pavilion Books (Michael Joseph) £25 (UK).

**ZEFFIRELLI.** The Autobiography of Francos Zeffirelli. Weidenfeld & Nicolson. £14.95 (UK).

**WELSH NATIONAL OPERA.** Richard Fawkes. Julia MacRae Books. £14.95 (UK).

**THE ROYAL BALLET: A PICTURE HISTORY.** Kathrine Sorley Walker and Sarah C. Woodcock. Threshold Books (Harraps). £9.95 (paperback) (UK).

**THE SHATTERED SILENTS.** How the Talkies Came to Stay. Alexander Walker. New edition. Harrap. £5.95 (Paperback) (UK).

**HAROLD PINTER:** *The Birthday Party*, *The Caretaker*, *The Homecoming*. Edited by Michael Scott. Macmillan (*Casebook* Series) £20 (UK) £6.95 (paperback) (UK). **MEASURE FOR MEASURE.** Graham Nicholls. Macmillan *Text & Performance* Series. £4.95 (UK) (paperback).

**SUPERGEL GUIDE.** Suggestions on How to Use Supergel Colour Filters. Also available as a poster. Roscolab Ltd. Free.

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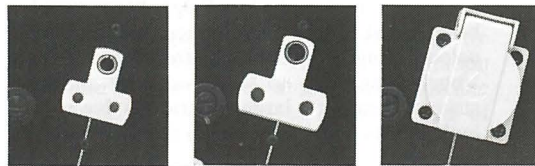
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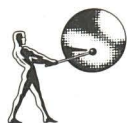
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# A 1961 DIARY

Twenty five years ago, on the First of November, FRANCIS REID embarked on a three week mission to find a new 'board' for Glyndebourne. He kept a diary.

## HAMBURG TOSCA

Auditorium architecture a good solution to sight lines while preserving intimacy, but doubts about decorative treatment—especially houselights. Wonderful depth from gauzes in Act I. Excellent dapple. Act 2 crude with rather nasty omni-directional yellow candle-light. Low ceiling and the false pros dropped low to frame the stage down to intimate room size—a very good example of the use of a typical German adjustable false proscenium. Act 3 had a black cloth cyc (with ridiculously bright stars) but it is difficult to get a good dawn on a black cyc.

## HAMBURG STAATSOPER BACKSTAGE

AEG 240-way thyatron board installed in 1956. Control desk in cabin off the OP lighting tower. Two presets which can be quickly reset via each lever's 4 adjustable levels memorised mechanically on adjustable cams. Master desk here and also duplicated in lighting box at the rear of the auditorium. Row Masters corresponding to the rows of circuits on the preset desks, plus fixed group masters for various stage and foh groupings. Circuits can also be grouped into a further three groups by means of illuminated push-buttons under each preset lever. For two of these groups there are cross-faders and it is by this means that most big cues are carried out. The control room also has a patch panel to allow transfer of batten circuits. Floats can be raised or lowered by remote buttons from this room. No I Bridge in two levels: large lamps on top level and low-voltage (used a great deal for follow) on lower level. These low voltage have a small potentiometer fitted to rear of each lamp for fading by operator. Towers have soft-edge spots next to stage and 500w ellipsoidals offstage. Side galleries in abundance. There are 5 foh bridges in the auditorium ceiling and a side slot each side of the pit, running full height. 80 foh are mixed 5k and 2k. All stage mechanics are hydraulic including a main lift in sections, sliding rear and side stages, and flying bars.

## HAMBURG FIGARO

Watched Acts 1, 2, & 3 from the lighting cabin and adjoining tower. Act I inside lift so that in first change it dropped below bringing Act 2 into position on top. Act 3 rolled down on rear stage and Act 4 came in two sections from the sliding side stages. Saw last act from foh lighting box. Master desk not used but cues given from here by microphone count-down to the other (hidden) master desk! Acts 1-3 in open white, Act 4 with lots and lots (? too much) blue dapple. Follow spots move discreetly but too bright and too flat.

## HAMBURG BALLETABEND

Watched Romeo and Juliet from backstage. Again the cues operated from the backstage lighting cabin, talked down by the Beleuchtungsinspektor from the foh box: he did not use his own masters and this seemed a pity

as some of the fading seemed visually rough to me, although operated strictly to time. Huge nasty gold set. Strange blobs of pink and yellow in otherwise open white full-up. Lifts used a lot for making levels. Transistor walkie-talkies for re-setting in changes. Primitive portable upstage lighting towers—wooden wheeled rostra with stands screwed down.

## HAMBURG THALIA THEATER

Refurbished 1960. A Schauspielhaus playing drama repertoire. Not a city or state theatre but privately owned with partial subsidy. The board is the standard Siemens Magnetic Amplifiers operated through a motorised desk as installed in many theatres including Berlin, Mannheim, Salzburg, Nurnberg etc and will be fitted on all stages of the new Sydney Opera House. This example is 120-way with 4 presets setting the motorised levers of the main desk via clutches and polarised relays. Control desk situated at the back of the circle in room next to sound control room. Main desk has one dimmer lever per circuit and can be moved through a clutch and motor drive to a limit provided either by (a) a physical stop on the control scale or (b) a polarised relay controlled limit which is servo-operated from the preset desk. This presetting desk has 4 small preset levers per circuit. As these levers are close together and very small, they are made to rise in a gate by means of a master wheel, one preset at a time. Above the window there is a switch panel allowing any circuit to be grouped to one of three masters. Master controls (motor 'go' and 'speed', and group masters) are placed together on the master desk which has telephone and microphone communications to the lighting crew. The sound control cabin is equipped on a scale completely undreamed of in any British theatre. Microphone and loud-speaker patching facilities. Mixers, faders and studio-quality tapedecks. Stage has normal bridges and towers. Many pneumatic-electric colour changing mechanisms from Reiche and Vogel. Stage has no large side/rear sliding stage system but a large electric revolve with built-in lifts which rotate with the revolve.

