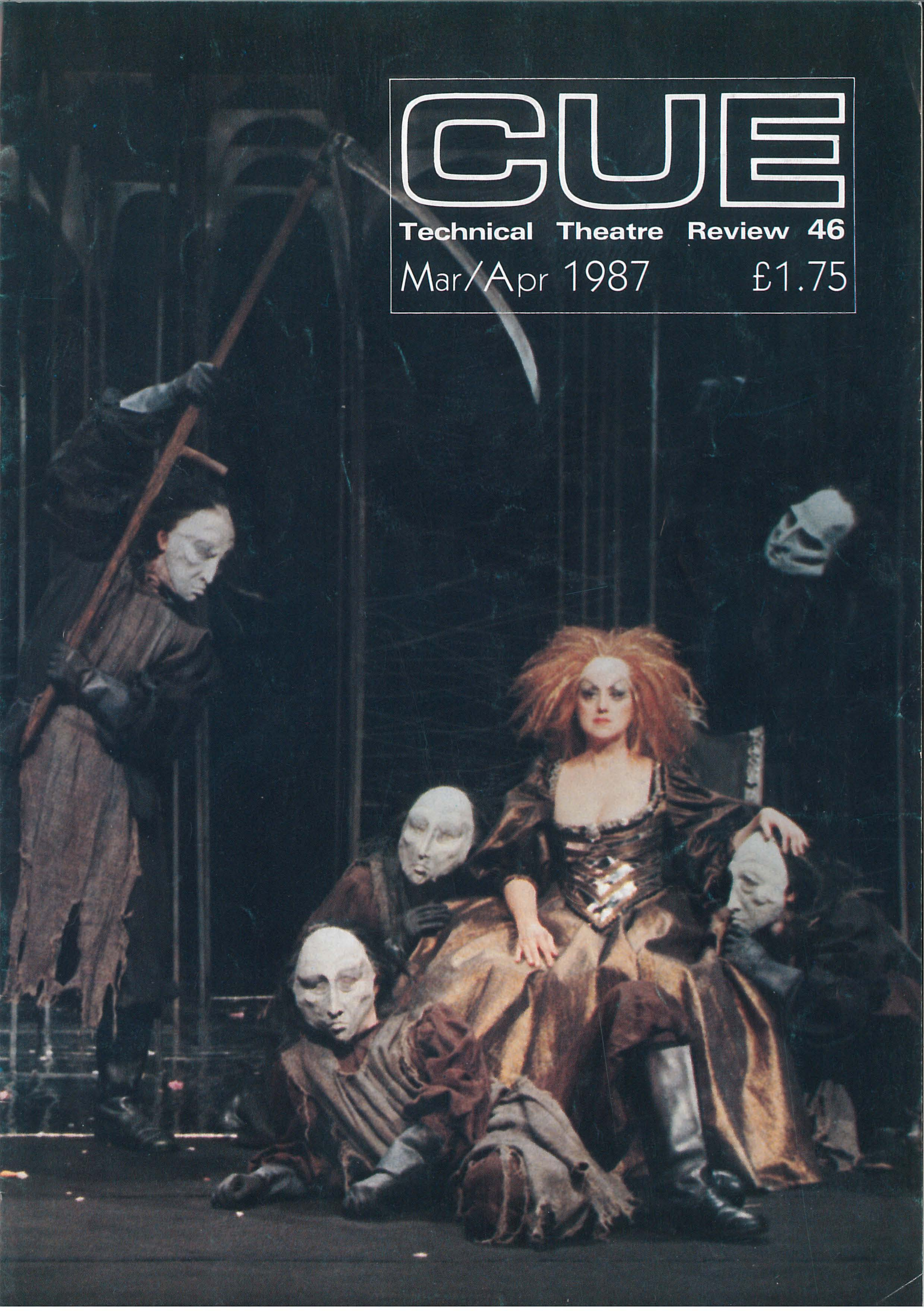


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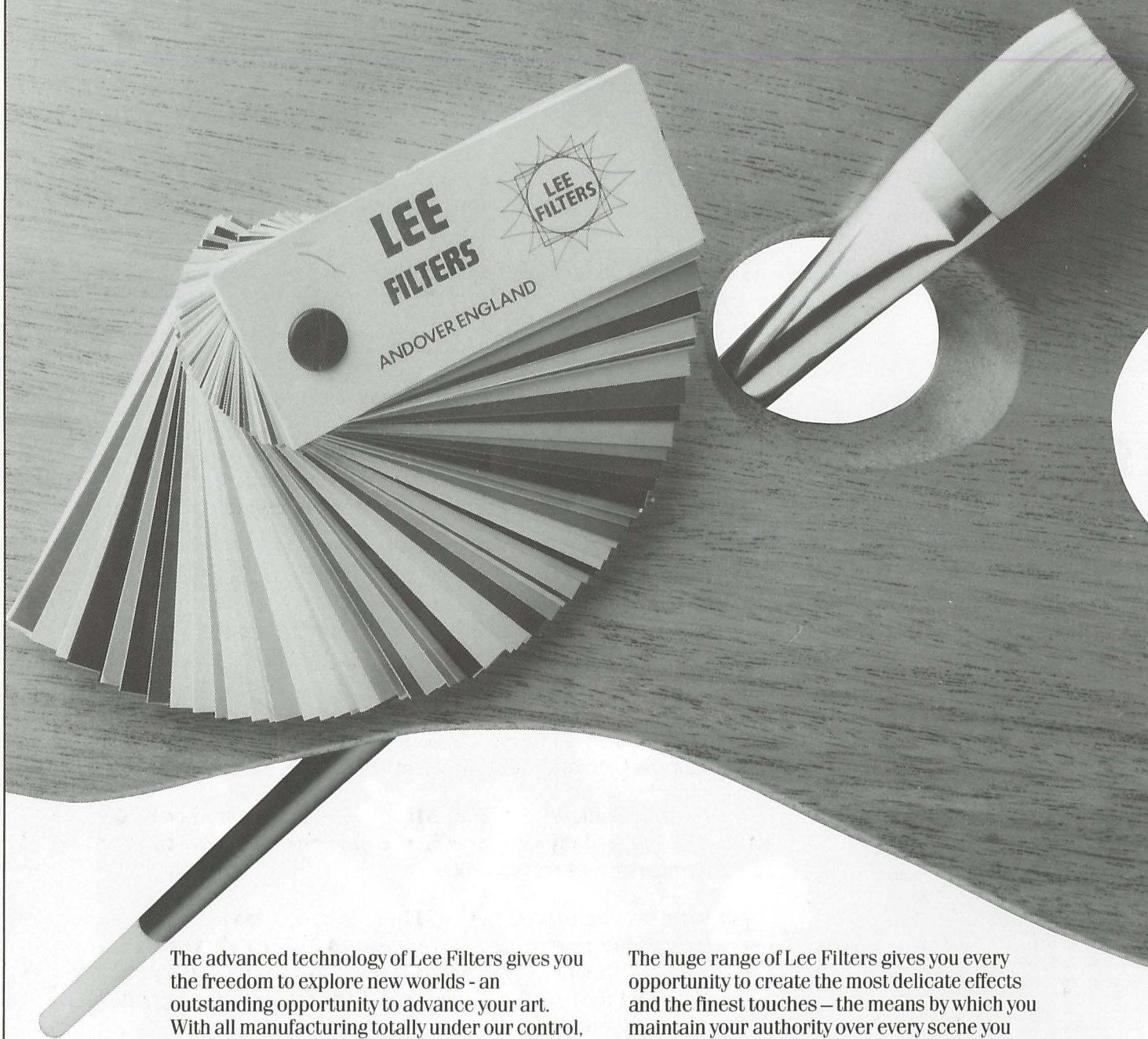
Technical Theatre Review 46

Mar/Apr 1987

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Cover:

The Teatr Wielki, Poland's principal opera house was rebuilt after total destruction in the last war and reopened in 1965. It is thought to have the largest operatic stage in the world and very probably the best equipped. An impressive imaginative staging of Handel's opera *Amadigi* in the 250 seat Studio Theatre in the Teatr Wielki is our cover picture. Directed by Laco Adamik and designs by Barbara Kedzierska. Photo by Juliusz Multarzyński.

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Technical Theatre Review 46

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Most professional theatre organisations seeking a logo manage to avoid such stock showbiz images as the twin masks of tragedy and comedy. Or the spotlight beam – interesting that the pattern 23 shape, which replaced footlights as the popular image of theatre, has now in turn been succeeded by the anonymous extruded box. . . especially in cartoons.

Cynics delight in the crossed paperclips of the Arts Council.

Anyone intrigued by why the Society of British Theatre Designers should base their logo on a fresnel lens should recall that they emerged from the old Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers – who subsequently defected to reclaim their identity as the Association of Lighting Designers with a logo of simple but stylish lettering devoid of symbolism.

We await a Society of Sound Mixers – they might choose the audio-irises that many of the audience are trying to grow in their ears as a measure of self-defence.

But what has come over the ABTT? As fine a body of upright persons as any dramatist could ever wish to have catalyse an ideal actor/audience relationship. Perhaps after a run of twenty five years, they feel they need a new image. But why choose a logo that suggests they are falling over.

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STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

Poland's principal opera house, the Teatr Wielki (Great Theatre) in Warsaw, first opened in 1833 but was almost totally destroyed in the last war, only its neo-classical, colonnaded facade remaining intact. The theatre reopened in 1965, having been rebuilt to three times its previous size, but retaining the colonnaded facade and portico, and with the positions of stage and auditorium reversed so that it now had the largest operatic stage in the world. Moreover, as well as ample rehearsal stages, workshops and administrative offices, the new building contained on its top floor a small, 250-seat studio theatre. It is an imposing, functional, typically 1950's East European monumental building, with huge marbled foyers and staircases and a 2,000 seat, well raked, rather cinematic main auditorium offering good sightlines, reasonable acoustics, and relatively little charm. Indeed the wood-lined studio theatre, with its remarkably spacious stage and full-sized orchestra pit has noticeably more atmosphere.

Since Robert Satanowski became General and Artistic Director, as well as Principal Conductor, of the Teatr Wielki in 1982, he has offered each year since 1983, the theatre's 150th anniversary, his Days of the Great Theatre, which is not so much a festival as a collection of what he considers to have been the most notable work in opera and ballet during the theatre's past year, thus a sort of shop window for the company's work. The fifth 'Days' in March lasted for 10 days and offered no fewer than eighteen different programmes of opera and ballet during that period. Mr Satanowski also succeeded in enticing fourteen directors of other national opera houses in Warsaw, including the 'intendants' of the New York Metropolitan, the Leningrad Kirov, and Moscow's Bolshoi Theatre, as well as an assortment of dramaturgs, producers, designers and critics. No mean feat.

When the Teatr Wielki was rebuilt the stage was not only the largest in the world, but also very probably the best equipped. Moreover, unlike opera houses in the West, budgetary problems do not bulk large — Satanowski's grant for this year represents a 23% increase on the previous one — and productions can thus be as complex and elaborate as the production team deem desirable. Certainly some of the stagings I saw, notably those of *Turandot*, *Aida*, and *La Traviata*, lost no opportunity to make use of the stage's dazzling array of lifts, traps, and trucks. Indeed there were times that one was left feeling that the equipment was being used simply because it was there, and that the budget might have been better directed at the musical side of the production.

The Teatr Wielki's director of productions is Marek Grzesinski, and chief

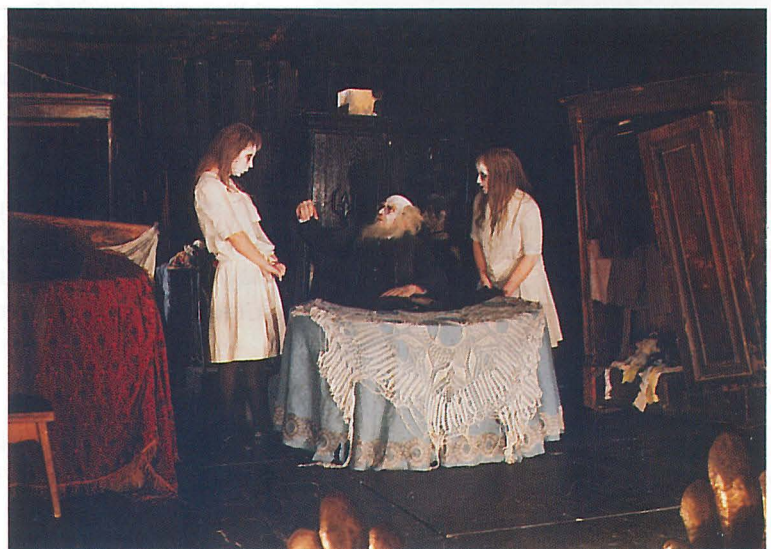
designer is Andrzej Majewski. These two were responsible for the stagings of Puccini's *Turandot* and Verdi's *Aida*, with the newest production that I saw, Verdi's *La Traviata*, being also directed by Grzesinski, but designed by Wieslaw Olko, with costumes by Irena Bieganska. All three operas were fairly heavily politicised, in the East European fashion, with much play being made of the conflict between state and populace in *Turandot* and *Aida*, and of the social milieu of *La Traviata*. *Turandot* had a huge Colditz-like grey fortress at the rear of the stage, its slopes populated by a vast crowd of workers in grey dungarees and peaked caps, all of the imperial court being

in contrast much-bedecked. The problem came with the second act and the great Riddle Scene. Here, where a monumental scale truly is required, the lifts and traps sprang into action, the castle was obscured, the ceiling lowered, and the scale diminished so that we found ourselves watching little more than a run of the mill court-room drama: very disappointing. Yet come act three and Ping, Pang and Pong's temptations of Calaf to divulge his name, an entire red-lit street with floozies sitting in shop-windows sprang up on a lift, at a cost of who knows how much, for a two-minute scene.

