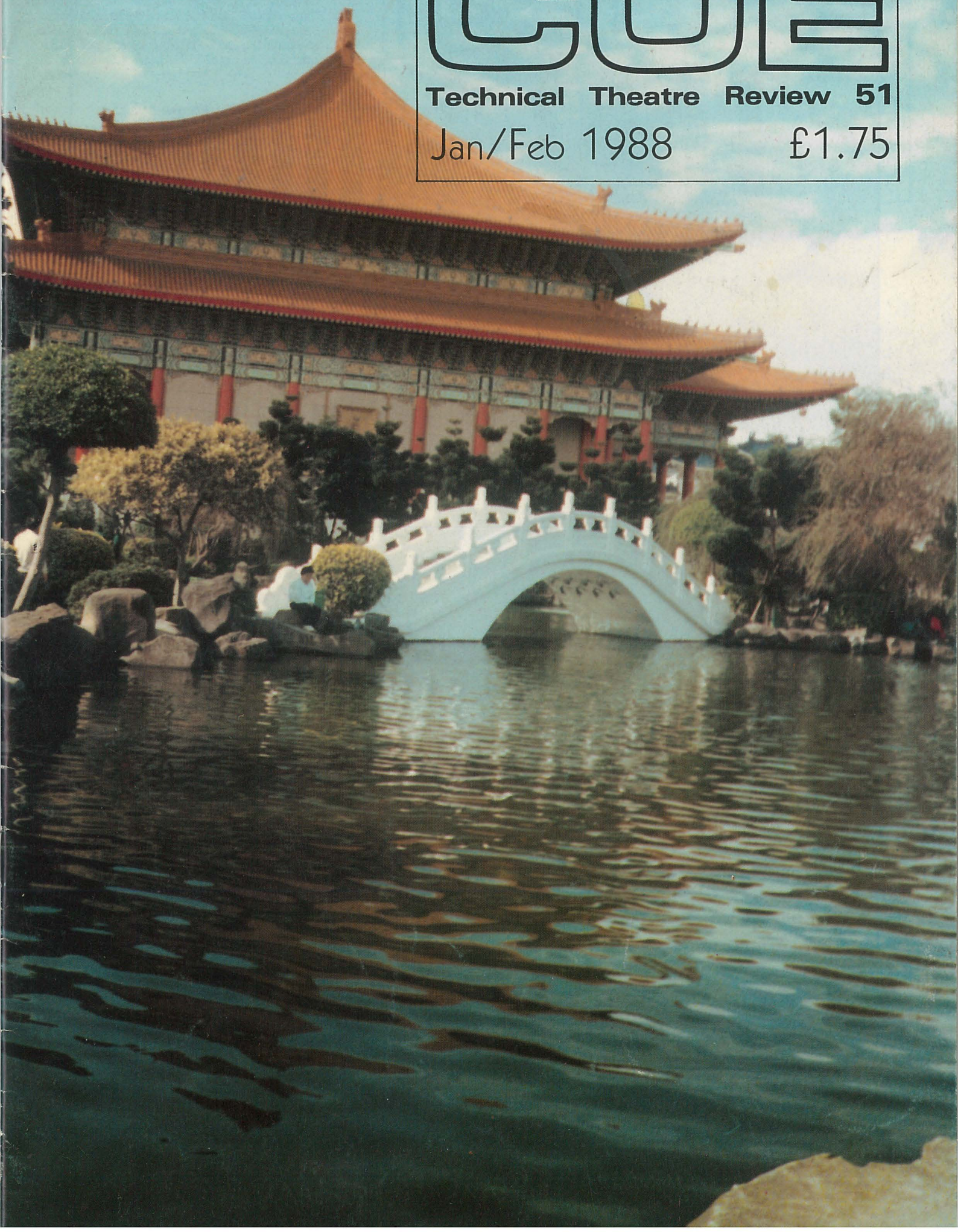


CUE

Technical Theatre Review 51

Jan/Feb 1988

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Cover:
Temples of thespis is Francis Reid's description of Taiwan's National Theatre and Concert Hall. Our cover picture captures the willow pattern setting of the National Theatre in the Chang Kai-Shek Memorial park in Taipei.

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STATES OR MOVES?

The world of lighting control seems to have become as divided about its computer philosophy as the linguistic academics are split over structuralism. At CUE we certainly don't understand the structuralist debate and we are not at all sure that we understand the tracking one. But let us try. Particularly since, although it is quite possible to enjoy a book without having heard of structuralism, it could be rather brave to set out to choose a board without considering whether it records states or moves when in default mode.

The divide started as a mid-atlantic one. When Britain added computer processing to lighting control, most theatres were using multipreset boards and so the new technology was used to memorise complete cue states in order to provide what were essentially infinite preset systems. In America the big impulse to memorise came later and because it became from Broadway (Chorus Line, 1975) the jump was straight from piano boards without an intermediate phase of electronic presetting (despite George Izenour's pioneering work in educational theatre) and so the computer processing was applied to the cue-to-cue moves rather than to the cue states.

We suspect that British users were more actively involved than the American users in the debate over how the new technologies were to be used. We also suspect that computer people like the move philosophy because it saves memory capacity and so appeals to their concept of engineering elegance. And no one who has faced one of those American domestic television sets where you have to hit 'enter' every time you key a new channel is ever surprised that it generally takes more button pushing (or key stroking if you must) to get action on an American lighting board than on a British one.