## BERLIN

Seat in the stalls. I like the grey and yellow auditorium although the houselights are horrid. I like the open plan foyers and the pebble wall. I seem to be the only person in Berlin who does. Three-tiered baroque balconies built over both sides of the orchestra for the second chorus who comment during scene changes. Lots of lovely sepia. Singing fair but no conception of Handelian style in acting, singing or orchestra. But Handel will never be recognised as one of the operatic greats until Glyndebourne takes him in hand. The lights and stage management don't seem to tie up very well.

## THEATRE DES WESTENS: MY FAIR LADY

Stood at the back of first circle for act one. Sets, after Beaton, on revolve. Lighting pretty ghastly. Foh positions poor, wonder how they managed when the opera were here. Orchestra good musicians but style incredibly square for this music. Coordination between SM & lights very bad. Eliza and Doolittle fair, rest not for me. But audience wildly enthusiastic. Auditorium very poor design for its period: rather nasty in a Moss Empire sort of way.

## DEUTSCHE OPER: COSI FAN TUTTE

For me, Cosi is the Ebert Cosi and this was a good one (more the Cosi I remember from the Edinburgh Festivals of the late 1940s than our 1959 Glyndebourne production). Lighting good and recognisably Ebert . . . I mean this in the best sense. One cannot always apply logic to Ebert lighting but when it works it is excellent. Production very familiar and as Glyndebourne ground plan. Glyndebourne can teach the Deutsche Oper (1) ensemble singing and (2) wig dressing.

## REICHE UND VOGEL

Shown around factory and showroom by Herr Heinrich whom I met at the ABTT Conference in London last summer. Very impressed by 500w ellipsoidals—manipulation of iris, shutters, focus much easier than in pattern 23. Can rotate the shuttered mask-shape through 360 degrees. Low-voltage spots good, near parallel beam, very high intensity for the wattage (transformer built-in). These are the lanterns that Lila de Nobili and Zeffirelli enthuse about. I think Glyndebourne ought to try them on the booms (foh & stage). Good 2kW effects projector (flames don't go in a circle). Looked at all kinds of spots up to 5kW. Germans are swapping their horizon floods for fluorescent tubes, especially the blues, but I am not satisfied that the colour quality is good or the control flicker-free. Fortunately Glyndebourne cyc is so far away from the acting area that we do not have the normal intensity problems. Factory is very much a matter of individual craftsmen rather than mass production.

## DEUTSCHE OPER BACKSTAGE

Tour with Technical Director Birr. Standard cruciform layout of four stages: main, left, right and rear (including revolve). Rear and side sliding stages cut-off by iron curtains when not actually moving. Main stage sectioned in lifts. Usual adjustable proscenium carrying twin-level bridge and side lighting towers. Approx 90 counterweight lines, alternately hand and electrically operated. The lighting control desk is in a cabin on the OP perch, far too small and so the desks have been built vertically rather than horizontally which seems to make operation more difficult. Takes a lot of men to work and they seem to get in each others way. A small master desk faces the



stage with a view whose restriction varies with the scenery design; important and non-important levers are grouped together and this is bad. The masters are repeated in the producer's box at the back of the auditorium. Large amount of lighting equipment can slide along special tracks on the fly-rail. Specially made portable towers 16' to 18' with access ladders.

Sound control cabin with elaborate input and output patching. This has been placed foh. . . seems to me that it is more important for light control to occupy this position if space is restricted.

Workshop and scene docks fantastic. Paint shop has galleries suspended from the ceiling so that painters can look at their work from a distance as it lies on the ground. Seems to me that there are too many uncoordinated control desks in flies, wings, understage etc. The lack of performance coordination suggests too much departmental independence.

### **DON GIOVANNI**

This is the production that opened the theatre. Watched partly from stage and partly from production box in auditorium. One person giving light cues over a microphone from score while lighting director talks to bridge and tower operators by radio. The coordination between lights and scenery extraordinarily bad: like Hamburg there are master faders in the production box but, like Hamburg, they don't use them. This is quite beyond me. In Anna's aria before the supper scene there was disaster. In setting up the lighting behind the cloth, the operator also changed over the foh, getting blackout plus two strange blue shapes. It took all of 20 seconds to restore the light. Not surprised that this happened because the layout of the master desk is very bad, without easy differentiation of levers. Relatively insignificant ones are mixed up with important ones. Many of the stage pictures were lovely although frequently spoiled by staircases which were Festival of Britain/Coffee Bar rather than Mozart/Spain/Da Ponte.

For a newly opened opera house this is a technical marvel but I do not feel that the whole technical problem has been approached from the right angle: performance control. No doubt it will all settle down in six months.

### **VIENNA STAATSOPER**

Toured theatre and watched part of Carmelites from stage and switchboard, a Bordoni on the PS perch, arranged on grandmaster principles facing stage with master control at onstage end from where chief operator has an excellent view. The Bordoni has about 280 circuit levers which can be individually locked on (manually). Manual stops can be preset to levels but the cue is motor driven. Watching a simple fade to blackout at the end of one scene and come up on the next scene, I noticed that 5 men were required. The control perch also has the clockface dials and motor controls for the remotely driven spots on the upstage bars, used principally for backlighting. Interesting assortment of lanterns from many sources including Kliegels, Patt 23s, Reiche & Vogel and the Viennese manufacturer Pani who started by making special designs for the Staatsoper, including very interesting low voltage mirror spots. Had a good solid 2-hour discussion with Dr Rotter, the Chief Engineer. He has many theories on switchboards and has examined most of the systems. This helped to clear my mind on a number of points.

Interested to find how afraid he was of electro-mechanical systems. He feels that Bordoni (for which he has great affection) has now been replaced by the magnetic amplifier and will ultimately be replaced by the SCR, but not yet.

### **NURNBERG SCHAUSPIELHAUS**

New Siemens installation in 1000 seat drama theatre converted from a cinema by addition of stage tower. No elaborate stage but large docks for truck storage. Standard Siemens mag-amp system in foh box. Experimental SCR dimmers in use on a couple of circuits.

### **NURNBERG OPERNHAUS**

Old theatre adjacent to Schauspielhaus and run in conjunction. Work in progress to replace Bordoni with mag-amps during next summer recess. Dimmer room being formed under stage with deep cabling channels included in the concrete. Pleasant theatre—noted that while rehearsing it is very useful to raise orchestra pit lift so that pianist and conductor can be in touch with the stage (a facility available in Britain, as far as I know, only in Glasgow Alhambra and Manchester Opera House).