Similarly in *Aida*, having watched opening scenes on the grandest scale, with body-stocking lovedies swimming in the Nile at the front of the stage, and its vast depth fully deployed behind them, when we reached the 2nd Act Triumphal Scene, which really does need space for that March, a huge golden frieze of mummies, with head holes provided for the chorus, was trundled right



Verdi's *Aida* at Warsaw's Teatr Wielki. Director Marek Grzesinski. Designer Andrzej Majewski. Photo: Juliusz Multarzyński.



The Studio Theatre at the Teatr Wielki staged Zbigniew Rudzinski's *Mannequins*. Director Marek Grzesinski. Set designs by Janusz Wisniewski. Photo: Jacek Gilun.

down stage to within just a few feet of the footlights so that everything became absurdly cramped. It might have been a bright idea for one of our regional companies, forced to work on a small scale by theatres and budgets, but on a stage the size of Teatr Wielki's it was inexplicable. *La Traviata* worked better on stage but took an eccentric view of the opera. Act 1 was clearly set in a brothel, all decked out in red, with only the male guests departing from Violetta's party, the women merely retiring upstairs, stage left, presumably to their bedrooms. The second act was set in a conservatory with a live horse seen grazing on the other side of the glass, the third, Flora's party, returned to the opening bordello, and the final act was set in the basement, cubicled ward of a paupers' hospital, with the carnival revellers' feet seen through a window at the top of the set. Perhaps we protest too much about the whims of directors and designers here in Britain in the light of what is offered to the opera-going public elsewhere.

Majewski's best work was to be found in the two Szymanowski works offered during the 'Days': the ballet *Harnasie*, and the opera *King Roger*, both powerful works, both allowed to speak for themselves in visual, as well as musical terms, and both strongly and clearly designed. Another attractively staged event in the main auditorium was the 13th century *Ludus Danielis*, taken from the Beauvais manuscript, and most beautifully performed to an audience sitting on the vast stage itself. The stunning tableau designs for this were by Marian Kolodziej who exhibited a grasp and flair that had eluded him in his anaemic settings for Moniuszko's equally anaemic opera, *The Countess*.

Some of the Teatr Wielki's most exciting and successful work clearly comes in the studio theatre. There I saw an impressively imaginative staging of Handel's opera *Amadigi*, given an admirably fantastic treatment in Laco Adamik's production by designer Barbara Kedzierska: her attendant masked furies were masterly. Clearly this team feel more at home on a smaller scale: their staging of Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Golden Cockerel* in the main house had seemed sadly overstated, over-politicised, and clumsy. Two Polish one-act operas, written in the past decade, had stimulating productions in the studio, and together Zbigniew Rudzinski's *Mannequins* and Zygmunt Krauze's *The Star* would form an exciting double bill for our own Opera Factory/London Sinfonietta on the South Bank. In fact *Mannequins*, taken from the novel by Bruno Schulz, was given on a tiny Pagliacci-style stage, with the audience also on the studio theatre's stage, and the chamber ensemble to our right. It was a device that worked well, with Janusz Wisniewski's deliberately overcrowded set and Marek Grzesinski's busily claustrophobic production holding one gripped in the best tradition of Polish avant garde straight theatre. Krauze's *The Star*, the reminiscences of an ageing actress, was likewise given an admirably taut production by Wojciech Szulczynski, powerfully



Puccini's Turandot at the Teatr Wielki. Director Marek Grzesinski. Designer Andrzej Majewski. Photo: Zbigniew Feliksiak.



La Traviata. Designs by Weislaw Olko. Costumes by Irena Bieganska. Photo: Zbigniew Feliksiak.



Ludus Danielis staged in the main auditorium of the Teatr Wielki. Tableau design by Marian Kolodziej. Photo: Zbigniew Feliksiak.

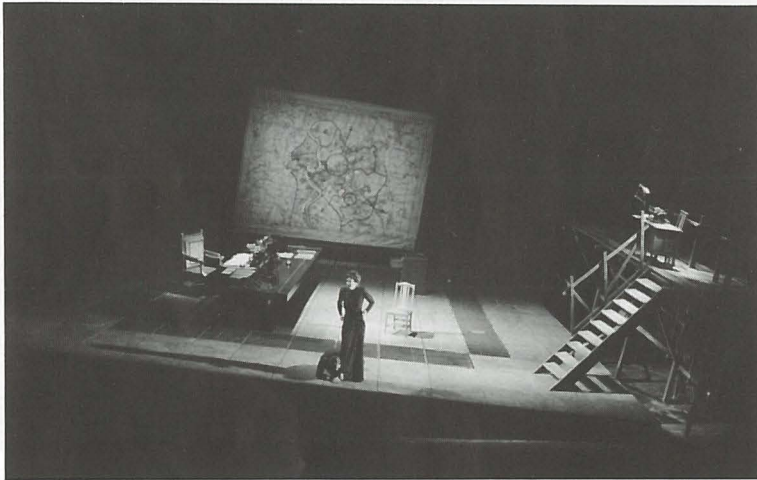
designed against black cloths, and most imaginatively lit, by Ewa Starowieyska. This too held one most rewardingly enthralled.

Whatever may be one's reservations about some of the individual designs at Teatr Wielki – and at what opera house in the world would one not have them – no praise can be too high for their execution. Scenery and costumes were all beautifully made, and even the most elderly productions came up looking crisp and pristine. Furthermore lighting was invariably precisely controlled with every cue spot on, and the work of the stage crew deserved the greatest admiration. Poland is a labour intensive country and crews are therefore more numerous than here, but they worked with such skill and care that every instant scene change went as though on oiled wheels, and in total silence, intervals were never protracted, and it was extremely rare to witness even the smallest scenic mishap on stage. The abundance of productions in Warsaw leaves little space to comment on recent events in London. At the Coliseum

E.N.O.'s new production of Puccini's *Tosca*, by Jonathan Miller, was designed by Stefanos Lazaridis and had come to London by way of the Teatro Comunale in Florence, where it had been the centre piece of last year's Maggio Musicale. Dr Miller had decided to update the opera to Rome in 1944, during the German Nazi occupation, and Lazaridis presented a huge fixed setting, set at a vertiginous angle across the stage and extending out over the sides of the pit. It did not work: the bomb-damaged church in Act 1 was acceptable, if one closed one's ears to Puccini's music, its use as Gestapo boss Scarpia's office in the Palazzo Farnese for Act 2 more convincing, though the torture chamber – previously the Attavanti chapel – was now far too remote, extreme stage left over the pit, from Tosca's battle with Scarpia, and as a setting for Act 3's Castle Sant'Angelo it was disastrous. It made a nonsense of the shepherd boy's opening song, Cavaradossi's aria about the stars, and Tosca's supposed plunge from the ramparts – here "achieved" by way of a fake window in the



Anthony Dowell's new production of *Swan Lake* at Covent Garden had Yolanda Sonnabend as its designer. Photo: Donald Southern.



Puccini's *Tosca*, ENO's new production by Jonathan Miller at the London Coliseum. Designer Stefanos Lazaridis. Photo: Clive Barda.



John Copley's new production of Bellini's *Norma* at the Royal Opera House. Set design by Robin Don. Costumes by Bob Ringwood. Lighting Robert Ryan. Photo: Clive Barda.

back wall. And whoever heard of an indoor execution by firing squad anyway? Dr Miller's intention, apparently, had been to make *Tosca* more relevant and accessible to contemporary audiences, but this production singularly failed to do so. John Copley's new production of Bellini's *Norma* at Covent Garden, with sets designed by Robin Don and costumes by Bob Ringwood was no more successful. Don's basic scheme of raised circular stage with circular canopy above it was a good one, but had become fussily over-embellished, and Ringwood's costumes were untenably crude, inapposite and over-coloured. The production evoked neither the spirit of Bellini's own day, nor of ours: it merely floundered. Far better was Ian Judge's production of *Ruddigore* for New Sadler's Wells Opera, which made a positive effort to get away from the 'send up G & S' school of contemporary stagings. Judge approached the piece on its own terms as a skit on 19th century melodrama, and Gerard Howland's witty and economical designs, within the framework of an intimate Victorian proscenium, succeeded admirably, as did Deirdre Clancy's well-observed costumes and Nick Chelton's adroit lighting. Back at Covent Garden, Anthony Dowell's new production of *Swan Lake* had Yolanda Sonnabend as its designer. Her work, perhaps predictably, evoked controversy, being as idiosyncratic as anything Ms Sonnabend does, and bearing her familiar hallmarks of gauze, wire, and the collage effect. Personally I liked her designs a lot. They were romantic, Russian, and powerfully evoked the fairytale element of the ballet. My only concern was whether the detail of the delicate costumes, and indeed of the dancers themselves, might not have been lost amongst the elaboration of the scenery.

A PROPER THEATRE

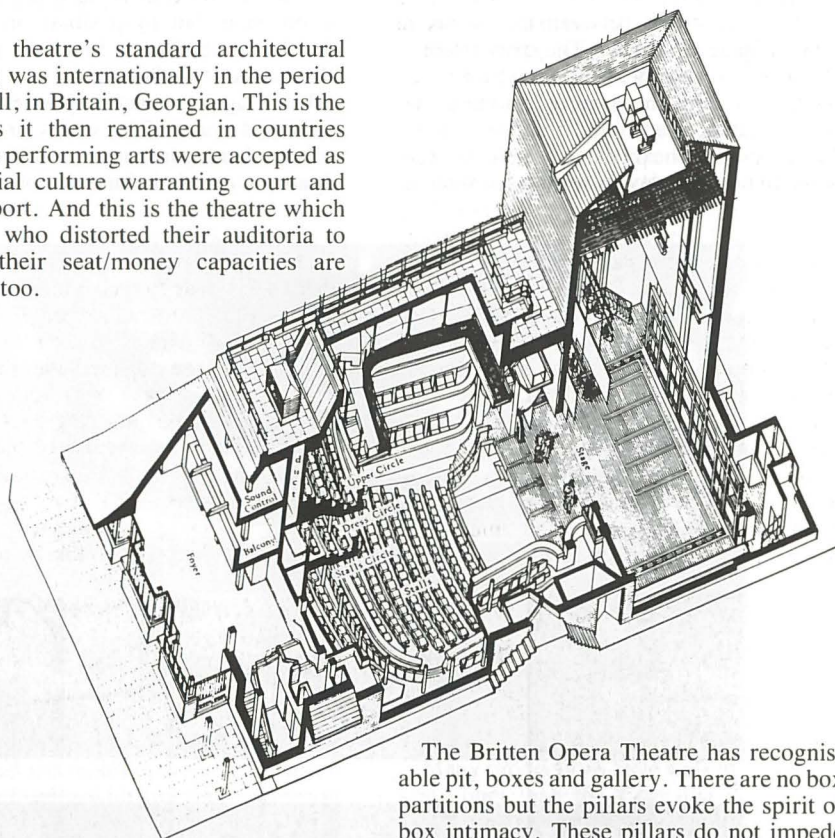
FRANCIS REID

Britain builds very few theatres specifically designed to house opera, although most major touring houses have now had their orchestra pits adapted to enable them to receive an occasional opera week. The only postwar opera houses to have been planned on a blank sheet of paper rather than adapted from existing buildings are those in Manchester's Royal Northern College of Music (1973) and London's Royal College of Music (1986).

This pair of opera houses provide a very telling illustration of the architectural movement that has been labelled 'The Rediscovery of the Courtyard'. I personally am still rather uneasy with the word 'courtyard' since it implies the angular geometry which has manifested itself in many recent playhouses built in the "hang 'em on the walls" idiom.

There is no angular geometry in the Britten Opera Theatre recently built within an available space at the Royal College of Music. The space was indeed formerly a courtyard within the college buildings but the lines of the resultant auditorium are curvaceously seductive in a manner which would please most operagoers since Monteverdi. My own initial response was to exclaim **A proper theatre!**


This is theatre's standard architectural form as it was internationally in the period that we call, in Britain, Georgian. This is the theatre as it then remained in countries where the performing arts were accepted as an essential culture warranting court and civic support. And this is the theatre which countries who distorted their auditoria to increase their seat/money capacities are returning too.



The Britten Opera Theatre has recognisable pit, boxes and gallery. There are no box partitions but the pillars evoke the spirit of box intimacy. These pillars do not impede sightlines because seating is restricted to three rows in the centre and one at the side — it is this shallowness in the galleries that is a particular hallmark of a proper theatre across the centuries.

The gallery fronts are plastered in a deceptively simple ribbed design which adds a sinuous vertical curving to the lateral curving with which all three tiers simultaneously encircle the stalls — until they reach the orchestra and reverse in a manner which is totally appropriate to all whom it has served well. To name but a few: the Romans, Scamozzi, the Bibenas, William Wilkins and now the Casson Condors.

The ribbing is primarily a textural device rather than one that is overtly decorative. The auditorium gains a quiet opulence that is unobtrusive yet sufficiently heightened for the festive ambience that still remains a feature of operagoing despite the efforts of one or two doctrinaire directors who have infiltrated opera from the murkier corners of the playhouse and consider the plot to be more important than the tunes. Opera mostly explores personal emotional relationships rather than socio-political issues. The good are generally seen to triumph over those demonstrating a lower moral standpoint — even if the good have to suffer death in the last bars of the last act to prove the point. Generally speaking I emerge from the opera house with the intent to be a better person — whereas an average evening at today's playhouse tends to turn me into a no-hoper. So it is good that this opera house is soothingly gold, with warm plush on the seats.