Should there be such a divide? Surely not? Surely each and every board (certainly those for use in professional theatre) should be capable of working in either mode. Perhaps because we are British, we think that 'state' should be the default mode with 'move' as a selectable option.

But our main concern remains that all boards should be reliable and operator friendly. Alas, few are both and many are neither.

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STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

Hansel and Gretel move into a 1950's suburban housing estate earning full marks for a stimulating new staging at the London Coliseum □ A lavish and luxurious production of *L'Italiana in Algeri* with many pleasing effects □ In a five hour marathon at the Olivier *Country Mania* provided outstanding sets, costumes and lighting □ The Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet and a staging which suited the work and the company.

to make an opera's staging in a changed setting a success. The Pountney/Lazaridis handling of *Hansel and Gretel* continued on an equally high level. When the children left to pick strawberries they went not to the woods, but to the local recreation ground, the kitchen having slid back into the stage, where, amidst urban squalor, tramps and winos slept rough on park benches. The wicked witch turned out to be their previously shabby and defeated mother, now smartly decked out in the 'New Look', and when she took them to her home director and designed pulled their master stroke, for it turned out to be the family kitchen again, but now put to sparkling

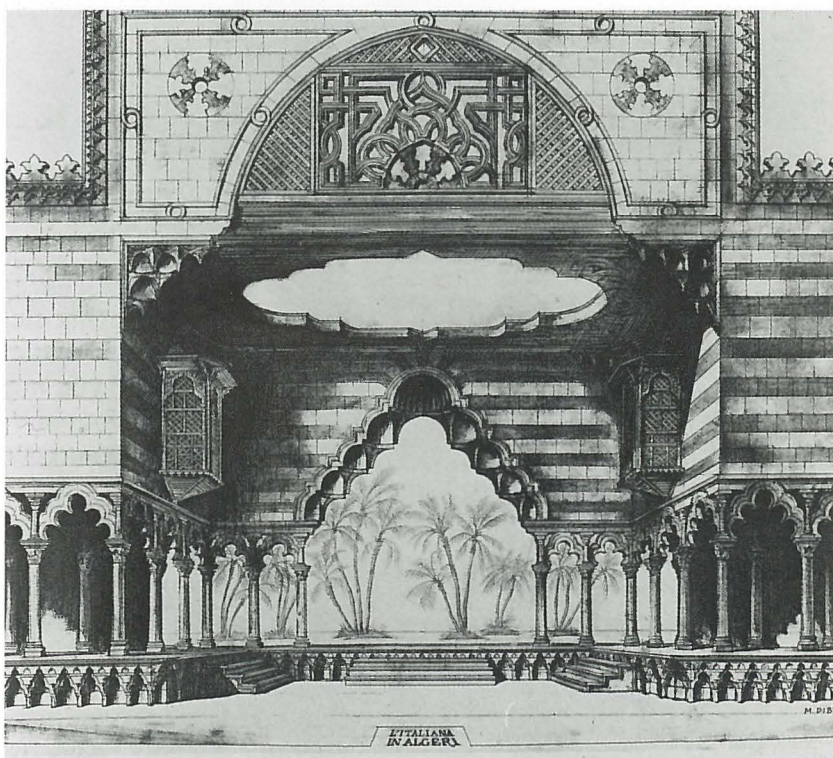
It has become something of a fad at the London Coliseum that English National Opera producers should update and generally re-examine the operas that the company stages. Thus in the past year or so, to name but a few, we have seen Jonathan Miller's 1950's New York Mafia setting of Verdi's *Rigoletto*, his transference of *Tosca* from the Rome of the Bourbons in 1800 to that of Mussolini in the 1940's, Rossini's *Moses* brought forward from the Old Testament to the State of Israel, *Cavalleria Rusticana* and *I Pagliacci* set not in Italy's deep south but at a pithead in the industrial North, and now Humperdinck's *Hansel and Gretel* removed from Grimms' fairyland to an English housing estate in the grim early 1950's.

Some of these new-look productions have worked better than others, and I am bound to say that when I heard advance rumour of what was about to be done to Humperdinck's traditional Christmas favourite, I feared the worst. I need not have done so: David Pountney's entirely untraditional staging of the old favourite, brilliantly designed by Stefanos Lazaridis, remains true to the spirit of the opera — the important thing — presents it in terms that make it more, rather than less, intelligible and meaningful, and thus offers highly stimulating and satisfying operatic entertainment.

The overture is played, tabs up, before a skilfully modelled tableau of meagre, boxy houses on a typical London suburban housing estate, surrounded by urban detritus. Then, from the centre of the stage, a fully constructed set rears up and settles into place. It is the kitchen of one of the houses on the estate, in an advanced stage of poverty and neglect, and is of course the home of Hansel, Gretel, and their parents. There is an abundance of remarkably accurate period detail: not only were the gas cooker and unwieldy old 'fridge spot on, so too were smaller details such as the kitchen scales, the radio in bakelite case, the kettle and the crockery. Equally precise and accurate were Lazaridis' costumes for the two children and their parents, even the copy of the *Daily Herald* brought on by father, and his bottle of gin, were correctly 50's, redolent of that age of austerity that followed victory in 1945. It is this kind of attention to detail, as in Patrick Robertson's setting of Dr Miller's *Rigoletto*, that helps



English National Opera's *Hansel & Gretel* at the London Coliseum. Producer: David Pountney, Design: Stefanos Lazaridis, Lighting: Chris Ellis. Photo: Bill Rafferty.