### **FÜRTH STADTTHEATER**

Delightful old multi-boxed small theatre. The Nurnberg company give about 4 performances a week (opera, operetta, ballet and plays), some transferred from Nurnberg and some like this performance of 'Albert Herring' specially produced for Fürth because it requires an intimate theatre. Production not nearly as bad as Britten fears when his operas come under German producers. Orchestra in period costumes and bowler hats. Promptress sat in OP box in costume and was so hissingly audible that I was thankful to be on the PS side of the stalls. Simple sets against a black surround. Lighting rough open whites but quite effective in a primitive sort of way. I wonder if we sometimes try to be too smooth in our lighting. Singing not very accurate but some characterisation good. Whole evening spoiled musically by sluggish tempi. I know Herring fairly well from my English Opera Group days and some bits were for a moment unrecognisable due to strange interpretation. Went to bed wishing that Glyndebourne would (a) commission a new opera from Britten and (b) try to persuade him to relax his rule of conducting Mozart only at Aldeburgh.

### **SIEMENS AT ERLANGEN**

Research department of Siemens Theatre Lighting Division. In the demonstration theatre I was shown a somewhat horrible sequence of light cues to music (a sort of dusk/night/storm/dawn sequence performed on cut-out scenery against a cyc). They apologised for this in advance, saying that they were not artists but electro-technicians: I find this a wrong attitude. . . . how can they design a control desk if they do not bear in mind artistic performance requirements? Saw the magnetic amplifier dimmers and was able to test, personally, their load independence from 15w to 5kW. I think that there can be little doubt that the Siemens Magnetic Amplifier is the finest dimmer on the world market today. It occupies the position which the Bordoni transformer held until 5 or 6 years ago. But, and it is a large BUT, I am not at all happy with the system of control in their installations, ie the use of an electro-magnetic clutch lever. One of the great advantages of an all-electrical system is that you can not only

eliminate moving parts but can have proportional dimming. It seems to me that if you are going to have clutches it is better to do as Strand do and put the clutches at the dimmer and not the desk.

I had a long argument on this point with the Siemens engineers but found that one cannot really talk to them in terms of the needs of stage lighting control. They are thoroughly committed to this piece of engineering. I was told that whereas my professionally trained eye could detect the difference between proportional and non-proportional fades, the audience could not. I asked whether they could make a desk to our requirements to operate their magnetic amplifiers. They said this was impossible as their factory was geared to standard production. They said that Mannheim would convince me that their system was the best. . . and anyway, they said, look at all the theatres that are satisfied with our equipment. This was rather an impasse because it is rather difficult to tell them that what may be good enough for Berlin, Salzburg, Prague, Copenhagen, Stockholm, Sydney and the Bolshoi may not necessarily be right for Glyndebourne.

I should perhaps add that my discussions with Siemens, in spite of the above account, were friendly and amicable! I had a particularly nice lunch with Herr Kolbe, the Chief of the Theatre Department. We agreed as to the supremacy of the magnetic amplifier (with the reservation on my part that it might be necessary for financial reasons in non-state-subsidised theatres to use a simpler transducer dimmer for the fixed load circuits). We agreed about the unsuitability of thyratrons (from an efficiency and expense point of view, although at the purely laboratory level they have possibly the best performance characteristic.) He said that Siemens would not launch SCR for at least 2 years as they had not solved the problem of current surges.

### **MUNICH CUVILLIESTHEATER**

Delicious theatre but perhaps a teeny bit too clean and sparkling. Chandeliers go out of sightlines on motor winches as they fade. Enjoyable performance of 'Seraglio'. As expected, lighting troubles due to the difficulty of finding places for lanterns in such an auditorium. Mainly from top centre above principal box and therefore very flat. However the production deliberately kept actors upstage. Lighting in general rather rough: good ideas, good sculpting, but individual lanterns needed tidying up. A couple of sheets of frost would have worked wonders. Blues particularly primitive in the last act.

### **SALZBURG LANDESTHEATER**

Theatre recently decorated and very pleasant indeed and intimate. 'Der Vogelhandler'. Singing positively evil but orchestra playing rather good. Chorus were not trying (they had already sung a matinee of the same piece) and were completely inaudible. A permanent set with changes contrived with simple flown pieces of little imagination. Lighting coarse but plastic—itching to tidy it up with a few scraps of frost, but in doing so I expect I would have lost its individual quality. Usual soft-edge following from the bridge: pity that the spot used had a badly adjusted mirror which contrived to give actors a halo when they stood against a flat. Also this spot had a very nasty filament striation. This may all sound depressing but there were some jolly good tunes.

I had just eaten a very fine Schnitzel and thoroughly enjoyed the evening.

#### **NEW FESTSPIELHAUS**

This is the best lighting layout I have ever seen. The bridges, towers, galleries have the best possible relationship to the acting area for getting lanterns into ideal lighting positions. Some Reiche and Vogel, some Strand and a lot of Pani: Right proportion and disposition of soft and hard edge types. Upstage lighting bars have remote control of pan, tilt and focus, preset by polarised relays. Board is a 300way Siemens Mag Amp. The famous hole blasted into the rock face behind the stage to allow back projection is not used for projection which is all frontal: however it makes a good, if expensive, dock. Two rolling cycloramas (one large and one small). 8 Electricians in winter rising to 36 for the festival. Electricians storeroom for spare lanterns had nearly enough spots to completely equip Glyndebourne, but then the electricians workshop was nearly as big as the Glyndebourne stage. Auditorium not at all my taste. . .but then how does one build this size of theatre in a contemporary style?