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The houselights bracketed to the fascias and to the pillars are properly positioned and proportioned, offering a reasonable compromise between visibility and ambience.

The relationship between the 402 seats and the stage is intimate. The space taken by the orchestra pit does not impose a barrier. Contact is something more complex than mere distance and an orchestra has a bridging role. The pit extends well under the stage to hold 80 players for the big stuff but

provides enough space in front of the stage to seat a Mozart orchestra where they should be. This part of the pit is on a hydraulic scissors elevator – not for the usual playhouse function of offering a possible apron stage but to position orchestras at alternative depths and bring the piano near the surface for rehearsals.

The stage is a usefully sized and proportioned space. The wings are adequate rather than generous, encouraging designers to use their imagination rather than

massive trucks. Perhaps the presence of a paint frame on the back wall will catalyse some rediscovery of paint. Flying height is restricted, inexplicably, by the amount of space left between the grid and the roof of the fly tower. It is nice to be able to walk tall when maintaining pulley blocks, but why leave enough height to swing a cat?

The lighting positions should serve well. There is a bridge in the advance bar position and the possibility of rigging within the auditorium ceiling space. A bar on the circle front allows effects and front cloth washes from a properly full frontal angle. There are good side foh positions in the gallery and, since the theatre is small, the major lighting difficulties of this style of auditorium – absence of side wall booms – should not be a problem. The onstage lighting possibilities include pros booms and ladders running in tracks under the fly floor. There are 120 dimmers and the Duet 2 has been transferred from the college's old theatre to a central lighting box positioned exactly where you would expect to find it in a well designed theatre.

Reviewing in *Tab* the 1973 Royal Northern College of Music Opera Theatre (all blank walls and pure sightline), I wrote "The building sets out to avoid intimacy: this could be disaster in a playhouse but is appropriate for opera". I was obviously thinking just how cruelly an intimate theatre can expose a raw acting performance, especially of a heroic deity. But on reflection I really wonder if that is really such a bad thing in a school theatre. RCM students in the Britten Opera House will certainly have an incentive to act with conviction and truth – and that can be no bad thing for the future of opera.

But what is even more important is that they sing in a supportive acoustic, free from strain and able to hear themselves, their fellow singers and their orchestra. Here all is well: Derek Sugden was in charge and can add this theatre to his honours gained in such acoustic delights as Snape, Glasgow and Buxton. I hope the Royal College will reward him with a jolly good evening of his beloved Haydn.

Architects: Casson Condor Partnership
(Job Architect: David Ramsay)

Acoustic Consultant: Derek Sugden
Lighting Consultant: Neville Currier

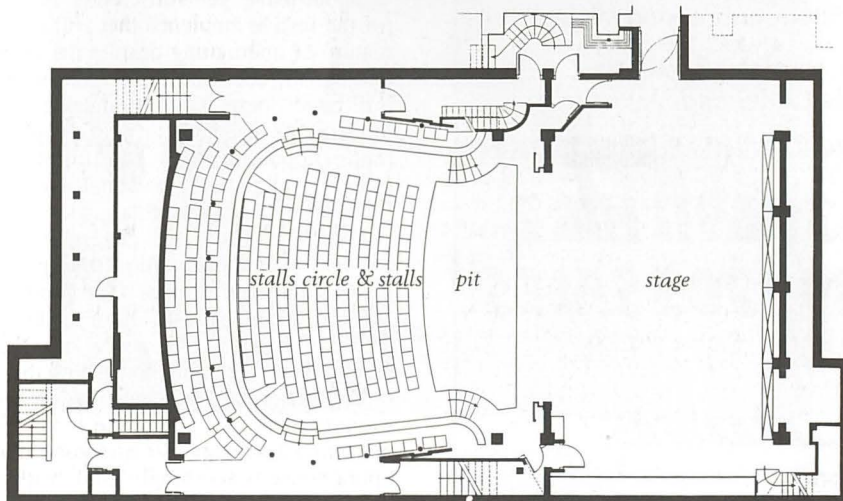
Sound Consultant: Bruce Elliot

Main Contractors: John Laing

Stage Engineering: Telestage Associates

Lighting Equipment: Strand Lighting

Electrical Installation: Showstrand



DIMENSIONS

| | |
|---------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Pros Arch Width |9.06m (29'8½") |
| Pros Arch Height |5.18m (17') |
| Stage width between walls |15.66m (51'4½") |
| Rear of stage to pros | ...8.39m (27'6½") |
| Rear of stage to pit |9.82m (32'3") |
| Max flying height |12.37m (40'7") |
| Length of bars |12m (39') |
| No of lines | ...35 including house tabs. |

Infinite Riches In A Little Room

JASON BARNES

In 1973, Britain's new National Theatre building was well under way. Two differing performance spaces were included: The Olivier, with its 1100 seats and a thrust stage, and the Lyttleton, with 890 seats, a conventional but up to date proscenium theatre. Lack of money had cut short the design of a third Auditorium, which existed only as a bricked-up void.

The importance to the National Theatre for developing this space was threefold: the ability to host medium and small scale visiting companies (without having to share the Box-Office revenue of a larger Auditorium whilst maintaining its own company), a flat floor that could serve as a television studio, (the NT had long been eager to record its work) and a flexible space which could serve as the National's experimental Studio.

Iain Mackintosh of Theatre Projects Consultants (the Theatre Consultants for the National Theatre Building) who submitted the design study in 1973 for the development of the third space, wrote at the time of the Cottesloe's opening in 1977:

"A studio Theatre is an utterly simple space in which a performance can be given with the minimum of technical preparation". . . "A flexible space in which far reaching experiments, possibly about the very nature of Theatre, and certainly about actor-audience relationships can be made. . ." He concluded "The central issue is probably the opposing demands of simplicity on the one hand, and the demand for total flexibility on the other. . . . The Cottesloe design proposals are aimed at giving people enough, but no more than is essential to experiment. . . . Only by leaving a lot to the user can the designer of brand new theatres encourage the improvisation and the vital response to the problems of Theatrical relationship more often found only in converted premises".

The Cottesloe – a Studio Theatre? In the sense that it is an Artists' workroom – yes. Its proportions are room sized within its enclosing galleries: 32 feet 6 inches by 43 foot 4 inches. However 'Studio' and 'experimental' labels are hard to lose. Experiment with what? One pressure on any repertoire complex is to plan in such a way that its theatres offer a sufficiently diverse and interesting programme as to maintain high Box Office revenue. This emphasises the sense of suiting product to the Theatre.

A play of other than intimate proportions and of average appeal could do well in the Olivier or Lyttleton, the choice determined by availability of theatre in the season, and scenic or production style. If the product is valid and potentially exciting, but of unsure public appeal, the Cottesloe, with an end stage capacity of approximately 300, could

offer a respectable 50 performances – spread over 5 or 6 months in a repertoire calendar, with a total audience of 15,000.

The Olivier would swallow this up in some 14 performances. Experiments therefore, with the nature of text or unusual subject matter, could sensibly be served by the third smaller space – not a studio, I venture, but perhaps the neatest of three performance spaces.

"INFINITE RICHES IN A LITTLE ROOM?" were the words I read on the cover of a large plastic folder which formed my principal inheritance in 1977, on being appointed Production Manager for the Cottesloe, having spent the previous six years variously as Stage Manager and Head of Stage Operations. The folder contained Iain Mackintosh's sketches of proposed layouts for the National's as then unopened third auditorium, to be called the Cottesloe after Lord Cottesloe, Chairman of the South Bank Theatre Board responsible to the government for building the new complex.

My familiarity with the space was confined to observations in the gloom of a late night amble through steel columns, across planks and round mysterious voids, taken some months before. This cursory nocturnal glance was made in an effort to understand something of the nature of this last playhouse to be completed, and was taken half-heartedly, almost negatively, for at the time I was responsible for the scheduling and staffing of the National's stages, and had reached the point of wishing that the last theatre would never open, in the hope of getting to grips with the complexities of running the other two.

The departure of my predecessor, who had supervised the fitting out of the Theatre to designs developed by John Bury (then the National's Head of Design) Denys Lasdun (Architect), and Iain Mackintosh, meant that I was responsible for what had affectionately been known as the 'hole in the wall', it was ready for occupation, but with no immediate product, staff or management.

A policy? Yes. Peter Hall, Director of the National Theatre following Laurence Olivier in 1973, called a company meeting – and sat on what was to become the 'end stage' – as opposed to the many other performance arrangements that have been explored in the last ten years – and described his view of the Cottesloe as the Kitchen of the National, and himself as earnestly seeking the moment when he could don the chef's hat and begin the 'misen-place' for a feast that would last a generation.

The tenth anniversary of the opening on 4th March 1977, with Ken Campbell's eight

hour Science Fiction spectacular ILLUMINATUS, marks a fraction of the time it will take to understand the full nature of our young child, however, we are nearly in our teens, and our pubescent appearance is certainly not all spots.

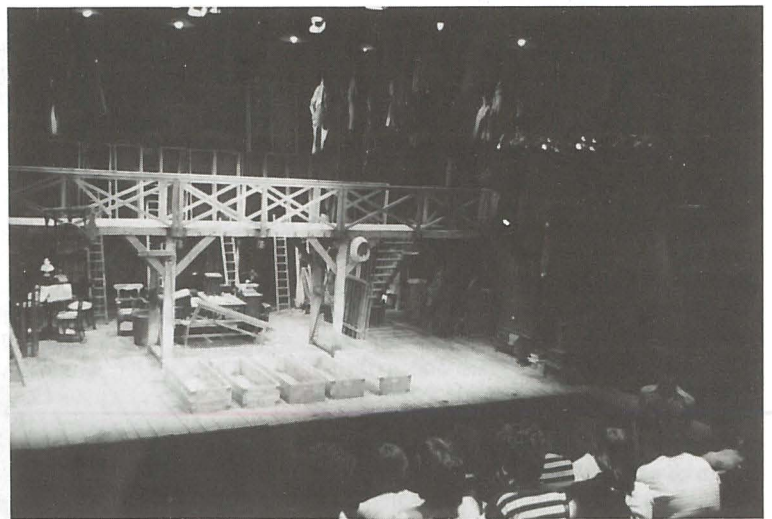
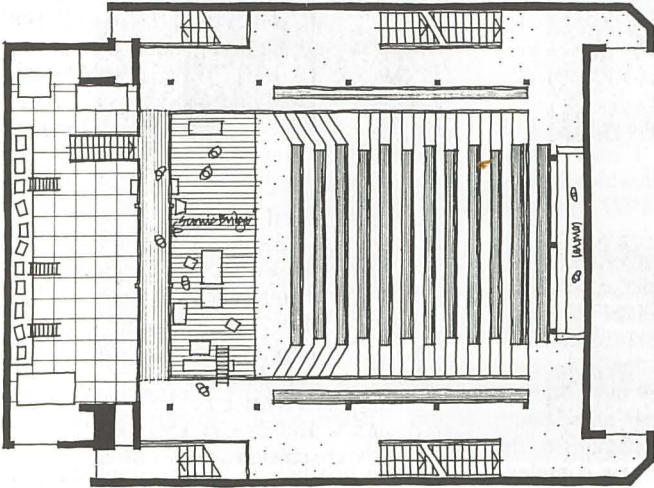
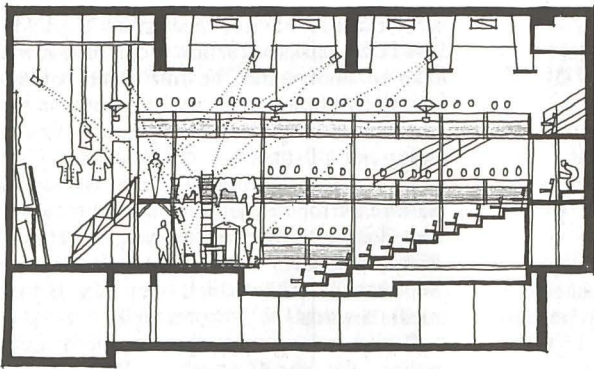
In fact Peter Hall had to wait five and a half years for his debut as play director in the Cottesloe, for the opening of Harold Pinter's trilogy OTHER PLACES in September 1982, which won six British media awards.

Whilst it was only a part of the original policy for the Cottesloe, Peter Hall's analogy of a Kitchen – whose dishes would be served up on the National's other two stages – rang somewhat hollow until 1982 when three productions made the great leap: In December 1981, THE MAYOR OF ZALAMEA (Calderon de la Barca, Director Michael Bogdanov, Designer Stephanie Howard) moved to the Olivier, and subsequently on tour to Denver, Ohio. DON JUAN (Moliere-John Fowles, Director Peter Gill, Designer Alison Chitty) moved to the Olivier and then the Lyttleton, and subsequently to the then newly restored Theatre Royal Glasgow. In April 1983, Bill Bryden's production of A MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM transferred from the Cottesloe to join the repertoire in the Lyttleton Theatre, with Robert Stephens as Oberon.

Many productions have warranted greater seat count than the Cottesloe allows, but these particular plays moved easily because they had been prepared for the end stage option, and this required virtually no alteration for the larger stages; their design did not rely particularly on a significant contribution from the architectural nature of the Cottesloe's galleried atmosphere. London's medium sized West End playhouses dating from the 1880's, offer perhaps, better physical alternatives for showing the Cottesloe's end stage work with their proscenium openings of 26 to 30 feet – (Cottesloe stage width 32 feet 6 inches) than the Lyttleton's 39 feet, and the Olivier's daunting 49 feet across the thrust stage.

A large proportion of the productions have been on the end stage layout: at the time of opening, a central pit section with eleven rows of seats surrounded by free standing metal framed seat units mimicking the appearance of the two fixed galleries above. The pit seating was arranged in blocks of three or four seats, attached by thumb screws to simple timber block rostra, rising by the row from below stage level, in four inch rises, to reach the stage level, by the back row.