Model of set design for Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algeri* by Jean-Pierre Ponnelle.

rights, and with red and white checked gingham (of course) attached to every conceivable surface. This was a production in which everything, for once, *worked*, and thus it both arrested the attention and led to an enhanced appreciation of the opera. Full marks to Pountney, Lazaridis, and to impeccably precise lighting designer Chris Ellis for their mastery of both concept and mechanics, and for their scrupulous attention to detail.

At the Royal Opera House Christmas and New Year productions were more conventionally staged, with a newly designed version of Ashton's ballet *Cinderella* followed by an imported new production of Rossini's comic opera *L'Italiana in Algeri*. The Royal Ballet's previous staging of *Cinderella* had costumes designed by David Walker — Henry Bardon was responsible for the sets — and this time round Mr Walker was the designer of both. He gave us pleasing, conventional, well detailed settings which allowed ample space for the dancers, though personally I would have welcomed a little more sparkle and grandeur in the ballroom and final scenes. As was to be expected, David Walker's costumes were up to their usual, meticulously detailed standards, and the production as a whole is a highly effective one for a popular classic and will no doubt continue to please Covent Garden audiences for many seasons to come.

The Royal Opera's staging of Rossini's *Italian Girl in Algiers* was shared with the Vienna State Opera, where it had first been seen last Autumn in Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's production. He was apparently too busy to come to London to direct his staging and left matters in the hands of his assistant, Sonja Frisell, but presumably his designs were the same at Covent Garden as in Vienna, and here were skilfully and precisely lit by Robert Bryan. Ponnelle is a director and designer who believes that opera should above all entertain and be enjoyed, and, as well as stage productions, he has presented many operas with much success on television. Not for him then the challenging or the controversial, rather the stage picture that pleases, even dazzles, the eye, and helpfully eases the action along. So here we had an attractive, brightly coloured, strongly rococo Algerian harem, framed and roofed, and containing many an audience-pleasing effect, such as the sinking of Isabella's boat, on the horizon, by cannon shot in Act 1, and its departure, in a much larger version under full sail, with Isabella and her lover aboard, in the final scene.

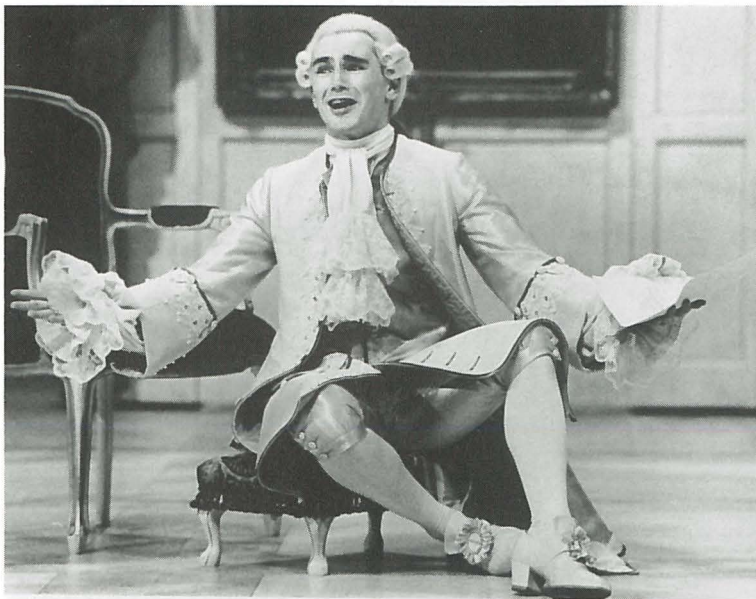
There was nothing more challenging than the fact that he put the European visitors into late 19th century costumes and used something closer to *commedia dell'arte* for the Bey and his court, with the chorus of eunuchs in squidgy face masks and with false, bare, protruding stomachs. It was all very easy on the eye, and attractively undemanding; perfectly all right if you happen to share Mr Ponnelle's evident view that opera is a lavish and luxurious art form that should not unduly tax the intellect.



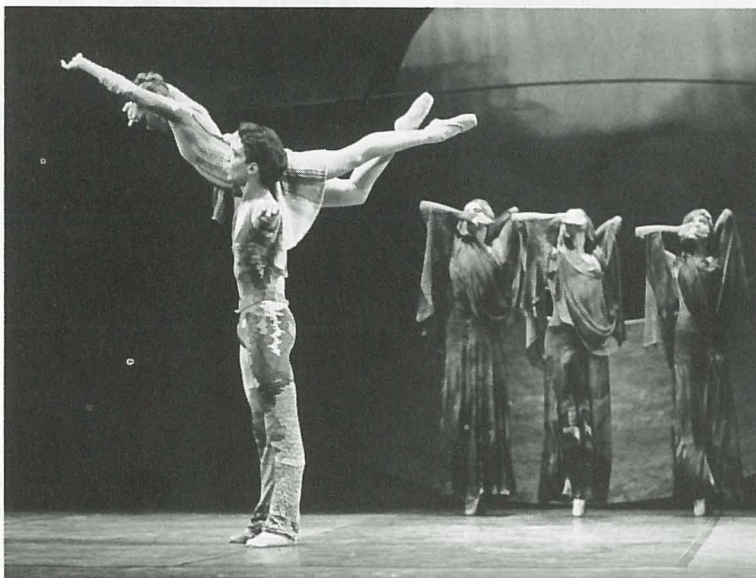
L'Italiana in Algeri in performance at the Royal Opera House. Producer Sonja Frisell, Lighting by Robert Bryan, Photographs by Clive Barda.