#### **STUTTART STAATSTHEATER**

Comforting to be on an old stage after so many shining new buildings. . .pleasant to walk old well-worn boards. Although old, well equipped with wagons to left, right and rear. The board is an ancient AEG auto-transformer, built on the PS perch with tracker wires to an adjacent dimmer room which includes some splendid examples of the brass and mahogany age of switchboard and construction. Board normally worked by two men. Watched Eugene Onegin from the board. Grid was absolutely clear of all other shows so that three-dimensional pieces could be flown. Wonderful that these German theatres have such high fly towers that it is possible to light all the acting area from the first bridge position; and also possible to cover a cyc with projections from this bridge. Set changes very smooth with everyone knowing exactly what they were doing although this was a new production at the end of last season and has only had a few rep performances since. I was impressed by the sensitive operation of the board. Despite its age and inconvenience they were getting good results. . .limited perhaps, but well-executed within the limitations of the equipment. Whereas in some theatres with new equipment poor results are achieved because of the way that the operators handle their equipment.

#### **MANNHEIM NATIONALTHEATER**

Built 1957, two theatres in one building, sharing facilities, dressing rooms, technical staffs, workshops, storage etc. In the large house (1200 seats) the lighting bridge has 4 levels and carries 60 spots and the grid is so high that scenery can be flown sufficiently clear for all 4 levels to reach upstage. Control room at back of stalls with superb view of the stage. Standard 240-way Siemens but with 8 presets rather than just 4. Watched performance of 'Lohengrin' from here: quite an elaborate plot with a good deal of projection of swans and heavenly rays. Impressive to see such a complex plot so relaxedly handled by one operator. Was almost converted to a Siemens board tonight but logic prevailed and I still feel that it is just a large board made small, rather than the new control philosophy that must develop from the possibilities of all-

electric dimming. Offstage bridal chorus produced from tape and fade-away so excellent in quality that I am sure I would have been 'taken in'.

#### **MANNHEIM KLEINES HAUS**

The small theatre is an experimental space which can be converted into various shapes including complete in-the-round. No flying tower but system of lines and adaptable proscenium. Foyer is rear part of the auditorium, and motorised tabs shut off huge floor to ceiling windows during the performance. Watched Priestly's 'Ever Since Paradise' from the board: an episodic play which would have been operator torture on anything but a preset board. Here its operation was quite straightforward although much of the actual lighting was not to my taste.

#### **AEG AT FRANKFURT**

Lunch, rather superbly, at the top of the AEG skyscraper with Werner Schott of AEG who chose the parallel path to mag amps for dimmer development. Thyratrons (back to back pairs rather than Strand's trio of one per phase) now being phased out in favour of SCRs: a 6-way system on trial at Frankfurt opera for 6 months is the prototype for 60-ways planned for Frankfurt and then Koblenz. The standard desks will be 4-preset and 120 ways are likely to cost £30,000.

#### **FRANKFURT SCHAUSPIELHAUS**

An enormous revolve, only about one-quarter revealed in the proscenium arch. Board is motorised Bordoni with the speed controls and motor switches set in a tiny cabin within the orchestra rail so that the operator has a complete, if rather low and close, view of the stage. The 6-way experimental SCR unit replaces 6 Bordoni circuits with quick change-over switches in case of failure. I tried it with lamps of different loads and it seemed fine, although AEG confessed not yet fully happy about the waveform. Evening Ballet had some good lighting.

#### **NEW TV STUDIOS**

Not yet completed, but dimmers will be motorised ring transformers controlled from a 2 preset desk with each lever having 20 presettable levels selected mechanically by cams(!)

#### **COLOGNE OPERNHAUS**

Everywhere I go 'Fidelio' is announced for yesterday or tomorrow. And so its 'Pulcinella' and 'Miraculous Mandarin'. An evening which was a good example of German dance which is very interesting so long as it keeps to music-theatre: it seems to fail with tuttu-pretty pieces. Did not go backstage: I have seen the plans and it represents the sort of orthodoxy about which I am becoming quite blasé!

#### **GELSENKIRCHEN STADTTHEATER**

This is the centre of Germany's glass industry so this 1959 theater makes much use of glass in its exterior treatment. Auditorium is completely black except for grey-white boxes and charcoal seating. This makes a very un-festive house when the audience are coming in but is wonderful for lighting since there is no reflection from the auditorium walls. Two false proscenium sets of bridge and towers: the first is fixed but the second can travel up and downstage and can sink! Portable hydraulic lighting towers rise to 9(?) metres. Board is 120-way ASEA-Graham from Sweden with 6 presets controlling mag amp dimmers. Saw part of 'Carmen' and did some of the cues

myself. International beer and theatre technology conference until 2am.

#### **MUNSTER STADTTHEATER**

Came to see the 120-way version of the AEG thyatron board, watching it deal with 'Der Waffenschmeid' in a dire production. Three weeks ago I would have been amazed by the stage: now I take it for granted. And so only note direct passage from the control to the stage without going into any audience areas.

#### **BRUSSELS NATIONAL THEATRE**

Opened a month ago. Much closer to British practice. No great mechanics, although German style bridges and towers.

#### **BRUSSELS MONNAIE**

A Sonnambula by a scratch Italian ensemble with lighting as strange as some of the singing. Stage without wing space with bridge and towers contrived from scaffolding. ADB auto-transformers from tracker wires on the OP perch.

#### **ADB FACTORY AND LABS**

New factory, everything made on site. Impressive photometric lab. Experimental punch-card board with three transient memories to remember three complete cues which can be permanently recorded on punch cards. The engineers are wonderful in this organisation. They talk earnestly about their work and they refer it all back to the first principles of lighting all the time. All their research is geared in terms of control requirement rather than mere technical feasibility.

#### **LIEGE OPERA**

This theatre has of all the installations I have seen the system which approaches closest to the ideal control which I have been carrying in the back of my mind. It has mag amps and six presets without any motors. When I worried about how quickly the presets could be reset, the operators demonstrated how easy it was in practice.

#### **DAY 22**

Get on the plane feeling that unless Strand can do something at the dimmer end, ADB will be favourite for Glyndebourne.

#### **POSTSCRIPT**

Strand's SCR (now called thyristor) dimmer was a triumph and Fred Bentham, reversing the habit of a lifetime, agreed that this customer, while not actually being acknowledged as right, might be permitted to specify his own preferred form of control desk.