This arrangement was used for the opening performances of ILLUMINATUS! Ken Campbell and Chris Langham's 8-hour adaptation of the science fiction novel by Robert Shea and Robert Anton Wilson, and the National's own first production in the Cottesloe: Stephen Poliakoff's STRAWBERRY FIELDS (Director Michael Apted, Designer Di Seymour). Neither of these productions had particularly challenged the space (simply, in the case of ILLUMI-



*Beggars Opera by John Gay.
Director Richard Eyre. Designer
John Gunter. Lighting Peter
Radmore. Plans Tim Foster.
Photo: Jem Wilsher.*

NATUS!, the endurance of the audience and the resources of the Cottesloe's then rather limited catering facilities.

The simple nature of this removable seating, provided a flexible layout beneath which elevators could be installed at a future date.

The Theatre has happily accepted settings varying from a single feather for Stephen Berkoff's *FALL OF THE HOUSE OF USHER*, to a natural exterior by Jane Martin for Julian Mitchell's *HALF LIFE* (Director Waris Hussein), about the demise of an elderly politician played by Sir John Gielgud.

This play transferred to the Duke of York's Theatre for 205 performances, where we reduced the width of the set by three feet an interesting reflection on the Cottesloe's not so small stage. The set whilst eminently suitable for the proscenium theatre, was quite at home with the Cottesloe's galleries running on over the stage, their horizontal line drawing the spectator's eye through. *HALF LIFE* was subsequently seen at the Royal Alexander Theatre Toronto (Proprietor Ed Mirvish, whose London venue *The Old Vic* reopened in October 1983), and Washington DC.

In April 1980, we presented *EARLY DAYS* with Ralph Richardson, (David Storey, Director Lindsay Anderson, Designer Jocelyn Herbert), and tried for the first time a steeper pit tier rake.

The seats for a traverse season examined later, had come within two or three feet of linking with the first gallery. Jocelyn

Herbert wanted to play on a flat floor, with the audience block rising steeply up from it. Now was the moment to build a layout whose risers would take us all the way, and enable the audience to enter at the first gallery which is at street level as one approaches the auditorium through the foyer.

One catch however: Lindsay Anderson wanted the axis of the setting, and the seating block, to be turned gently through seven degrees! On being asked by several groups of visitors groups why this should be so, I could only answer that I had Christened the arrangement "Lindsay's Angles" and that it "challenged the rectilinear nature of the space!"

We achieved the uplift of each row with scenic folding rostra in such a way as to be able to straighten out the tier for future use, should it prove a successful alternative to the provided shallow raked seating. By preparing the front rows under stage level at the same time, although these were covered over for *EARLY DAYS*, we reverted to a full straightened form, which we have kept ever since for *End Stage* work. It has lowered the seat count, as some of the mobile pit surround seats were obscured by the tier, but the benefit in terms of increased intimacy, and the effect of drawing together the pit and first level audience is marked.

One recent end stage production is notable in two respects: John Gunter's setting for the *BEGGARS' OPERA* (John Gay 1728, Director Richard Eyre, Music arranged by Dominic Muldowney) drew directly from the architectural nature of the room itself, in that by using an existing

bridge, a one level "fourth wall", (originally envisaged by Iain Mackintosh, and realised by Bill Dudley for the first of the *Mysteries*), its alloy frame dressed with rough timber, it created a mid-victorian workhouse. The audience entered a smoky galleried room lit by gas light overhead, peopled by the beggars, whores and pimps whose world is celebrated by John Gay in contemporary ballads, in what has become known as the worlds first musical.

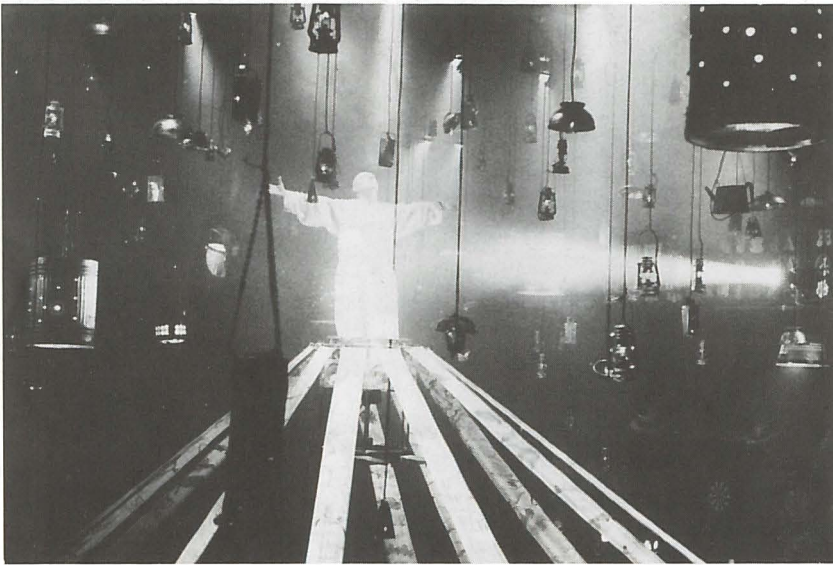
A collaboration with Warner Communications led to the first television recording to be made wholly within the Cottesloe itself, with all the necessary recording equipment installed behind the raised pit tier seating, and cameras accommodated in front of the acting area by decking over the front seating rows.

Although the majority of plays in the last ten years have been on the end stage, the most significant continuous achievement must be what have become known as the *Promenade Productions*, under the direction of Bill Bryden, and conceived visually by William Dudley, with lighting by William Dudley, Stephen Wentworth and Laurence Clayton.

The Cottesloe was transformed rather to brewhouse than kitchen for the first of five major works to be staged in this form, at the beginning of 1977. Three of them started when the English poet Tony Harrison proposed an exciting, but challenging 20th century adaptation of a selection from the continuously performed *Mystery Plays*, drawn largely from the York and Chester Cycles of some 400 years ago.

Bill Bryden wanted to reflect the traditional staging method of using carts or platforms that had originally toured the streets of the city, pausing to perform individual parts of the Bible stories. We needed a sense of popular jostling town life, together with a feeling of progression necessary to recreate in a modern idiom the *Stations of the Cross*.

Bill Dudley and I examined the provided end stage seating layout used for the first two productions. By removal of all the seats from the lower pit section of the Theatre to a chair store in the basement, and turning over the rear rostra blocks into the front



The Nativity and below Doomsday Finale. Designer William Dudley. Lighting Laurence Clayton. Photo: Nobby Clark. (Right) Part 1 of the Nativity – The angel Gabriel summons Joseph. Photo: Brian Windsor.



deeper portion of the void, we provided a 32 foot by 32 foot playing area 2 feet below stage level.

This kind of sunken garden, enclosed by the loose railed seating units (which in turn could be used as raised playing areas – the Mystery Cart equivalents – as required), offered a sufficient vantage over the promenading audience at the lower level.

Overhead, the two upper galleries, thronging with both seated and standing spectators, recreated the upper windows of what would originally have been surrounding buildings and balconies – sporting faces, eager to catch the festive attraction. In modern terms these are not unlike the upper floors of a shopping centre, or London's recently restored central market hall in Covent Garden, now itself a lively mix of puppet performances, spontaneous dance and street theatre, combined with the bustle of a public market place.

This first selection, entitled THE PASSION covered stories from the New Testament, and embodied music by the Albion Band (led by Ashley Huchings and John Tams) with participation in the action by the musicians. Having created a playing space in the lower central pit, we needed to accommodate the band in a focal way, and

to provide an upper performance space. Bill Dudley chose to build the bottom half of a 'fourth wall' proposed by Iain Mackintosh as part of the design study, and subsequently used in both the Beggars' Opera and, 'A View From The Bridge'. Iain Mackintosh had suggested this 'fourth wall' as a device for reducing the need for scenery – in a space where one target should be to experiment with the power of performance alone – when this bridge would be available to actors or spectators, and to qualify this by altering the volume of the performance space.

The bridge linked the ends of the existing galleries, and could be reached via these galleries, or by stairs from the stage below. The band was sited upstage and beneath this fourth central gallery, which provided a very strong upper focus, particularly for the Herod Scenes, and for the Crucifixion play, in which the Roman Soldiers, having nailed Christ to the full sized and very heavy cross, could just manage to haul it vertically, and fix it securely, for the twenty minutes the actor playing Christ must remain aloft. The soldiers' dialogue refers to mortice and wedges, and these were mechanically necessary in stabilizing the cross! The Theatre itself provided an exciting physical

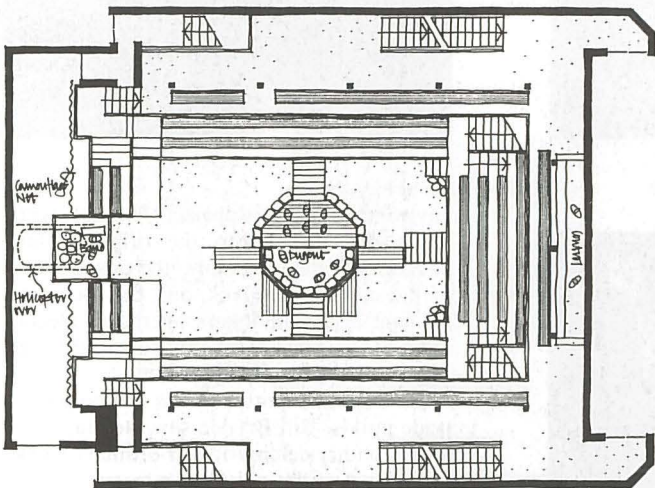
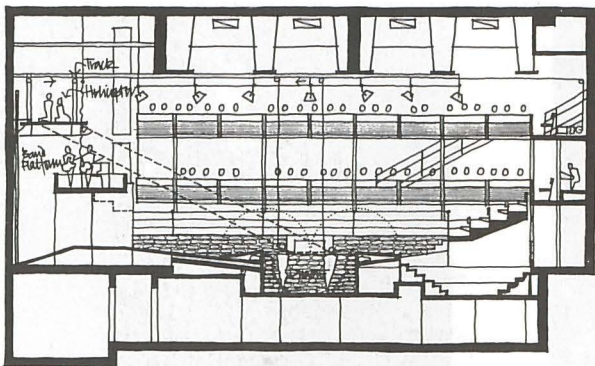
environment for this project. Parallels were being drawn between the original fluid backdrop of the spectators, the raised levels of the carts themselves, and the focussing element of the onlookers overhead. Decoration of the space, and atmosphere through lighting were the final touches.

Having been written by the contemporary trade guilds, Bill Bryden saw the plays as a 20th Century celebration by ordinary working people of the greatest story ever told in the history of man. High above the upper gallery, Bill Dudley placed 19th Century Trade Union banners, faithful full sized reproductions, prepared in the National Theatre's workshops, with the help of John Gorman, whose definitive book, Banner Bright, contains many beautiful colour plates from which Bill chose appropriate banners for the Plasterers, Bakers and Nail-makers who had traditionally and appropriately written and presented the Creation play, The Last Supper, and the Crucifixion, amongst others.

A significant haze from a smoke gun running gently throughout the performance in order to replenish smoke drawn off by the air conditioning, was punctuated by a firmament of twinkling orange lights, housed in early 20th century kitchen and household articles – cheese graters, paraffin stoves, sieves, collanders and dustbins, each containing a neon candle lamp – gave the overall impression of a candle-lit barn, with a distinct feeling of a Byzantine Church.

In lighting the play in the first version in 1977, no production lighting units were used at all, with the exception of one beam light, reflected from a circular prop mirror held by the Angel Gabriel, sending a shaft of contrasting white light from above the heads of the audience down to the figure of Christ amongst the crowd.

The production of the Passion, which covered the New Testament from Christ's baptism by St John to the Crucifixion, remained in the repertoire initially for 63 performances. In August 1980, we added a second programme; adaptations of many of the Old Testament stories from the Creation to the Nativity, opening initially at the



Dispatches adapted and directed by Bill Bryden. Designer William Dudley. Plans by Tim Foster. Photo: Michael Mayhew.

Assembly Hall in Edinburgh for the International Festival, where by covering the existing bench seating with a 50 foot by 50 foot Promenade 'Arena' for 400 standing participants, and a further 600 viewed from the existing gallery on three sides.

Presenting God above the crowd posed some design problems. A 20th Century solution was clearly acceptable in our approach: a scarlet fork-lift truck bearing a crow's nest radiating white shafts of light, like a salvatory lighthouse. The whole basket arrangement strapped to the forks of the truck provided an off-the-peg mobile 'deus ex machina'. The truck was manoeuvred among the crowd by the Theatre technicians wearing boiler suits suitably emblazoned with the name of ROLATRUC, the company who had kindly loaned the truck – industrial sponsorship after all, had been a feature of the Passion Plays for over 400 years!

The need to be able to lose the truck to the side of the space led to a decision on the production's return to the Cottesloe to fill in the previous sunken pit, and to level the whole floor of the theatre. This larger promenading space needed a little more control over the lighting of the actors' faces, and 100 Minuet spots were added discreetly among the flickering junk overhead.

Dance has always formed a significant part of traditional Drama, and Bill Dudley with Dance Director Dave Busby conceived a Maypole dance for the Creation play. God ascended slowly as silk streamers unrolled bearing images of birds, fishes and other creatures, as the company interwove in an

accelerating traditional dance until the radiating beams of light from the ascending crows nest flashed across the faces of the spectators on the surrounding galleries. A tremendous enclosure of excited faces had become a living environment in which we could share the very beginning of the creation of the world.