The Royal Ballet's newly designed version of Ashton's *Cinderella* by Prokofiev. Sets and costumes by David Walker. Photo Leslie E. Spatt.



Mike Alfreds' version of Carlo Goldoni's trilogy *Country Mania* at the Olivier. Sets, costumes and lighting by Paul Dart. Photo: John Haynes.



Graham Lustig's *The Edge of Silence* by the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet. Design by Nadine Baylis. Lighting by John B Read. Photo: Leslie E. Spatt.



Altogether more economical, but equally attractive and dramatically rather more stimulating, design was to be found at the National Theatre's Olivier auditorium in Mike Alfreds' marathon adaptation of Goldoni's trilogy, *Country Mania*. For this production Alfreds used the very able young designer, Paul Dart, an old hand on their productions for Shared Experience, and, more recently, responsible with Alfreds for the highly successful staging of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* at the Cottesloe. Dart's use of moving, revolving screens to evoke Italian 18th century middle-class residences in both town and country, indoors and out, was most astute. For once on the unwieldy Olivier stage a lightweight setting felt genuinely theatrical and managed to convey both dramatic presence and a sense of intimacy. Dart's costumes were equally successful and showed a highly developed grasp of the vagaries of both fashion and class, as well as looking as if they belonged to their wearers. As he was also responsible for lighting the show, which he did with skill and sensitivity, he can look back on a triple success in the National's main auditorium, despite the woefully thin audiences it drew: they were deterred, I fear, by the production's nearly five hour length.

During the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet season at Sadler's Wells Theatre there were nightly appeals towards raising the million pounds that are needed to widen the stage and improve its facilities. The appeal was timely inasmuch as it is said that unless the stage is extended SWRB is likely to move its base to Birmingham. Certainly the company need a larger stage if it is to continue to present such grandiose pageants as Michael Corder's *Gloriana*, given its London premiere at the Wells during the season. In Philip Prowse's monumental black and gold setting, surmounted by a heavy gilded grille containing an astrolabe, and dominated by a central throne set at the top of a precipitate flight of stairs, space was seriously at a premium. This was aggravated by Prowse's costumes, which were on a similar scale and so cumbersome that the dancers needed more room than usual in which to move — they were scarcely called on to dance.

Whether we actually need this kind of work from the company I rather doubt, either at Sadlers Wells, in Birmingham, or anywhere else. Such a touring dance company seems far better served by such works as David Bintley's witty and compact *Allegri Diversi*, even if Terry Bartlett's rather confused backdrop is hardly an adornment, or by Graham Lustig's dramatic, if over portentous, *The Edge of Silence*, designed with her habitual skill, dramatic grasp, and economy by Nadine Baylis. Here there was an impeccably scaled, genuinely dramatic fixed setting, strong lighting by John B. Read, and those admirable knitted costumes that Ms Baylis uses so effectively to accommodate the movement of dancers. The whole concept fits the work and the company, and is in need of no seven-figure stage extensions to make it more viable.

Pondering in the Playhouse

FRED BENTHAM

As I sat in the newly refurbished Playhouse down on the Embankment yesterday two thoughts struck me. First I had been right in thinking that of all the theatres in the West End the Playhouse was the only one I had never been in, either backstage or out-front. Second that I had been wrong, when glancing through CUE No. 50, not to stop and read the Iain Mackintosh article* instead of saying to myself I can guess what he is on about! I have now read it and this article is an admixture of the stimuli received in remedying these two omissions. Deciding to keep my thoughts to the demi-paradise of this other Eden and not cross the silver sea in which it is set to the envious less happier lands; it occurred to me what a true servant of its time the Edwardian theatre was. Design recognised the fact that all men were born unequal and unless they had a talent for making money, no matter how, they stayed that way: in order of precedence; stalls, dress circle, upper circle, pit and gallery. Even in the last two cheap unreserved areas for which you had to queue on the day, there was a distinction between those who could afford an extra sixpence for "early door". Men and women in their time certainly had their exits and their entrances in many parts, as they rose in financial status and descended from gallery full of strange oaths to stalls and round belly with good capon lined. It is a fact that shows began at 8.30 pm to allow this area to dine and even so the arrival of latecomers was notorious. As bad as hats at the matinee of which more anon.

Being in a mischievous mood I have to say that I am not sure that Iain Mackintosh is right when he attributes the changes in cinema theatre design to changes in social conventions between the wars. Certainly there had to be a change in geometry of the auditorium "to emphasise sightlines to the screen" but the fact that in purpose built super cinemas we all went in through the same door was not quite as democratic as it might appear at first sight. Cinema going in my experience was for a long time looked down upon as a second class occupation, in much the same way as the reading of 'bloods' (Sexton Blake and that ilk) was not real book reading to be done proudly in the open for all to see. Live theatre was quite a different matter. In that respect cinema was regarded by 'the educated' as something for the masses, rather like television was at one time. After all there are still those who can be heard to boast that they never look at it and would certainly not dream of buying a TV set.



The Playhouse Theatre circa 1913

I know what Iain means when he claims that the audience was demoted from an active to a passive role in cinema going. But first there were the silent twenties and I am sure that the musicians in the pit got something of a response from a good house as distinct from a thin. Reginald Foort has remarked on the ordeal of playing to a more or less empty house in early afternoon. Then again the superbly humorous organ accompaniment by Quentin Maclean to Buster Keaton or Harold Lloyd both gave and got something in audience response. It is monstrous what pedestrian accompaniments have been dubbed on most silents since. Again not all members of the audience were passive. There were those who insisted on reading out the captions for the benefit of an aged gran' alongside. These dear old souls may have been slow readers or not at all unlikely, had never learned to read. Then there were those pairs who went for the darker or remoter areas of the large auditorium we, I mean they, were by no means passive at all. Leaving aside the select few more pricey pre-release houses in the West End we have to see the rest of the cinemas, no matter how super or palatial, in terms of the neighbourhoods in which they were built. They covered a larger range than the music halls they ultimately, with the arrival of the talkies, replaced; but unlike most theatres only had to serve their particular suburb.