# Taking Australia's Oldest Theatre into the Twentyfirst Century

D. C. IRVING

For Australians, restoration of theatres is not a frequent occurrence, and restoration of old theatres is even rarer, due to the lack of such buildings still extant, with the notable exception of Her Majesty's Theatre Perth which was fully restored some years ago. The topic of this piece is another, older and smaller theatre which is the oldest in Australia, being foundation stoned in late 1834, and in which the first public performance was March 1837. This is the Theatre Royal Hobart, a building of great interest to theatre building historians as it has undergone numerous re-constructions and changes in its 150 years, reaching its present auditorium form in 1911/12 from a redesign by William Pitt of Melbourne, followed by re-furbishment and the addition of 4 boxes in 1952 by Yuncken Freeman Architects, and later, a workshop/dressing room/office block was added behind the main stage rear wall.

These changes were all to the good, but the stage house remained constructed of stone walls, covered by a wooden truss supported hipped roof which allowed only

limited flying by unassisted maritime techniques, using snatch blocks tied to handy beams between trusses. The fire curtain when raised, nearly touched the inside of the roof cladding and even then its installation at some unknown date had necessitated a rather ugly rigid infill to the top of the nearly square proscenium. The added problems of restricted wing space bounded by historic bluestone walls and stage access from the rear only, produced a continual mumbling about bringing the stage more in line with other theatres, to facilitate touring as well as local productions.

Funds were allocated to the redecoration of the house in time for the 150th anniversary, but not for any improvement to technical areas. Whether or not the resident ghost had a hand in it or not will never be known, but on 18th June 1984 a fire started in the stage area of the empty theatre which quickly burned out the whole centre section of the building, causing smoke and heat damage to the newly painted auditorium before the fire curtain came in. Insurance companies and bureaucratic systems moved

fast—a temporary corrugated iron wall filled in the proscenium, more galvanised sheeting at truss lower chord level kept the weather off the gutted stage, and the painters and upholsterers brought back to re-do the auditorium. But, what of the vital stage area? A harder problem this, the subject of several visits and reports by various persons (this scribe included) and much debate over briefs, requirements and of course, funding.

Happily, although a special appeal contributed reasonably, Government funding eventually ensured the continued existence of the building, and, with the architects, Forward Consultants of Hobart we were retained to advise on the modernized stage and associated works. As can be seen from the photograph, the area was not left in a good state, hence the whole roof, gallery system and floor had to be replaced. It was therefore decided to incorporate a grid at 16m above stage with working height above, and a single purchase counterweight system. To achieve maximum usable wing space, without being able (or even wanting)