Certain conclusions can be derived from this experience of promenade work. The inclusion of a rectangular or circular dance form by performers, with perhaps spectators as well, needed a central area of about 30 feet diameter. On a flat floor the public were able to 'back off' under the galleries, to re-converge for the development of the next scene. Most plays need space away from the action for entrances and exits, and in the absence of approaches from outside the auditorium, one can create these entrances between or below upper seated areas.

In January 1986, a third and final part of the story DOOMSDAY, took us from the Crucifixion to the end of the world, and we embarked for the first time on what were christened EPIC DAYS, by our devoted Company executive Michael Hallifax. All three parts given in one day! The complete cycle opened to the press in January, and played what was to become the closing season of the Cottesloe at the time we ceased operations for six months, due to lack of Arts Council funds on April 20th 1985. Plans were already well advanced for the company and staff to record the whole cycle for Channel 4 Television, and for the second time, the Cottesloe became a TV studio.

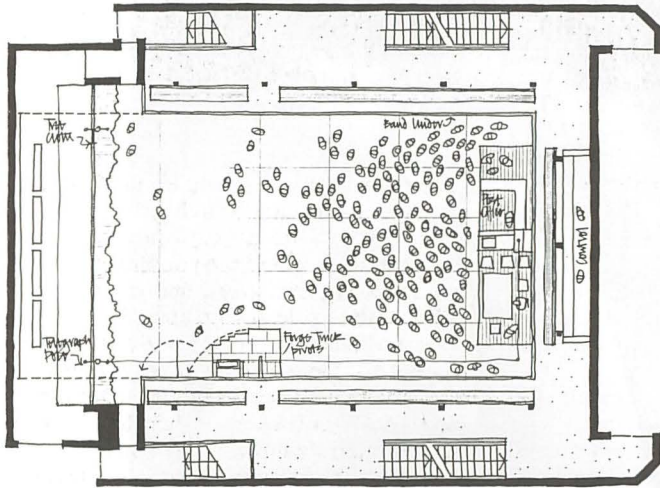
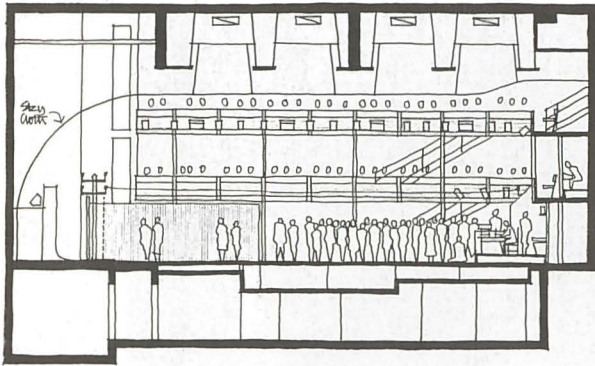
The recordings were made with the Theatre thronged with invited audiences who had been unable to see the plays during the sell-out season, and were seen on British screen the following Christmas, and subsequently all over the world at Christmas 1987.

In the next few months however, performances continued, almost in defiance of the closure, at an eminently suitable venue only 2000 yards away – Iain Mackintosh and Richard Pilbrow, loyal supporters of our work in the space created by Theatre Projects nine years before – led the company, lock stock and God's crows nest across Waterloo Bridge to the Lyceum Theatre. The building had not seen regular play performances since 1945, but the presence of three award winning plays of such an unusual nature brought renewed interest in the building as a live theatre, and we eagerly wait news of the recent efforts to this end.

Bill Bryden's adaptation of Michael Herr's novel DISPATCHES about the Vietnam war called for a series of contrasting locations. Helicopters arrive bearing their cargo of weary soldiers and reporters, interiors for the recreation centre, news conference scenes, a dugout fortification and others.

By examination of the space's axis, parallel to its length, Bill Dudley provided a sunken 'bear pit' lined with sand bags (filled with 10 tons of sand!), access to which was gained by 4 vomitories under the surrounding seating. Sufficient head room was obtained by demounting sections of the lower auditorium floor and 'dipping' into the basement area. The construction of this area consists of bolted steel sections, with 4 foot by 8 foot three-quarter-inch plywood panels which are simply self-tapped to the steel; the economic pressures at the time of fitting out the Cottesloe lent a blessed flexibility which all Theatre Planners could do well to bear in mind. (The original intention was to fill the central well with a mosaic of elevators).

The Albion Band again featured musically, this time as a sixties rock band, to link and underscore the text. They were swathed in camouflage netting, which doubled as the



Candleford by Flora Thompson. Directors Bill Bryden and Sebastian Graham-Jones. Lighting – William Dudley and Laurence Clayton. Plans by Tim Foster. Photo: Michael Mayhew.

'port' from which the helicopter emerged, headlights and flashing red light beneath the base skids giving a convincing impression of reality, together with a sound track of rotor blades. We stopped short of fans overhead to whip up the sand covered floor below.

The lofty bandstand was virtually strapped to the Cottesloe's ceiling, which happens also to be the Olivier Theatre's floor! The appreciation of the rock music by the Cottesloe's audiences was not shared by those performing in the Olivier – where structurally transmitted noise could be heard from below.

The tiered seating for dispatches was rented, and came in the form of outdoor stadium seating: plastic moulded seat panels which pulled out and turned up two at a time, housed in cast alloy sections. A scaffold under-structure united these sections. The opportunity to rent seating was a chance for a successful experiment in layout, but the quality of the seating left a great deal to be desired. The claimed flexibility of the system turned out to be the 'flex' in the seats: any occupant weighing more than ten stone, was likely to be delivered into the row in front.

Having seating on four sides enclosing the performance space did however produce a very concentrated bowl, with a technical handling and circulation area behind and beneath the seating, very much like a circus, and not unlike the Stoke-on-Trent's New Victoria Theatre, opened in 1986. This

together with the existing staircases within the auditorium, which allow vertical movement of the audience, enabled the Cottesloe to share something of a football stadium (whilst taking only a fraction of the revenue!).

Between the opening of the first two parts of the Mystery Cycle came Keith Dewhurst's faithful adaptation of Flora Thompson's novels about Oxfordshire agricultural life at the turn of the century, **LARK RISE TO CANDLEFORD**.

The first adaptation **LARK RISE**, opened in March 1978, and was followed by **CANDLEFORD** in November 1979. Each takes place in a single day, the first in harvest time, the second in mid-winter. The plays again gave Bill Dudley and Bill Bryden the challenge of multilocation.

They chose to represent the young heroine's home naturalistically to one end of the flattened space. Accurately detailed interiors represented Laura's parents' house, and the village post office in Candleford to which she moves to take her first employment. The plays were to be performed as promenades, as a development of the experience gained from the first **PASSION** play.

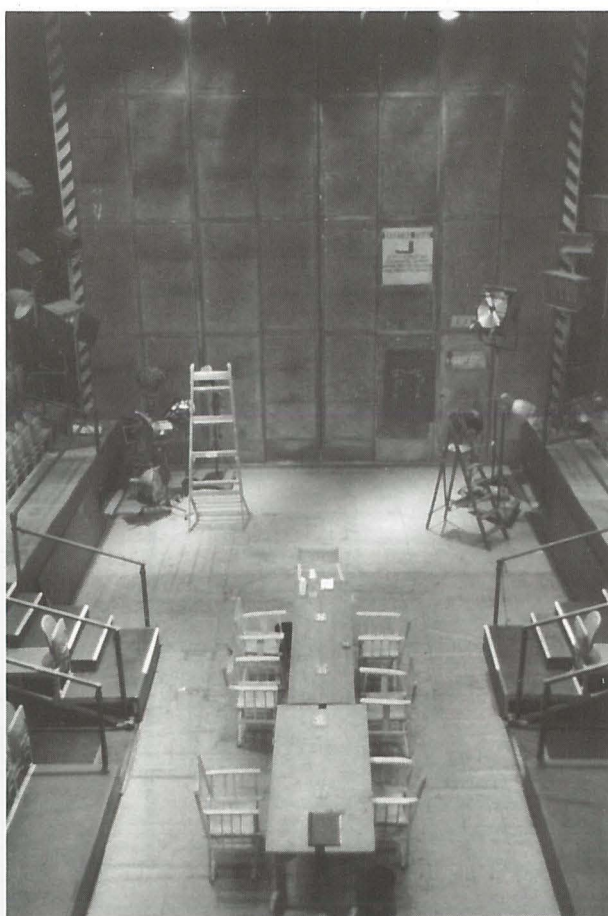
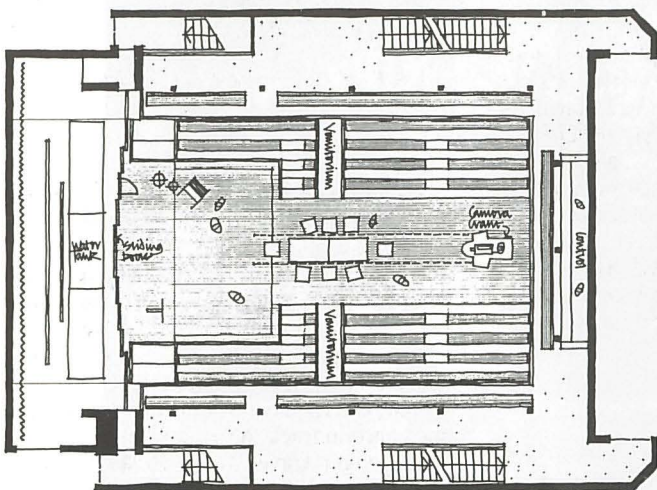
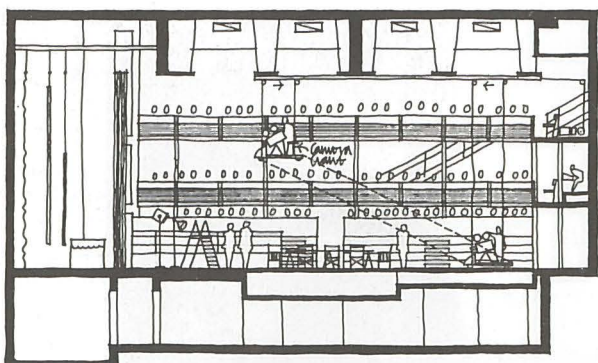
As a contrast to the interiors, the far end of the space (the stage in the more normally used end stage arrangement), were set stylised three dimensional backdrops, either cornfield or wintry forest allowed approaching entrances and exits to the arena. Between, the flat floor served as field, village

green, church, lane, snow covered landscape or lowering forest. Overhead, a sky cloth covered the entire theatre above the heads of the audience, which, when top lit with 5K skypans floods borrowed from Pinewood Studios, bathed the whole Theatre with a shadowless daylight; when underlit with dark blue, it was transformed into a clear evening sky from which projected stars and harvest moon beamed down on the villagers assembling for evensong – at which the harsh reality of the twentieth century strikes home during the reading of the World War One death roll; names of many of the characters with whom one has spent the evening, including Lauras' little brother Edmund.

Reality catches up with this rural backwater, but the chill of death gives way to a celebration by cast and spectators, as everyone shares in the Grand Circle Dance – a Breugel painting come to life!

The experience of those on the upper galleries, and those below who move with the action, clearly differs in a Promenade. The scene may be set with a minimum of props. Those with the actors below ARE the scenery within an environment shared with those actors. The circle of faces round the scene become the inner surface of a crystal ball in which the moment is continually reflected, giving a heightened sense to the text and the performers at the nucleus of the action.

This local stimulus from the spectators is accelerated by the corporate experience,



Has Washington Legs by Charles Wood. Director and Lighting Geoffrey Reeves. Designer William Dudley – Film studio Traverse Theatre arrangement. Plans by Tim Foster.

and cannot be matched by the reaction from the darkened auditorium of a proscenium house. Those observing from above, share as if by proxy the feelings of those below, and thus the whole experience is generated for the drama within the walls of the space, papered as they are with people.

The last ten years have seen a hundred or so productions, including 50 new plays, visiting companies from home and abroad, particularly four plays originating from the Market Theatre of Johannesburg as a result of a happy and developing relationship with Mannie Manim, and Athol Fugard. Fringe productions, Music Theatre, Childrens Theatre, Productions from ILEA schools (there will be a two day festival of ILEA drama on April 1st and 2nd), Theatre by Mentally Handicapped Children, Dance Theatre, Late Night performances (notably HUGHIE starring Stacey Keach) revivals, educational events have all found a place in what I often refer to the National's Church Hall. (I am often consulted about the design for Church Halls and hope that the many 'create what you want' features of the Cottesloe may slowly start to be BUILT OUT of specs for such buildings!) Happily, too, the Cottesloe has become the showcase for the NT's educational workshops devised by Kevin Cahil, and for one day showings of work in progress from the NT STUDIO under the direction of Peter Gill.

At the end of 1986, we achieved the fruits

of four years development work, and based on the experiments with environmental layouts and temporary seating we were able to realise Iain Mackintosh's and John Bury's expressed hopes for the space – moveable flexible seating. We now have reproduced the steep pit tier in a new system by AUDIENCE SYSTEMS a British Company specialising in Theatre and entertainment seating. The seats are no bigger than before (I felt strongly that our work should be seen by maximum audiences), but are slightly more comfortable. The terrace is carpetted, which has greatly reduced the noise of staff moving about during technical rehearsals, and of Latecomers and those needing to leave during the action (through ill health only you understand!) Seats may be turned down in pairs beneath the flooring of each row, which produces flexibility of aisle positions, and the four parts of the system may be positioned in several different parts of the theatre floor, with the aid of a screw jack elevator 32'6" x 18' installed at the same time by Peter Kemp and Bert Richman.