A cinema opened in 1923, Frank Verity's 3000 seater for Israel Davis the Shepherds Bush Pavilion, was a good example of the

kind of thing. In the mid-twenties when we as a family frequented it; mother would take her two boys in the afternoon to the 1/2d's. These were the rows behind the cross-gangway of the balcony; while right at the very back (afternoons only) were the 8d's. In the evening when father took mother and the two sons out for something really special he wanted to see, like Douglas Fairbanks in the *Thief of Baghdad*, we went in the rows in front of the cross-gangway at 2/4d. The very front rows of the balcony were 3/6d's. There was live prologue to the *Thief* on the stage with dancing girls and appropriate scenery with, although pre-Rank, a Rank sized gong centre stage. All this with a second feature and newsreel into the bargain. All 3000 of us went in by the front door and foyer and the price structure was duplicated downstairs but with the cheap seats at the front.

Now for a strange thought: in the left hand side wall at balcony level was a line of curtain with dummy equivalent along the opposite wall. This would sometimes be gently wound open *after* the house lights had been dimmed, for a group of special persons in the box, said to include the Duke and Duchess of York on occasion, to see *the* film unheralded & unsung. In Mayfair itself the Curzon (not the present building) did not open until 1934. Mind you the manager was the Marquis de Casa Maury and clad in white tie and tails of immense length the switchboard operator, for the grand opening night only, was Frederick Bentham. The Curzon opened with and relied on Conti-

* *How the Committees and Consultants Hijacked Theatre Architecture in the '60s etc.* CUE No. 50.

mental films; certainly nothing from Hollywood! The first film was *Unfinished Symphony* and before long the auditorium was half empty and Fred was able to languish in a luxury loge which then as a £3 per week man he certainly would not have been able to afford. Whether the distinguished guests had found their way to champagne or just did not like Continental films he never discovered.

Post Second World War there was a feeling of democracy in the air and a fresh start. One cannot help wondering what would have happened if Churchill had been returned instead of Atlee as Prime Minister and United States might then have not landed us in the soup by cutting off Lease-lend. Maybe we would not have had to wait until 1958 for the 900 seater Belgrade Coventry to open. Perhaps since sooner or later I am bound to get on to the 790 seat Playhouse of 1987, the 756 seat Nottingham Playhouse of 1963 is more appropriate. Taking into account these two Civic firsts we see that our theatre building boom was based on the sixties and the early seventies. However it is perfectly true that there were enough mistakes in the air to inspire the ABTT to include theatre planning among the aims that gave it birth on March 3rd 1961. It is interesting that, as Iain stresses in his article, new theatres became a thing of Committees and Consultants. However I don't think they hijacked (ie. seized control) so much as rescued theatres. Also at least two theatres, the NT Olivier and NT

Lyttleton, were built by a prima donna who seems to have taken little notice of his committees and consultants. Who were the new Civic theatres rescued from? Why, from *theatre* people of course! They are, or at any rate were then, hopeless at planning. Firstly they seldom are able to read architectural plans; secondly they are so narrow minded or should the word be selfish. The actor manager is the classic example; but I have very much in mind a project which is under consideration at the moment. It lacks an oberfuhrer, so to speak. In consequence each expert head of department, and they really are expert, has laid claim to the space he believes he needs. At the opposite pole what of decisive directors? In one case I remember well the director demanded that a low barrier of concrete be built around his thrust stage. He insisted it must be a permanent discipline — hence concrete. Fortunately his consultant faked that wall to look just like concrete; because before the theatre opened that director took another job far away. Why is the Nottingham Playhouse stage such a peculiar shape? The answer is that the director wanted sliding stages; but he left for Bristol before the building was completed and his successors preferred a revolve.

Let us take a look at the pros. end of the Old Vic for some further examples. It reopened with some *comparatively* modest alterations for Michael St Denis and George Devine. When Michael Elliott took over in 1962 Richard Negri designed the extrava-

ganza in the photograph. Exit Elliott left and enter Sir Laurence right; whereupon Sean Kenny erects an outsize wooden shed affair suggesting that the pros. end of the theatre had fallen down and funds wouldn't run to a rebuild in brick and fibrous plaster. None of these people, it should be noted, made any attempt to improve the dodgy sightlines from the stalls of the Old Vic. Curiously none of this seems to have had any effect one way or another and many were the memorable Productions drawing good houses. This would appear to prove two things: people will put up with anything so long as the heart of the show is good; and that, as I declared in TABS in 1963*, the picture frame proscenium theatre is "The Most Adaptable Theatre of All". When one looks at what happened to the London Coliseum for White Horse Inn in 1931, it must be noted that even with a pros opening 54ft10 and the great revolve Erik Charell and Ernst Stern spread the show over the boxes right up to the circle.