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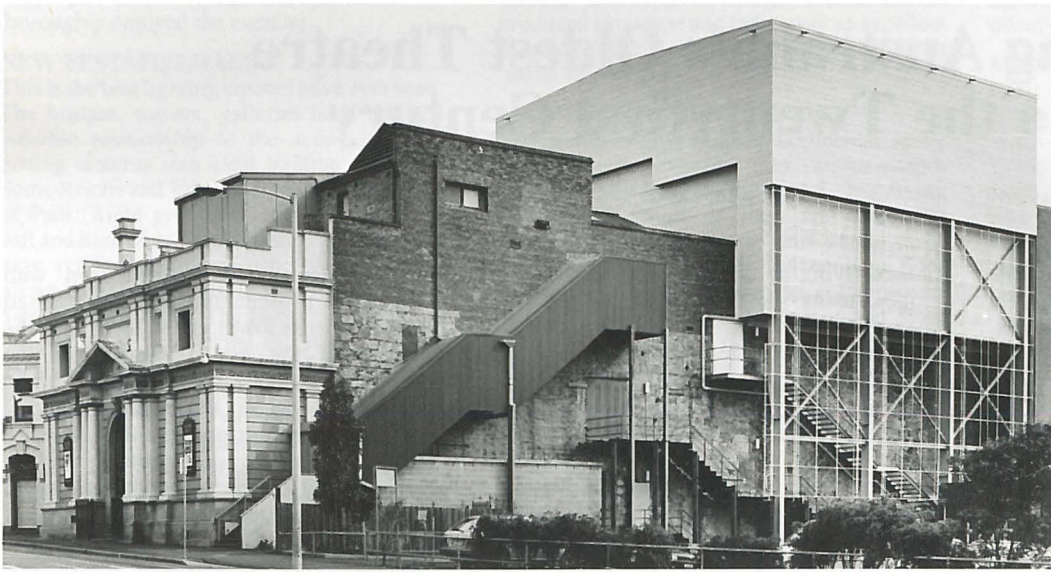
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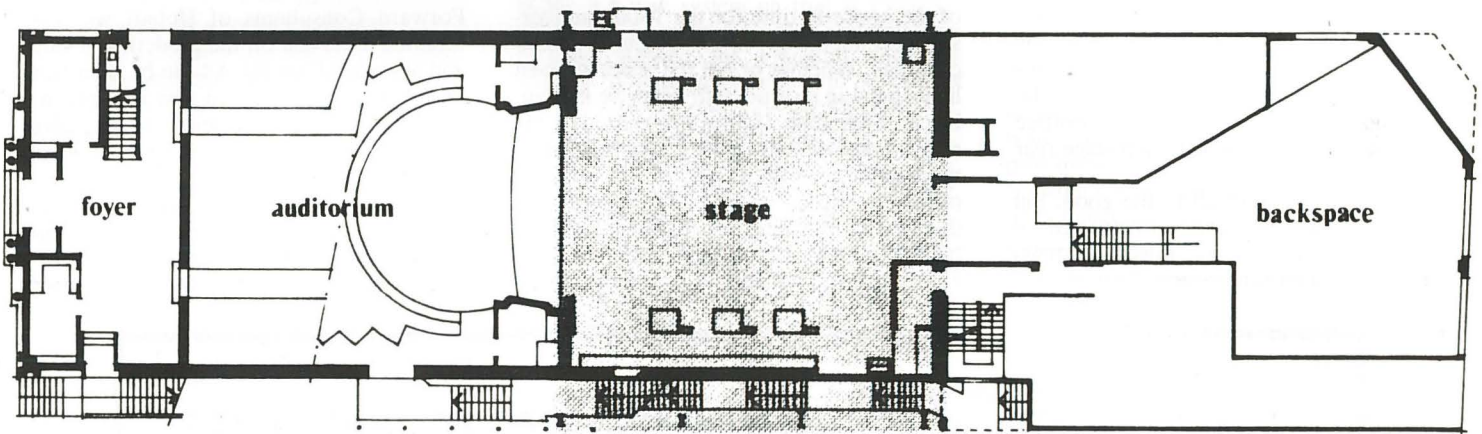
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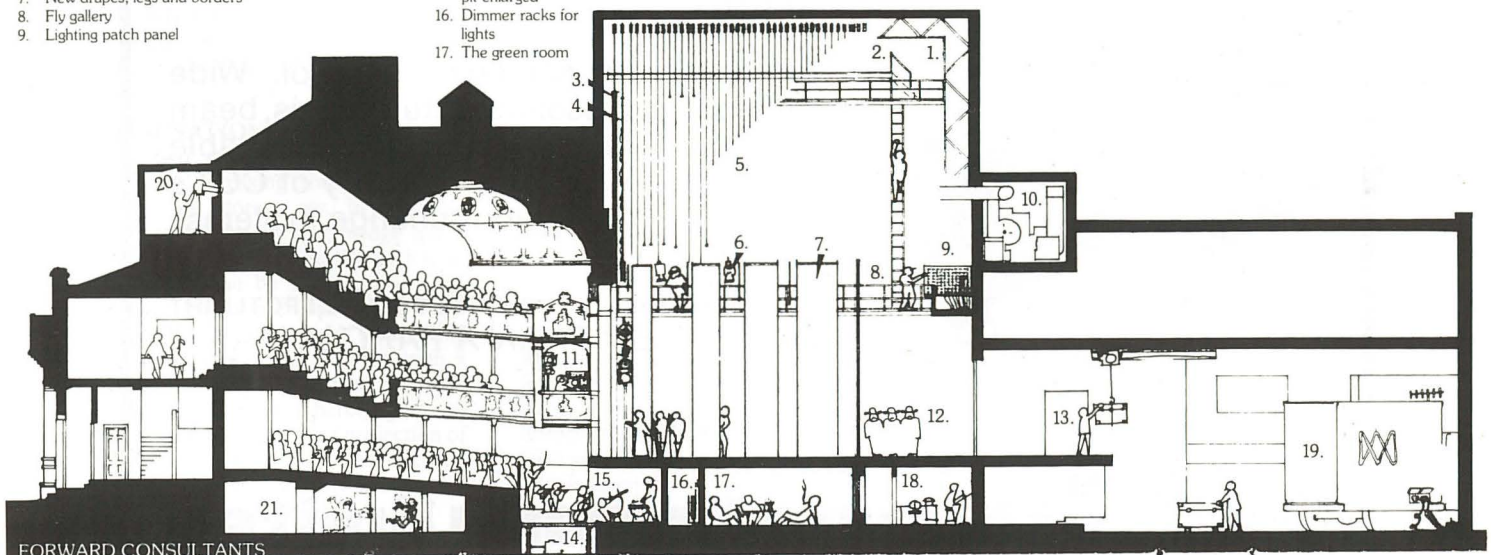
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| 3. Fire Curtain                                    | 12. Backstage: waiting to go on                          | 20. Follow spots                                |
| 4. House Curtain                                   | 13. Scenery loading bay and hoist                        | 21. Tourists looking for Ghosts in "The Shades" |
| 5. Counterweight scenery flying                    | 14. Pit hoist raises floor to stage level                |   |
| 6. New Stage lighting                              | 15. 35 piece orchestra pit enlarged                      |   |
| 7. New drapes, legs and borders                    | 16. Dimmer racks for lights                              |   |
| 8. Fly gallery                                     | 17. The green room                                       |   |



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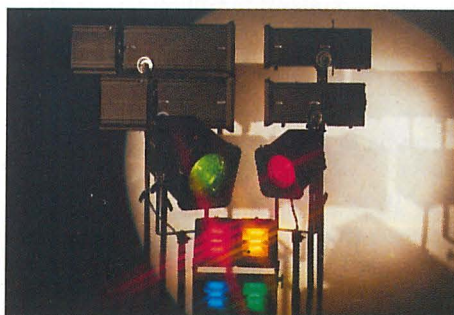
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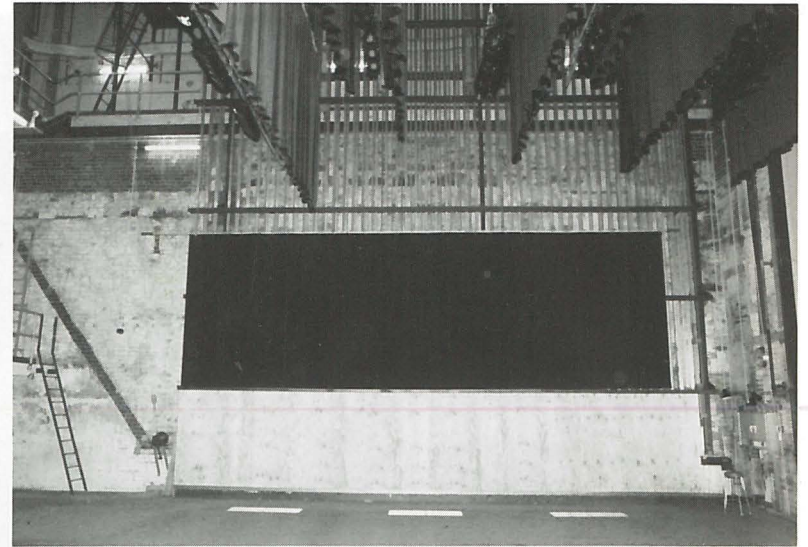
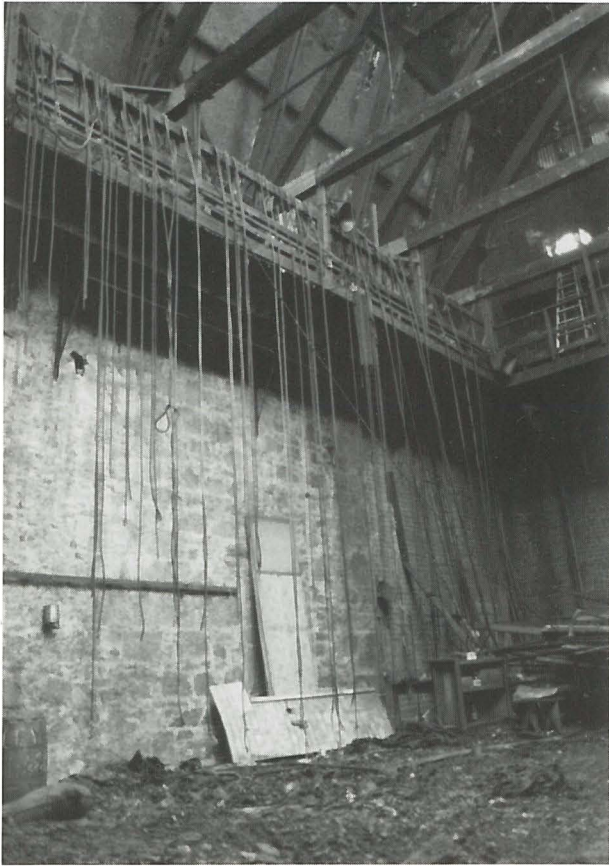
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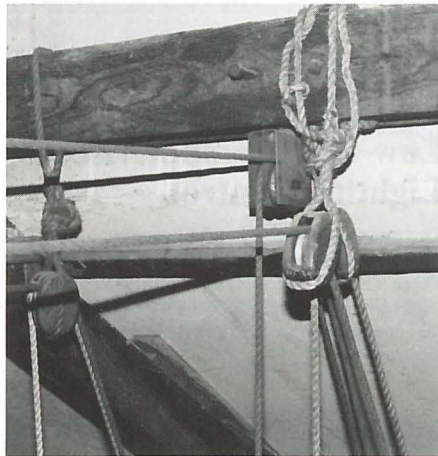
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- ▲ Prompt side showing counterweight guides behind side masking and stage level guard panels. Fly gallery just visible at top of picture behind guides.
- ◀ Looking upstage OP after the fire, showing old timber roof trusses between which scenery was flown on hand lines