We are already combining a full tier and stage riser layout with a thrust from which seats start with stage riser, and in March we shall put the system to the test by adding an IN THE ROUND format for LORCA's YERMA, providing a rapid repertory change of plays and the layouts required by the several groups playing across the National's three playhouses.

As we begin to ring the changes again,

after several years of end stage work, we shall from time to time have the benefit of increased revenue – which will support some of the cost of the system – the opportunity of playing Promenade performances within a day to day repertoire by quickly striking the seats to their under gallery storage positions, and have the chance of clearing or moving seats for daytime use – pre-rehearsals of new work or daytime lettings, rehearsals or performances.

We face now the task of mobilising the sound, lighting and Stage Management controls. There is already a new Gemini lighting board, which has the benefit of a small flexible control cable through multiplexing, which makes mobility a possibility, and we have increased from 120 to 180 circuits. We now have to increase the number of luminaires to cope with the flexible position of the performance space day to day, whilst maintaining our ability to exchange one complete production with another in four hours flat! The disciplines of repertoire performances usually mean that a play that has not been performed for a week or more is given a full Dress Rehearsal for the benefit of Cast and Staff alike. The maintenance of standards at the NT has been held as paramount by us all for the last twenty five years.

We still face operational and financial challenges for the future, however the Cottesloe has been nothing if not challenging in the first ten years of my love affair with it – long may it continue to be so!

ABTT TRADE SHOW 87

BOB ANDERSON

Prologue

Can it really be nine years since the first ABTT Trade Show? Was there nowhere, before 1979, to see rival theatre products side by side and nowhere to meet old friends and all those famous and infamous 'personalities' that flocked to Riverside Studios at the beginning of March? Memories of the earlier three shows at Riverside are still fairly clear, from the one studio beginning to this year's total takeover using both studios, the art gallery and upstairs cinema. Then, before that, there were the years at the Round House, and before that, on stage at the Shaftesbury Theatre, and the year before, (the first year?) on stage at the Piccadilly theatre in repertoire, as someone put it at the time, with Barry Humphries. But wasn't there a show at the Donmar Warehouse? Sightline for Spring 1980 confirms that there was and that it was in 1978 and the very first. So, despite the claim on the glossy catalogue (courtesy of The Stage) that this was show number nine, it seems we should be celebrating ten years of this highly successful ABTT annual event.

Technology, of course, still dominates the show. Reviewers have always been quick to comment on the preponderance of lighting exhibits and nothing seems likely to change this stage of affairs, given the difficulties of demonstrating sound systems in open-plan exhibition halls, and the weight and bulk of flying systems and the moving machinery. Nevertheless, there was a significant change this year, for this was the show at which lights really began to move!

However, for once, let's leave the lights and dimmers to the end and start with sound.

Act 1. Setting the Scene

Sound and Communications

TURBOSOUND Ltd manufacture top quality loudspeakers and had had the magnificent idea of bringing an acoustically absorbing shed to house their demonstrations. Inside, heads, chest cavities and even bones could be set vibrating while outside relative comfort prevailed. No use to attempt evaluation but professionals were seen to be nodding in admiration and the pictures of installations looked impressive and tidy. At the other end of the wire, so to speak, **SENNHEISER** were content to display their range of quality microphones and radio-mic kits and infra-red deaf aid systems which many theatres have found to be more satisfactory than the induction loop method. **CANFORD AUDIO Ltd**, a leading distributor of specialist audio equipment, showed some of the 1000 items from its catalogue and the TecPro communication system, formerly the Technical Projects intercom, which they now manufacture and

distribute. **VERBATIM COMMUNICATIONS** can also offer a talkback system designed to be compatible with the Technical Projects system and also with the Clearcom system. This company, visiting the show for the first time, specialises in show relay, calls and cue communications for the entertainment industry and offers a standard range of cue light panels with advanced features to simplify the stage manager's task. For an alternative, **EUROLITE** seem to be thinking on similar lines. **FUTURE FILM DEVELOPMENTS**, another newcomer to the show, also stocks a wide range of audio and video connectors and patching systems, microphones, headphones and intercom systems. For those who prefer to hire, **MAC SOUND** returned to the show after a brief absence caused by having had too much work on hand last year.

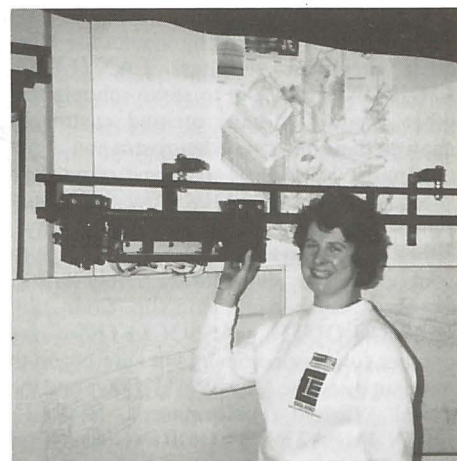
Machinery

Despite the continuing absence of the manufacturers of the bigger items of stage machinery, enthusiasts for moving scenery were offered a novelty by **TRIPLE E Ltd** who have pioneered many new ideas in recent years. This company has now successfully harnessed the linear electric motor to drive curtains and the like and



Turbosound acoustically treated sound booth for demonstrating loudspeakers.

demonstrated with impressive ease how smooth, powerful and controllable the device can be. Linked to the inevitable computer, speed and position for a multitude of tracks can be marshalled with a fluidity that was once the monopoly of lighting effects. With commendable caution, hand operating lines are fitted as what lighting have learned to call back-up. Pursuing the theme, **TRIPLE E** has also developed a friction drive curtain winch and a suitcase



Triple E Ltd. Linear motor unit in position on curtain track.

track-in-a-box kit for touring. Another computer making it's first public appearance was the **AVOLITES** chain hoist controller able to store 100 deads and move cues for up to 30 independent hoists identified by name or in plan on a VDU and with convincing safety procedures. For the more conservative, **HALL STAGE PRODUCTS** have introduced a new compact curtain track, a new curtain winch unit with longer travel and infinitely variable speed control and a new range of machined gear hoists. Completely un-computerised, **SUFFOLK SCENERY**, UK distributors for Foy Invention Enterprises, showed curtain systems and the **FOY** people flying effects. And, as everyone knows, **RADCLIFFE TRANSPORT** are experts at moving scenery in their big red vans, both at home and abroad.

Material, Props. and Paint

P L PARSONS, suppliers of scenic metal-work, again showed their 'Steeldeck' range of metal rostra frames designed to fit onto standard scaffold tube legs. **A S GREEN** of Lancashire offer specialised wooden rostra made in their own workshops, and will design, install and maintain complete



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schemes for flying, curtains, safety curtains and grids as well as being agents for most other theatrical supplies. **LANCELYN LIGHTING** who aim to serve schools and other financially hard pressed customers showed their basic wooden rostra and a low cost music stand. For fixed and removable sheet flooring **LE MARK** offer their usual range of single and double sided sheet vinyl, either self adhesive or with adhesive tape to stick it together and LeMark Safety-Track, a new "super-safe" non-slip floor tile. **CRAIG-LOUTH ASSOCIATES** are another flooring company who are proud to have supplied the Miss World shows and the Royal Variety Performance. **HARLEQUIN THEATRE FLOORING** also offer sheet flooring and specialise in sprung floor systems for dance. Their 'Harlequin-Rhofa' shock-damped floor demonstration was well appreciated by foot-weary visitors to the show.

Other specialist suppliers included the familiar **RAT MANUFACTURING** top quality range of professional music stands, **NERVA METALS** with a range of sheet metal including mirror finish aluminium and new flexible 'Metalrib' aluminium strip on a strong paper backing. **GERRIETS** showed scene painting brushes and setting-out aids. **FLINT HIRE AND SUPPLY** showed their extensive range of small ironmongery and paints and pigments for the scenic artist. **N and I COSTELLO** specialise in PVC materials including slash and shimmer materials with overprinted designs, all fireproofed for stage use. **VARIA TEXTILES** showed some of their enormous range of inherently non-flammable and fire proofed materials for scenery, costumes and furnishing. **PACKMAN RESEARCH** caught the eye with a working demonstration of continuous rain effect behind a window using their snow shower machine, glitter and a recirculating pump and also showed samples of their Formis vacuum moulded scenic panels. **DAUPHINE STAGE HIRE**, another newcomer, supply costumes, materials, makeup and drapes in the Bristol area and will soon be opening a London office. And if you want a box to put things in **FRONTLINE**



Show organiser Roger Fox receiving a Hook Clamp from Fred Bentham on behalf of Douglas Cornelison.

CASES made their first visit to the show with their range of craftsmen made specialist custom cases.

Services

Many of the products at the show are obtainable from various agents as well as the manufacturer and many of the companies noted for their own products also stock items from another manufacturer as a service to their customers and, of course, because it's good for business, but these deals are usually negotiated with the condition of not offering rival products. **DON-MAR** however, have set out to stock the widest possible range of products, with competitive items offered side by side for comparison and the convenience of the customer, so bringing the supermarket approach to theatre marketing.



Charles Morgan of Modelbox Ltd demonstrating the award winning computer aided design system printing a drawing.

And finally, in this section, a list of supporting but indispensable small part players – prop maker **JOHN BATTYE** had his "On the Make" display in the foyer; **BOOK BAZAAR** (Phone 01-352 6810, not as wrongly listed in the show guide) offered their range of second-hand technical theatre books and magazines; **JOHN OFFORD** promoted his rival to this magazine; and the **ASSOCIATION of LIGHTING DESIGNERS**, the **STAGE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION**, and the **ASSOCIATION OF ENTERTAINMENT AND ARTS MANAGEMENT** all had stands to promote their activities and to recruit membership.

Intermission

At lunchtime on the first day of the show the ABTT presented, as usual, awards for best product, best stand and technician of the year. Sufficient to say here, that **WHITE LIGHT** received the stand award and

DOUGLAS CORNELISON, won the technician of the year hook clamp for his work in developing the Central School Stage Management B/Tech course. Much more interesting for this review was the winner of the product award – **MODEL-BOX**.

MODELBOX is a system of computer aided design tailored to the special needs of theatre, television and exhibitions. Computer aided design allows all the precision and detail of engineering drawings to be stored in memory and displayed on the screen or drawn on paper far faster than possible by hand. It can also work out perspective views from different viewpoints, predict lighting cover and show the effects of small or large changes in dimension or layout. The equipment used is expensive so you have to go to them at their Shaftesbury Avenue office but you can then expect rapid service and with luck and some preparation can have the final result within hours. The RSC have used the system to fit ground-plans to various theatres on tour, the BBC has used it to explore camera angles in a complex three-dimensional set, and it has been used by many others to, for example, work out complex truck movements and **TRIPLE E** have full dimensional details of all their hardware in memory to speed their own and customers design planning. Perhaps, one day every production office will have its own CAD computer but, until the cost has made another major leap downward, hire of proven facilities from friendly competent experts is in the best theatre tradition. A well deserved award.

Act 2. The Lighting Products

Lamps

There were four specialist firms this year offering deals to supply all your lamp needs. **D C LIGHTING** of Reading made their first appearance offering friendly personal service and the best possible discounts, but then so did old friends **VALIANT**, **SLD** and **ACTION LIGHTING**. As a promise for the future Ron Merchant at **SLD** was able to show a pre-production M16 lamp

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Avolites new computerised chain hoist controller for complex road show rigs.

adapter from Thorn with solid state 'transformer' designed as a direct replacement for the PAR 38, and **ACTION LIGHTING** featured their range of candle and gas flicker effect lamps used to such good effect in Phantom of the Opera and also new miniature two-colour battens using M16 lamps at close centres working in series on 240 volt from Tomcat Engineering.

Controls

It seemed that there were fewer new lighting control panels this year. New, but still under development was the ADB S25 on the **CROWN HOUSE FURSE** stand, the latest in their new breed of Wimp, showing clear progress on the S20 screen graphics noticed in CUE 44. Furse also had a BBC computer add-on christened Starlight and aimed at schools. **CCT** showed the AVAB 202 seen last year and also their latest, the 211. Both the ADB S20 and AVAB new products use two dozen faders doubling as channel balance controls with shift for a large number of dimmers and also as group masters. Although this duplicate purpose seems confusing on first demonstration it seems likely that familiarity would reveal a lot of interesting features. More traditional (for the mid '80s) were **AVOLITES** Rolacue and QM 180, now with a timed cross fader which has allowed Andromeda Lighting to split the 180 way desk into three 60 way units for greater portability. **CEREBRUM LIGHTING** offer similar big rock boards and feature use of the USITT data protocol which allow their boards and dimmers to connect to anyone else's system using the same technique. **ARRI(GB)** also use this protocol with their new Connexion soft-patch system and one of their controls was demonstrated working **CEREBRUM** dimmers. **ARRI**, new to theatre lighting, showed the Image and Imagination controls last seen on Tim

Burnham's TBA stand but now metamorphosed with Tim and a new control, Imagine 250, into **ARRI** Lighting Control Division assets. Among the more familiar controls **STRAND** showed Gemini and M24, **DYNAMIC TECHNOLOGY** returned to the show after a major management buy-out with Chameleon and Multiset, **EUROLIGHT** showed Microlite 2, Micron and Spirit, **D.E.W.** continue with Concept, **ZERO 88** showed Eclipse (the only control with featured cigar lighter) and a new programmable effects panel, **TOUCHSTONE TECHNOLOGY** showed their touch sensitive system, the **GREEN GINGER** MicroFile 40 has not changed, **ELTEC** showed their Sceptre add-on for a BBC computer reviewed in CUE 44 and a new prototype to be called Scene Stealer, and **PULSAR LIGHT** also had their BBC add-on.

Enough of a choice for every taste and pocket!