The great preoccupation in the 1960s was sightlines, hence the end stage with a stepped auditorium; of which the Leatherhead Thorndike with 530 seats is a good example but the new Birmingham Rep with 901 is not. In part the aim was that all members of the audience should see the whole width of the stage with its scenery from more or less the same *angle*. At this selfsame time there was an active anti-scenery school whose desire was close

* TABS Vol.21 No.3



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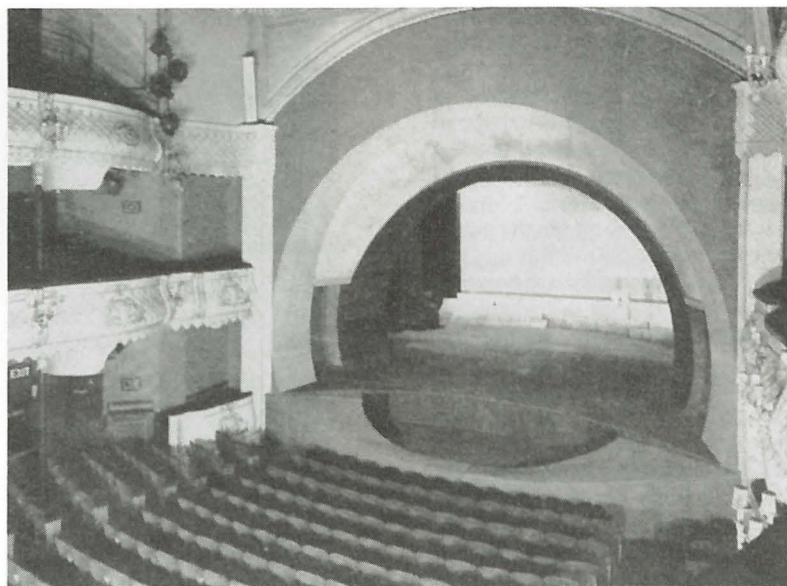
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contact of actor with audience; either by thrusting him among them or surrounding him by them.

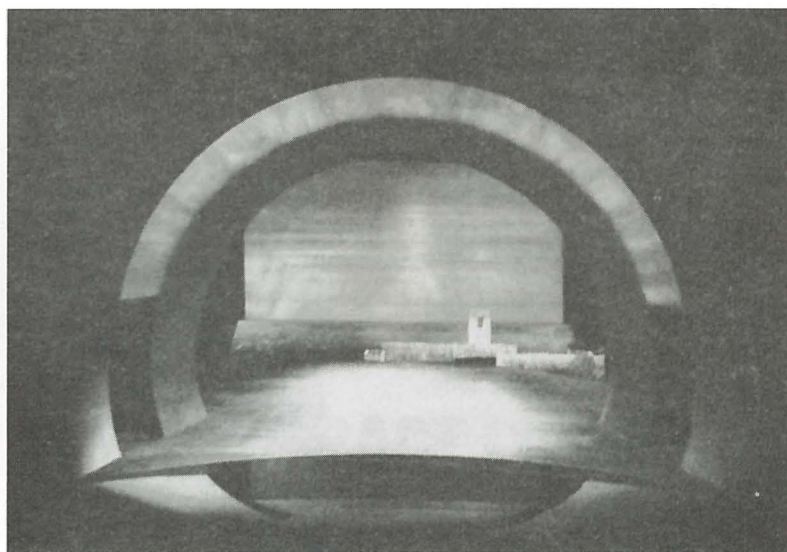
The anti-scenery battle has of course been lost. No matter how unsuitable the venue or whether most of the audience can see the stuff, masses of scenery will be there. If it should so chance that the set is simple in line and size, then it will be made of some strange material like mirror to tease both eye and brain. All this time when there has been so much talk and writing about live acting and theatres designed to exploit to the full this unique advantage over cinema and television we find that what the public wants is a revival of the old mechanical stage and does not care whether it is worked by live men or by computer, so long as there is a lot of whirling up, down, around and loud noise and lights. Can the reader imagine what we would have thought in decades past, if some ass had predicted that Sir Laurence would one day land up as a hologram in a show like *Time* at the Dominion theatre: a 1931 theatre which was then, as for most of its career, only successful as a *cinema*.

Now for the Playhouse or BBC studio down on the Embankment from which the Goon Show and Hancock's Half Hour used to be broadcast. Distinction indeed, another was that of being demolished by a railway station falling on it. There can't be another theatre anywhere which can claim that experience. Detmar Blow is the memorable name of the architect by whom it was restored in 1907. The exterior however dates from the time of the original theatre, 1882. Always excepting the top three floors of luxury flats added to finance the present restoration of the theatre below. Apparently it was touch & go whether they would get their licence in time to open on time for *Girlfriends*, as the building was not considered sufficiently ready. Eventually a provisional licence was issued so long as the top circle was not used. To remark on this would hardly have been relevant in this article were it not for the fact that I used the Underground just across the road to go home afterwards. It was rush hour and like so many of these stations there was extensive building work in progress. As the masses swarmed up the uncompleted stairway I could not help remarking to Roderick Ham on the curious discrepancy between theatre regulations and those if any, of public transport. There are only 210 seats in the Playhouse balcony, I wonder how many use that tube station, Covent Garden? When are they going to complete those lifts? I am sure they had been working on them for some years when I left 29 King Street at the end of 1973!