Lighting patch panel – Australian style.



Example of pre-fire snatch block hand lines.

to disturb the above mentioned 150 year old walls, the solution was to build a steel structure free standing outside and above the old building, and mount the fly galleries just over the level of the bluestone. It had been originally planned to put the counterweights on OP side, with a loading door upstage, but planning permission was not obtained due to the narrow side street, so the weights and guides had to be on prompt side. To improve stage volume, the fly gallery, hence the flying operation and rope locking are offstage of the guides. Although unusual, it was agreed that the method is better than the cumbersome alternative of double purchase counterweights.

Another regulatory outcome adding considerably to the cost, is the provision of 70° caged ladders or stairways for access to

galleries and grid. These take up a lot of space and in our view are very much a nuisance compared with simple vertical ladders.

Location of lighting FOH, and control gear for lighting and sound posed difficulties, as we were anxious not to disturb the auditorium any more than necessary. First step was to remove existing ugly 'temporary' box booms, circle front bracketry and cables, replacing them with more discreetly mounted bars and flush outlets. Then, it was thought, lighting control (Avab 204 to 80 JTM dimmers, mostly existing before the fire) in one circle box, and audio in the other. Later discussion with a newly re-constituted Theatre Royal Board indicated a wish to free both boxes for either audience or performers use on occasions. A small duct space at the rear of the circle was found and converted to lighting control (does this remind you of anywhere Fred Bentham?), audio being relocated in a cramped position under a stair landing downstage OP. There are however, tie lines from there to P corner and OP box for alternative control points.

A two ring SM intercom system to technical areas, dressing rooms and front of house, with programme relay and recall bell completes the re-equipment, not forgetting that there is a connection point for intercom and the AVAB in centre stalls for rehearsal purposes.

Perhaps it is best to allow the photographs to tell their own story, and let you share our pleasure in helping a grand old theatre into a continued happy existence. Our thanks are due to the Tasmanian Department of Construction, and to Forward Consultants for assistance for this short article. Anyone interested in more details on the theatre's history is referred to 'Theatre Buildings in Australia to 1905' by Ross Thorne, or 'A History of the Theatre Royal' by Dr. Michael Roe.

FRANCIS REID VISITS

## THE THEATRES OF POMPEII

Roman theatre remains are to be found all around the mediterranean. As far as I can ascertain, the ones which are most complete (or perhaps it would be more accurate to say less incomplete) are those at Sabratha in Libya and Merida in Spain. Until Libya becomes a less traumatic area for tourism, Sabratha will have to remain but a tantalising hope for a future journey; however I have positive plans to combine Roman Merida with eighteenth century Almagro. Meanwhile my feeling for Roman performance conditions slowly builds up as I sit on a series of tiered stones that have known Roman bottoms, strut upon variously fragmented stages which once supported the thespians of the ancient world or contemplate the records made by painters of what they thought they saw.

A visit to Pompeii adds a new dimension to that search for the elusive nature of Roman theatric experience. Here we have theatres in the context of a city whose people they served. We can leave the houses, walk along the streets, visit the shops, pass through the forum and take our seats in the theatre. We need to choose which one because the Romans tended to build their theatres in pairs. (A tradition currently active in the German Stadtheater practice of and adjacent Grosses Haus and Kleines Haus.) Or if we seek a more gutsy entertainment, there is an amphitheatre down the road.

Our knowledge of ancient theatres is more extensive in plan than in elevation. Foundations are often reasonably complete and there is frequently a clear indication of the audience seating arrangements, particularly when built into the natural slope of a hillside. But as we move upwards from the floor, our knowledge of the structure has to be based increasingly upon speculation. The stage buildings, inevitably, have mostly disappeared: the slow disintegration of time accelerated by removal of building materials for recycling elsewhere.