Dimmers

As usual, dimmers are not a major show feature. However, **GREEN GINGER** proudly presented a new range of self adjusting lightweight MicroPACK dimmer packs using opto-isolators and available with all common types of European and UK socket. **GREEN GINGER** also offer WallRACK fixed dimmer systems with trouble free circuit breakers in places of fuses as standard in most cases. **ZERO 88** also had an improved range of small dimmers intended for installation in clubs and hotels. **PULSAR LIGHT**, **AVOLITES** and **CELCO** showed their versions of impressive flight cased road show dimmers.

Lanterns

First, the static units.

CCT showed their full range of spotlights and floods and, as always, introduced new features to improve performance and reliability. This year it was a new lamphouse and reflector on the 2K Silhouettes giving even more output, a fixed 5 degree lens for very long throws and a novel pull-out extension tube added to the Project pop profile to give narrower angles with increasing travelling space. **ADB** on the Furse stand showed that they are highly competitive for all types of theatre lantern and included their Svoboda modular light curtain and 2Kw lamphouse for the **RDS** optical effects systems. **DE SISTI** showed his ever growing range of top quality Film and TV luminaires and **COEMAR** their high quality follow spots and disco and theatre lanterns. **ARRI(GB)** also showed Film/TV lights and included shutter dimmers controlled from the dimmer memory systems. **STRAND** had a Century Leko profile on the stand but would not explain whether it is to be added to the European sales list.

Now, the mobiles.

On most of the following stands some or all of the lanterns were in a perpetual state of agitation changing direction, colour and sometimes intensity in response to the demands of hidden micros. **STRAND** introduced Showchanger last year with waltzing PAR cans and new strip type colour change and the control panel hidden away behind the scenes. This year it was out front but disappointingly like any other small suitcase memory control. Showchanger can also be run from Gemini and other dimmer control-

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Eurolight lighting patch system.

lers that use the Strand method of data transmission. **CEREBRUM LIGHTING** showed Posispot from Germany, again controlling PAR 64 lanterns. **OPTOKINETICS** had Spectron, a Swiss system with colour change that seemed to work by combining the output of three primary colour lamps in each lantern. **COEMAR** showed their Robot moving mirror system. **ASTRALLOY** showed Colibri, a system for mini M16 lamps with three-colour-and-open spectacle semaphores.

All the above seem to be useful only to accompany music-with-a-beat entertainment. Following a different mission **LIGHT WORKS** offer add-on drives to convert most standard theatre and studio lanterns for remote precision setting.

Standard motors and data links can control up to 12 movements per lantern with accuracy to one part in 1000 so that remote setting to professional theatre standards is easily possible. A range of lanterns from the two motion PAR-can to a Colortran Dual-Source with eight movements demonstrated the speed and silence of the system. The solution is there, now someone must admit that they have the problem and, of course, the money to put the two together.

Effects and Accessories

The struggle for the colour filter market was played down this year, only **ROSCO** made any new move with their 'ours lasts longer than theirs' display. This time the **ROSCO** stand was devoted to paint, textiles and smoke and featured the only living robot in the show, Ulysses, a neat act that stayed in character throughout hazardous and jerky journeys off the stand distributing **ROSCO** literature and smears of stage blood and body paint to the unwary. **OPTOKINETICS** also had a smoke machine with separate pump and reservoir for easy refilling. For projected effects **A C LIGHTING**, a rental company visiting the show for the first time, demonstrated the 4Kw Pani HMI projector and effects loops plus samples of lanterns from major overseas manufacturers including Pani, Altman, Ultra-Arc, Spotlight and Colorwiz. **TRAFALGAR LIGHTING**, another rental company, claimed the largest lantern at the show, a Super Trouper follow spot, and showed powerful 400w UV lamps from Italy. **DHA** showed new double gobo rotators and animation wheels, more new gobos and examples of their screen printed fabric service. Seekers of truss systems could see Slick Systems on the **NORTHERN LIGHT** stand, TriLite on the **OPTOKINETICS** stand, Astralite, Struc-



"Ulysses" distributing Rosco trade literature.

talite and Minilite on the **ASTRALLOY** stand and Thomas trusses on the **ENTEC** stand. **EUROLITE** have a useful line of dimmer power patch systems and socket boxes and **NORTHERN LIGHT** and **D.E.W.** also displayed samples of custom made socket panels. All three companies can carry out full electrical installations.

Lighting Services

Most of the comments so far have concerned products. Equally valuable to many are the rental and general design and retail services offered by particular specialists. Prominent by virtue of their ABTT award winning stand and relaxed friendly demeanour is **WHITE LIGHT**, the steadily expanding London based lighting hire organisation. North of the border **BLACK LIGHT** are a new company specialising in lighting hire and in friendly competition with **NORTHERN LIGHT**, Scotland's other lighting company. **ANCIENT LIGHTS** have made their name in East Anglia and with their lantern conversion kits and unmatched stock of vintage lighting. **TRAFALGAR LIGHTING** in London offer special deals and renovated second hand items. **LANCELYN LIGHTING** serve Oxford and the Wirral. **RAXCREST INTERNATIONAL** offer technical consultancy and installation as well as custom manufacture, hire and servicing and **ENTEC SOUND AND LIGHT** appearing at the show for the first time provide a full range of equipment and crews, production and transport.

In all, an excellent tenth ABTT show, needed and welcomed by most. Will next year be even bigger and therefore at a new venue, or will the organisers stick to the present successful formula? Why not phone the ABTT office with your views?

(Curtain and calls.)

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CONTROL BOARD ALPHABET

Continuing Francis Reid's ABC for 1987



D is for the **Dimmers** which **distribute** and **ration** each light's electricity in accordance with commands from the operator's fingers – or their hands, knees and boomsadaisys when dimmers of water or wire were under direct manual



DDM (Drama Theatre, Adelaide Festival Centre)

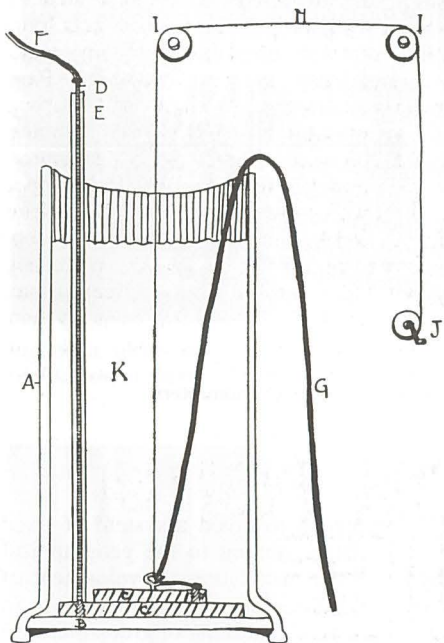
control. Today's dimmers are solid state (qv) devices usually based on thyristors (qv) and receiving their instructions remotely by small currents through multicores (qv) or increasingly by digital information conveyed through a single wire. This is the age of **digital** logic and the first major computer control (ie with operational logic derived from a software programme rather than hard-wired circuitry) was **DDM** named in the Bentham tradition from the initials of an



Duet

unpublicised fuller title – in this case 'Digital Dimmer Memory'. Such systems required a separate computer rack but, within a decade, microprocessor chips could be mounted within the desks of systems like **Duet** which made memory a universal facility available to all but the very smallest stages.

Some of the earliest electric dimmers (but see 'pole dimmers') were constructed from **drainpipes** and daily maintenance was performed with a watering can to replace fluid which evaporated at each performance in proportion to the length of time that each dimmer had been held on check.



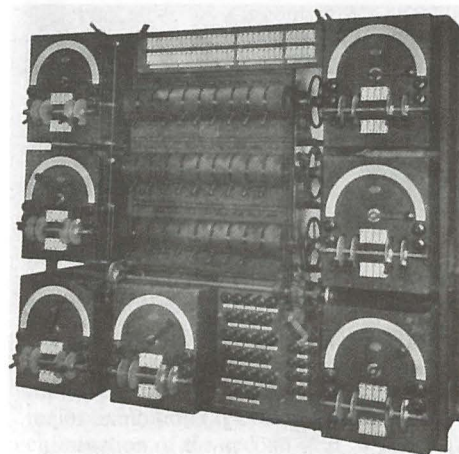
Home-made Dimmer.

- A. Drain pipe. B. Tile cemented in.
- C. Iron plates. D. Iron rod. E. Rubber tubing.
- F. Positive and G Negative cables. H. Cord.
- I. Pulleys. J. Winch. K. Electrolyte.

Do-it-yourself Drainpipe Dimmer (from Harold Ridge's Stage Lighting, 1930)

Delicolour was an early form of pre-setting whereby four dimmers for a 4-colour (3 primaries plus white) batten could be moved by operation of a single lever to take up the appropriate positions to mix the colour corresponding to a pointer selection of any one of some fifty gel numbers. Invented by Rollo Gillespie Williams (qv).

D is also for the **Diodes** that simplified circuitry generally but, initially and most obviously, eliminated flicker from grouping switches. Another commonplace of the newer technology is the **dipless** crossfade, once a prime measure of an operator's **dexterity**.



Delicolor Board (W. J. Furse Ltd)

And **D** most finally is for **DBO** the dead blackout which returns all stages to the stage from which controlled light brought them hence.



E is for **Electricity** which has very little to do with lighting – it was just the means by which we process energy today. There was controlled lighting before electricity and the future hopefully holds more sophisticated ways of generating and handling waveforms. Meanwhile the relatively young science of **electronics** has been as big an influence in lighting as in most other areas of our lives. The word 'electronic' made its initial major impact on stage lighting in 1950 with J. T. Wood's Thyatron (qv).



is for **Fade** which, although strictly speaking implies only a gradual reduction in brightness, is often used to describe any direction of intensity move – thus **fade-in** and **fade-up**. **Fade-out** implies a fade to zero of some channels, while **FBO** is the fade that takes everything to blackout. Crossfades (qv) can be ‘dipless’ (qv), ‘split’ (qv) or ‘profiled’ (qv).

All parts of a control system are protected by **fuses**, located for the power circuits in the dimmer room, and for the electronics at the desk. Wire has mostly been superseded by cartridges but the long awaited breaker (qv) revolution continues to remain a promise.

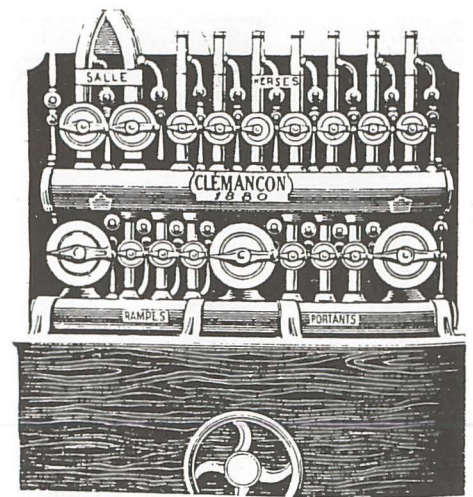
For driving boards the foot is a much underused portion of the operator’s anatomy. In **Bentham’s** Console and CD (qv), **foot pushes** were used as operational switches, usually doubling up the function of certain finger pushes primarily to free the hands for other tasks at critical moments. This might be thought to be a rather specialised technique appealing to organists, but the balanced pedal for speed regulation is a very natural movement for any driver, especially since sensitive board operation requires subtle acceleration and deceleration rather than a uniform speed maintained throughout the cue.



is for **Grandmaster**, the summit of the application of pure mechanical engineering to lighting control. Individual dimmers could be locked to shafts, each of which in turn could be selected to raise or lower when the single master wheel was turned on cue. All done by gears. Grandmasters were well suited to variety style washes of coloured floodlighting from battens, floats and wing floods – with the red, blue, amber and white dimmers each having their own shafts. Spotlight rigs were more complex to operate, particularly for plays. But in many theatres, particularly the number one touring houses, there were teams (of often not more than two people for 96 dimmers) who could perform feats of the most incredible dexterity. With enough operators (ie a lot) everything was possible, including some cues that can still be difficult on even the most sophisticated of today’s computer boards.

The **Gas Table** can be considered the first really centralised lighting control (but see candle ‘pole’). Centralised mounting of the gas taps allowed individual lighting instruments to be faded, and there was a system of pilot jets to permit circuits which had been faded to extinction to be remotely rekindled.

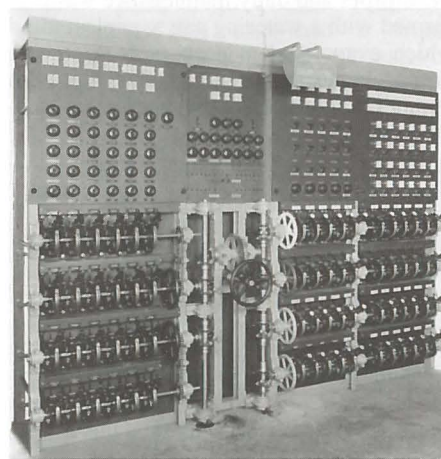
The formation of channels into **Groups** has always been one of the more contentious areas of board design. It was certainly the major point of debate in the design of the manual preset desks which accompanied the thyristor revolution in the mid-sixties. **Bentham** (qv) was convinced that the groups should be common across all presets: many users favoured the possibility of forming different groups within each preset. Thus ‘SP’ (qv) boards had a single set of grouping switches while ‘Threeset’ (qv) had a set of switches for each preset. The most versatile manual boards were the ‘LP’ (qv) and its more sophisticated progeny ‘Lightset’ (qv) which probably had just about the most flexible grouping achievable without a computer. The Strand grouping tradition, followed by **Thorn** on their introduction of pin patch (qv) allowed flexible grouping whereas the repertoire tradition of central



A Gas Table (Clemancon, 1880)



is for **Half** which was a convenient plotting level when boards were either uncalibrated or their operational procedures made the use of such basic calibrations as 1 to 10 unrealistic. ‘Full’, ‘three-quarters’, ‘half’, ‘quarter’, and ‘out’ was the usual scale with ‘plus’ or ‘minus’ added sparingly and optimistically. A theatre’s permanent control is called the **house board** when another board is brought in temporarily by a touring company. **Holophane** was the name of a company and their product which mixed colour on delicolour principles (qv). **Hydraulic** power was used to operate dimmers at the Royal College of Music in a lighting installation which was away ahead of its time in many respects including control, not only at its inauguration in 1925 but for many years after. Indeed the capability for a single operator to control so many dimmers moving at independent speeds was not achieved again until the computer age. Each channel had a hydraulic valve which set that dimmers travel at any required rate up to half an hour.