From the moment one enters the Playhouse from the Embankment, what one sees is impressive. I use this word deliberately because I did not find myself reacting to it as I do to Wyndhams or the new Swan at Stratford for example. The Playhouse auditorium is so dramatic of itself as to take one's breath away. But as far as this one was concerned, it did not do this for long and I soon became critical. In which respect it is necessary to make a distinction between the



The 1962 stage and curved proscenium arch designed by Richard Negri and Michael Elliot



fundamental and the superficial. For example, apart from anything else there is a clash between the new paintings on the pelmet and safety curtain, and the old paintings on wall and ceiling. Although how the latter appear may be the result of age and dirt, the new stuff appears too brash in contrast. What should be there is something midway between the two in tonality. The pair of boxes either side are dramatic indeed; the lower ones with the pregnant gilt caryatids and the crimson curtains of the upper ones swaggering their way right up to the ceiling. The key impression is of height; and this is emphasised by the pair of tall gilt 'street' lamp-posts each side, towering up from 'dress circle' to line up with the balcony balustrade. These balustrades are a fine feature in themselves, even though the lower one was disfigured centre with some stage lighting equipment: ay, there's the rub; for spotlights are not only there but in plentitude elsewhere. Vertically up the sides

of the pros lots of Patt. 264s are to be seen. Even though they were 'my' beloved bifocals of an earlier & wiser age, I thought them an eyesore there.

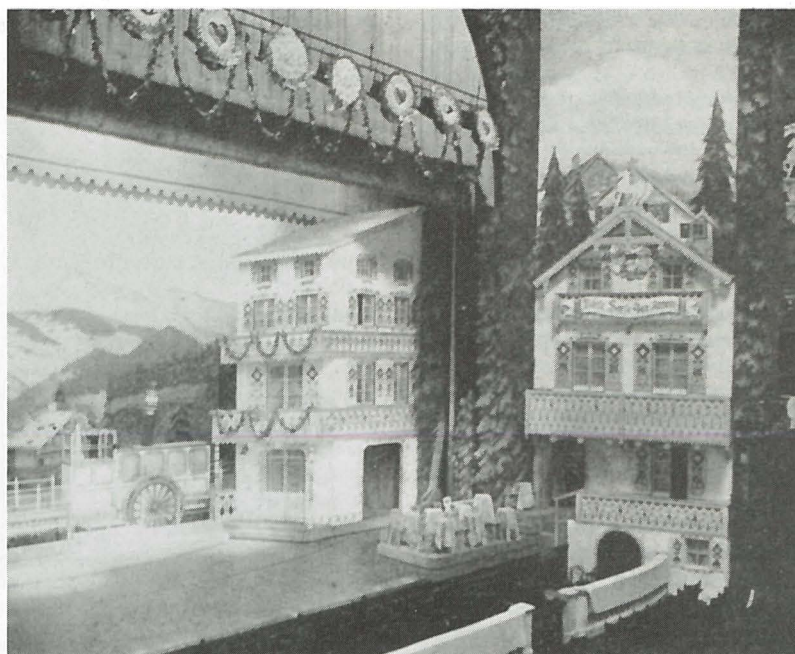
Nor will this be all; Bob Anderson, the electrical consultant, told the ABTT assemblage, to approving gurgles from a certain F. Reid seated immediately in front of me, how suspension lines can be lowered through purposeful holes in the ceiling to enable bars with massed ranks of spots to hang up there. I wonder what lighting was used during the 1913-14 management era of Marie Tempest, whose name painted up in outsize letters outside remained for passengers on Charing Cross station above to see for all the long years of closure as a real theatre. Did the 1913-ers say it's no good going to a show down there, the lighting is so poor you can't see her. Nor do I think that they lamented the absence of amplifiers & loudspeakers. Yet for the re-opening with *Girlfriends* I understand it was

impossible to see the pelmet area for the loudspeaker array hanging there. Needless to say the centre group of seats in the last two rows of stalls had to be removed to house a domineering visitor in the shape of a mighty sound console. For a real band of twelve, the short very front row of seats is removed and the pit uncovered.

It is sad that in seeking to attract the public to a theatre whose principle merit is that it is of its period, it has to be vandalised however temporarily by today's taste in technology. Could it be, I pondered, that one fine day thanks to laser and fibroptic technology it will become easy to diffuse & direct all the FOH stage lighting necessary via those four lamp-posts with all hidden within from view? Back to today with a bang! A similar thought, but in the reverse direction, occurred to me under the stage where so much of the old machinery remains. It seems accepted that, unlike the Tyne Newcastle, this is unlikely to be used even if it were in proper working condition. What we have here is something which *some* may wish to visit as a museum exhibit. But lit as it is by bare fluorescent lamps it is no longer an authentic understage of its period. A fuss over nothing? Above stage the practical has rightly taken over and instead of 28 hemp lines there are now 34 single-purchase counterweight sets. The dressing rooms are nicely housed en-suite under the stalls area — another legacy from Detmar Blow. This level goes on to house the stalls crush bar. What I found good is the way the doors to the Ladies and Gentlemen are near to each other. None of that finding relief for *the* person and now where the hell is mine! The front of the house area can hardly be described as spacious but does have style and gets one into the mood for the lofty impact of the auditorium.

All this is very well but what of seating and sightlines? As is usual in these theatres too much must not be expected of the sightlines downstairs. The Playhouse seats 790 now whereas in the 1946 Stage Guide it claimed only 653. I am told that the difference is accounted for by the substitution of normal seating rather than luxury arm-chairs in the stalls. And now for the upper circle. Even in 1946 this was not called the gallery; perhaps no one was prepared to queue on the draughty Embankment. Whatever it is called access is not via the main entrance and there are many stairs to climb. Once up there the upper circle drops steeply away from under one's feet. I found myself clutching a special rail for the descent to the front row up there. Steep top balconies are far from unknown but perhaps the height decor, so effective in the rest of the auditorium, *stresses* the stress. The seating in the balconies is rather odd. The seat backs are angled to encourage you to learn back and look upwards. They are quite wrong; it is as if they were intended for the stalls of some cinema. The 'dress circle' front row runs into trouble as the de-luxe padded top to the balustrade tends to intrude itself in the view downwards.