In Pompeii the agent of destruction was also a means of preservation. Although the volcanic fall-out from Vesuvius sliced off the topmost layers of the city's buildings, it also preserved the remains by placing the site under a very effective planning blight. Redevelopment was totally inhibited by up to twenty feet of ash, combined with the fear engendered by folk memory of the apocalyptic nature of the destruction. The combination of a volcanic activity which included debris, poisonous gases and a blacked-out sun, with lightning, earthquakes and tidal

waves, contained virtually every phenomenon ever associated with the wrath of the gods—an event over which Vesuvius maintained a grumbling presence throughout subsequent centuries.

One of the joys of Italy is that their architectural heritage is so extensive that they have no alternative but to treat it casually. Somehow the general unkempt air of Pompeii, the weeds, even the occasional fugitive squashed coke can, promotes a feeling of reality. Imagination completes the picture in a way that a full restoration never could. Visiting the theatres is primarily a revelation of scale. Not just the way in which they are scaled to catalyse the actor-audience experience, but their relationship with the city's public, commercial and domestic buildings and road system.

The large theatre of Pompeii was originally built in the Greek form around 200BC, undergoing a number of transformations into the Roman with the remodelling probably being just before the destruction of Pompeii—the city underwent considerable reconstruction following an earthquake just five years before the great Vesuvius eruption. The experience of sitting in the auditorium has similarities to visiting a Georgian theatre whose thrust has been removed. The audience tiers focus on the orchestra whereas in the final decades of Pompeii the actors had retreated to the stage and the audience had infiltrated the vacated space.

The feeling of intimacy is strong even when one sits in near solo occupancy: with a full house of 5000 the atmosphere must have been quite claustrophobic. Facilities for modern performances have been provided in a very simple way that does not intrude. Steel framing allows the stage to be floored and the seating tier gaps filled by supporting temporary timber planking. These steel ribs do not hide any of the original structure: indeed they act rather like a line drawing in emphasising shape. The rust, being compatible with the generally weathered aspect of the site, helps to keep this modern material from intruding. Interestingly, the gentle weathering of Pompeii often imparts something of a romantic ambience, rather as if one is viewing classical remains through the eyes of the early romanticism of an eighteenth century pastoral. This is particularly so in the smaller theatre (or *Odeon*) which has some rather fetching greenery climbing over the stage wall, together with weeds implanted amidst the stones so randomly yet delicately

that one is reminded of the theatres which were constructed as ruins in eighteenth century gardens by noble ladies who liked to play shepherdess.

The Odeon is a beautifully proportioned space, scaled for music, mime and recitation. It was roofed whereas the larger theatre had only an enormous *velarium* canopy which protected the seating area from sun and rain. (It was supported by poles fastened in rings which can still be seen behind the topmost seating row.) The Odeon is a purely Roman theatre whereas the larger theatre developed out of the original Greek one on the site.

In both theatres it takes little imagination to recreate the reality of the original *cavea* where the audience sat. It is the architectural backing to the stage—the *scaenae frons* with its doors, niches and statues—that can only be a conjectural image. However there is enough wall structure remaining to allow satisfactory speculation based on the various wall painting fragments that remain elsewhere as an illustration of standard Roman practice.

Curiously though, I found that the influences which fed my own imagination most strongly while sitting in these Pompeii theatres were the renaissance architects who sought to rediscover the staging conditions of the ancients. The *scaenae frons* of Palladio in Vicenza, the outwardly turned ends to the seating of Scamozzi in Sabionetta and the orchestral entrance doors of Aleotti in Parma (all from the renaissance and still existing today)—these helped me to flesh out the marvellously scaled ruins of Pompeii. None of these renaissance theatre builders were able to include Pompeii in



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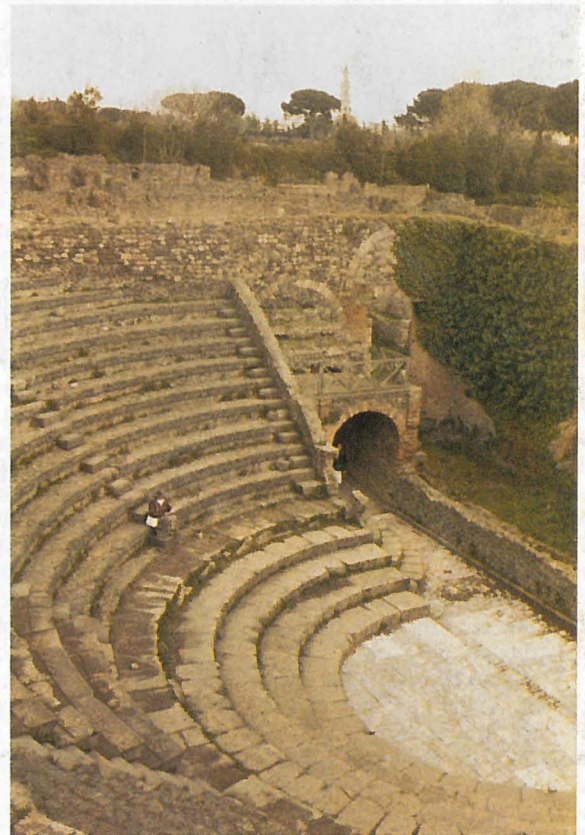
◀ The 'Theatre District' of Pompeii. *Teatro Grande* is seen left of the picture with the smaller *Odeon* on the right.



Teatro Grande.



Anfiteatro.



Odeon.

their researches although they had access to the books of Vitruvius and to sites such as the roman theatre in Verona. It is all part of the glorious jigsaw which is a major pleasure of theatric tourism.

At the edge of the city is the **Anfiteatro**. This is the oldest known Roman amphitheatre and, unlike the later ones, has no underground 'dressing rooms' for the animals, victims or gladiators who trained in the adjacent gymnasium and swimming pool. A positive arena wall normally protected the 12,000 spectators from any excesses of the performers except during the riot of AD59 which is recorded on a wall painting (now in Naples) and led to a ten year ban on the use of the Anfiteatro. Again one's sense of occasion on visiting the Anfiteatro is heightened at Pompeii by visiting it in the context of a complete city. This experience juxtaposed with that of opera in Verona enables one to edge closer to an understanding of what it must have been like to sit there twenty thousand years ago.