One of the smaller Grandmasters

Europe tended to breed a system of fixed groups corresponding to the geographical layout of the installation. Development of memory controls has involved a growth in the number and flexibility of group masters. The launch of the first viable memory system included quite an intense discussion on whether or not groups would now be redundant (the prototype had none) – and the debate on how many groups still continues, particularly between those requiring boards for plotted shows and those wishing to create instant lighting during performance.

Glyndebourne has always been in the van of lighting development. The opera house opened in 1934 with a **Bordoni** (qv) offering load independence for 5w to 5Kw on each channel, and there were 40 presettable ‘stops’ on each channel’s control lever. Such load flexibility did not become general in Britain until after 1964 – by which time **Glyndebourne** had become the first theatre in Europe to install thyristors. And a control desk whose functions could be temporarily duplicated in mid-auditorium for rehearsal.

THEATRE DESIGN AT CROYDON

BOB ANDERSON

One of the 'perks' of contributing to this magazine is that a reporter from Cue can enjoy a little of the respect (fear?) earned by the professional press. Another is the occasional invitation to press launches and first nights. This explains why I attended a performance at Croydon College last Autumn and enjoyed the evening so much that I resolved to fill a gap in my own education and find out how the college goes about teaching theatre design.

Croydon College, like many similar institutions, runs a Faculty of Art & Design. Unlike most, it offers a long established Theatre Production and Design course lead-



General view of displays and Ring Round the Moon set.

ing to a B/TEC Higher National Diploma in Design. It is a three year course with the final year spent on secondment in the entertainment industry. About twenty-four new students are accepted each year, a few direct from sixth-form, but most after an arts foundation course or a less specialised diploma course or suitable theatre experience. There are usually more women than men. The specialities offered are Setting and Costume and Lighting and Production studies.

The Director of Studies is Iain Potter who described the course to me and showed me round. New students begin by being introduced to the design processes, craft skills and practical staging techniques which must be applied when interpreting the script and supporting the actor in a theatrical presentation. This includes textual analysis, set design, costume design, lighting techniques, production management, construction, model-making, technical drawing, scene painting, property making, costume cutting and making, and the histories of

theatre, the performing arts, architecture and costume. A busy and fascinating first year! After this "orientation" period each student has to choose a speciality – Set and Costume or Lighting and Production, and devote the rest of the course to these subjects. Throughout the course about twenty percent of the lectures cover non-theatrical design topics – complementary studies aimed at widening horizons.

Senior lecturers, all with extensive theatre experience, are Suzanne Adams – Design, Mike Hanson – Planning and Construction, John Turney – Scene Painting, and Robert Muller – Lighting and Production. Ralph Adron provides specialist tuition in Design, Clifford Bayliss in Properties and Technical Drawing and Natasha Kornilof in Costume Cutting and Making. They are assisted by other members of the college and by visiting specialists from the world of professional theatre. The whole course is validated by external assessors and students are eligible for mandatory local authority grant awards.

The course has priority use of the College theatre – a flat-floor academic assembly hall but with a reasonably well equipped stage, a 50 seat studio space and well equipped workshops for set construction, costume cutting and property making. Each year students develop their skills by working on a series of projects leading to the realisation of their designs for setting, light-



Don Giovanni set by Martin Kern.

ing and costume etc., going through all the production processes required to mount a minor production in the studio theatre, a major exhibition (The Workshow) and, as a culmination of the second year, a full scale production in collaboration with a visiting theatre company.

This year's production was staged in the college hall in December and was 'Ring Round the Moon', Christopher Fry's translation of the Jean Anouilh piece, played in a permanent Winter Garden setting. My brief mention of this production was hidden in the Cue January product review. As I reported then, it proved a very enjoyable evening with excellent performances by the visiting cast and straightforward, competent lighting, scenery, costumes and stage management.

In the past, courses have staged shows at the nearby Ashcroft Theatre and co-operated with the Ealing Drama Studio, Surrey Opera, Croydon Warehouse Theatre, the Guildhall School of Music and Drama, the Royal Academy of Music and local amateur companies, providing all visual design, scenery, lighting, costumes and stage management and staging and sharing the production budget.

Evidence of the quality of the hands-on experience policy is most apparent to a day visitor in the workrooms. The woodwork and painting shop has a deliciously evocative smell of sawdust and size and on the day I was there, scenery and properties were nearing completion for the second year Workshow. All the usual materials and techniques are used to give the widest possible range of experience. Basic woodwork-



Costume for Ring Round the Moon by Trish Lee.



Animal Farm set by Simon Warren.

ing machinery is provided and the students are taught to use it safely. A paintframe offers experience painting cloths and bigger flats. John Turney sets each first year student to copy various painting styles on miniature flats and keeps an impressive library of 'El Greco's, 'Adam' fireplaces



Students rigging lights.

and 'Liberty' wallpaper, the achievements of the more talented from past courses. In the properties shop, among models of sets and sketches of detail, traditional chicken wire, paper-mache, string and glue were being transformed into the various items demanded by the Workshow set projects. On the floor below surrounded by cutting tables, dummies and racks loaded with completed and half completed costumes, students cut, sew, paint and dye their materials to convert their artistic im-

pressionistic designs into precisely fitting garments styled with authentic detail or to the flight of fancy appropriate to the character of the part.

Visiting the course a week before the annual Workshow, also offered the opportunity to see the second year working as a team to rig lighting bars in the body of the main hall. Over the years, an ingenious rig has been designed involving removal of the houselight fittings and wire rope suspensions made off in the roof space to support a

LAUNCHED at the ABTT TRADE SHOW '87

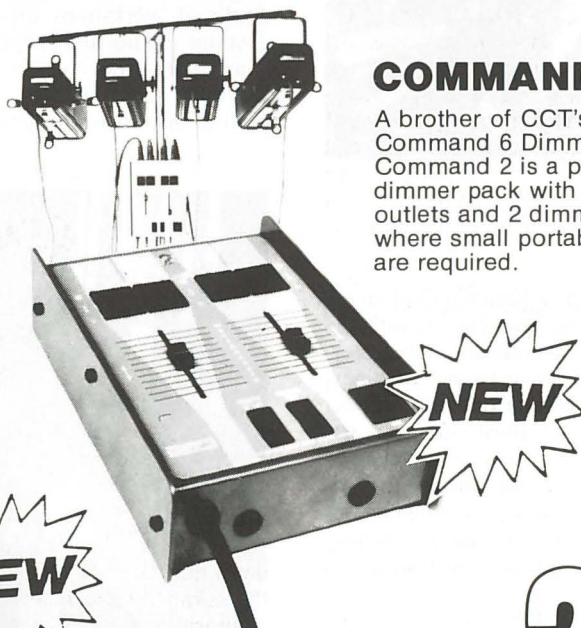


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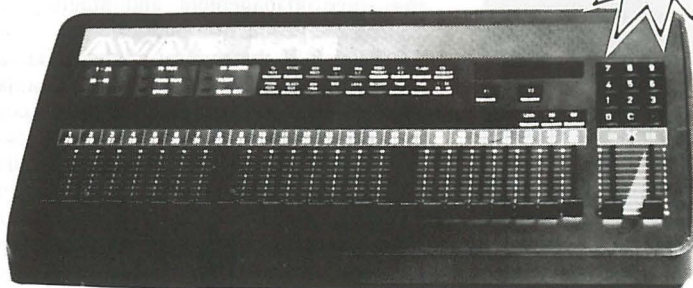
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YEARS

CCT theatre lighting

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Student work in the paint-shop.



Poster at entrance to the Workshow.

square lantern layout. Robert Muller explained that the students are taught the mechanics of checking the stresses in the rig for strength and balance and are expected to pay full attention to their own and other people's safety. Students were overhauling lanterns before rigging and overheard discussing proper phase separation rules. During rigging everyone wore safety helmets and have a mission to carry the practice out into their secondment theatres. Evaluation of the aesthetic success of the rig had to wait until the show opened.

The Workshow opened in the second week of March giving all 24 second year students the opportunity to show off examples of their best work. The main hall, now mysterious and magic in the theatrical lighting, was filled with costumes, scenic set-pieces, model stages and design drawings and surrounded by visitors, parents and relations, every grade of VIP, staff and fellow college students. Hopefully, the VIPs included prospective employers. On stage was the permanent set and lighting for Ring Round the Moon.

It is dangerous, and probably unnecessary for a near amateur to attempt detailed criticism of the quality of the work on display. Nevertheless, lighting in the main exhibition areas was appropriately theatrical and subtle. The set pieces properly dramatic, well built and painted and with a few touches of flair. The model sets offered alternatives; the drawings showed detail, with the occasional endearing shaky printing, but proper attention to joints, fixings, dimension and tolerance. The costumes were magnificent.

Generally, convincing evidence of crafts well learned and of individual artistic ability.

Like all good exhibitions, several side shows were on offer; an attempt at colour music, animated projections and sound images deployed in space. Here, I fear, criticism is due, because, despite the apparent technical ability, none of these experiments achieved a properly shaped performance with variation of tempo and recognisable beginnings, middles and ends. Small failures though, and in the non-visual

aspects of theatre that in the co-operative world outside, will come from the author and director of the piece.

During the course students are encouraged to get work experience in the West End or elsewhere within reach of south London provided it does not interfere with their main college activities. After the second year, however, the students have to go out and spend two terms on attachment to professional theatres and craft workshops acquiring full-time practical experience. Over the years students have found attachments in all parts of the British Isles. During this time grants dry up and students have to learn to live on what they can earn. The result, after return to college for a final term

to write a thesis and for final evaluation and award of diplomas and certificates, is an enviable record of near 100% immediate employment for the course graduates, nearly always in jobs closely related to the individual preferences and skills acquired at the college.

True to the characteristics of the profession, Iain Potter claims the course to be underfunded, short of space, self sufficient and highly motivated. They could also probably claim, with justice, to be cost effective, dedicated, friendly, good natured, competent and professional. I wish them well, staff and students, past and present, and recommend their abilities to sponsors and employers everywhere.

NAPOLI and FIRENZE

Francis Reid's Theatric Tourist trail takes him to a pair of minor theatres.

The San Carlo in Naples is one of the world's most delicious opera houses, but don't miss the **Teatro di Corte** just around the corner in the Palazzo Reale. Today's auditorium is a 1950 restoration following war damage to the 1768 theatre of Fernando Fuga. The rectangular first floor hall in the Royal Palace was in use as the court theatre earlier in the century and a print shows how the space was fitted out for opera around 1750.

Today's theatre is simple in form but ornate in decoration. Unlike a conventional 'Italianate' opera house, the majority of the audience are not hung in boxes on the walls but are seated in 21 rows of 22 seats on a flat floor with centre gangway. A shallow

gallery runs around the walls with space for only a single row of spectators. In the centre of the section facing the stage, this gallery expands into a box formed from exuberant drapes executed in gilded plaster.

The whole theatre has an abundance of gold. Paintings in the panelled ceiling offer an idyllic pastoral view of the classical age and the walls are dominated by statues of the gods displaying no interest whatsoever in the performance on stage. The colourings move from subtle pinks and pale lavenders above the gallery to blue greys below, while the house tabs are of the deepest darkest damson plum. Candleabra (5-branch at statue level and 3 branch on the balustrades) give a sparkle to the gilding, although day-



Teatro di Corte in the Palazzo Reale, Naples



Anfiteatro di Boboli beside the Pitti Palace, Florence



light can be admitted through the floor length windows opening along the OP wall onto the Piazza del Plebiscito.

The Pit would hold a chamber orchestra and the stage is a good wingless square. Too formal perhaps for operas about humans, but ideal for small opera seria and concerts.

In a day which had included the frustration of failure to penetrate the Court Theatre in the Royal Palace at Caserta and exclusion from San Carlo because of rehearsals, it was particularly rewarding to find such a delightful theatre open for viewing as just one of the rooms in the Palazzo Reale.

There is also daily open access to the seventeenth century **Anfiteatro di Boboli** in Florence. A large grazed arena for tournaments and equestrian spectacles leads from the courtyard of the Pitti Palace into the Boboli Gardens. The 'playing area' is contained by a horseshoe of elegant stone seating tiers. Leading out of this horseshoe and facing the Pitti courtyard is a long wide rising statue-lined path which provided a dramatic entry for the mounted performers.

Sitting in this amphitheatre, one can get close to the spirit of the prints that are now our only contact with these distant entertainments. However the theatric tourist develops something of a jigsaw imagination: remembering, for example, while sitting in the Boboli the choreography of Vienna's Spanish Riding School. One's imagination can also be fed in the courtyard itself. In 1589 it was roofed with an awning of red silk for a water pageant in celebration of the wedding festivities of Catherine of Lorraine and the Grand Duke of Tuscany — architectural detail in a contemporary engraving corresponds closely to what one finds today.