On the title page of the programme for C. B. Cochran's *The Cat and the Fiddle* at



In 1931 at the London Coliseum, Erik Charell spread the show Whitehorse Inn over the stage boxes right up to the circle



The 1908 Playhouse interior design by Detmar Blow and Fernand Billerey



The auditorium as it looked at the start of the century

the Palace theatre in 1932 there were two notices: one about no smoking in the auditorium and the other about hats. It read "Ladies are respectfully requested to add to the comfort of the audience by removing their hats." It was often necessary to add

one's own respectful request. With an icy stare and a great deal of no-enthusiasm she would then proceed to do so. This is where the likes of Iain Mackintosh score and they that sit behind him do not. It is obviously out of the question to request he remove his

head and tuck it under his arm, as that would muck up his own line of sight. If only that fine great halo of hair were a wig some may have muttered. It is indeed curious that theatres of the period which were so carefully tailored around unequal financial status, took no account of unequal physical stature. For Iain at 6ft.4 or so there can be no such thing as a bad theatre seat, except perhaps to sit upon. For myself at 5ft.9 a non-stepped area can be chancy but for my wife at 5ft.2 it is downright unwise. Other types of theatre breed different problems. In a courtyard with side gallery happily "papered with people" one man has only to lean right forward on the rail to better his own view, and they that dwell therein do begin to have bloody thoughts.

Iain concludes his CUE article by quoting the guru Peter Brook; "The science of theatre building must come from studying what it is that brings about the most vivid relationship between people." My inclination would be to substitute "violent" for "vivid". That done it would then be possible to set about designing a user-friendly theatre for all time though not for all productions. In doing this there can be no objection to any committee, so long as one is either the chairman or the secretary with the facility to cook either the meeting or the minutes.

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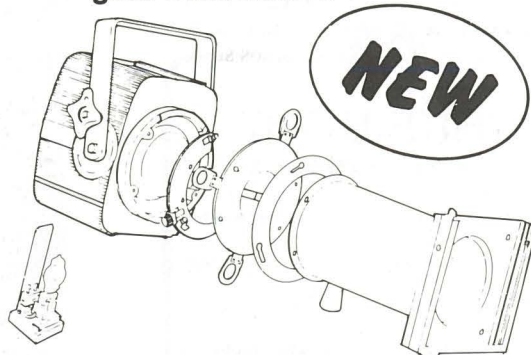


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THE PLAYHOUSE RESTORED

London's Playhouse is a survivor. Bits of Charing Cross railway station fell into her during the early years of the century, the BBC submerged her beauty in green paint and she suffered a near terminal dose of planning developer's blight. But she found a lover in Mr Robin Gonshaw who crowned her with a block of yuppy flats to pay for a facelift. And now we can all enjoy her intimacy. Long may she pleasure us.

And this Playhouse is a pleasure play house. This is just the sort of theatre for plays which end happily and do not have too many traumas on the way. Plays where the acting style hinges on a delicate cadence. And here also is an opera house which though perhaps too intimate for Mozart's Figaro is just right for Cimarosa's Secret Marriage.

The Playhouse is beautifully proportioned. Or so it seems from the stalls, the forward part of the circle and the front row of the gallery. Most of the gallery, and even perhaps the back of the circle, are as ghastly as is both common and inevitable in theatres squeezed on to cramped west end sites. The restoration has been done with considerable expertise. Steels pass through the building (but not the auditorium) to provide independent support for the flats which float overhead. But they have been so cleverly disguised that it would take someone with a considerable knowledge of building construction to find them. (I cannot find them, although I saw them unplastered during a hard-hat visit six months ago.)

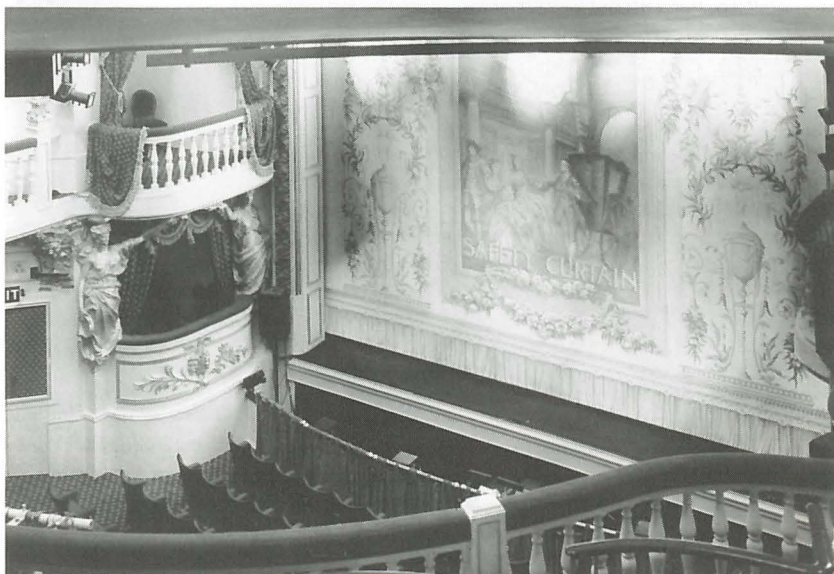
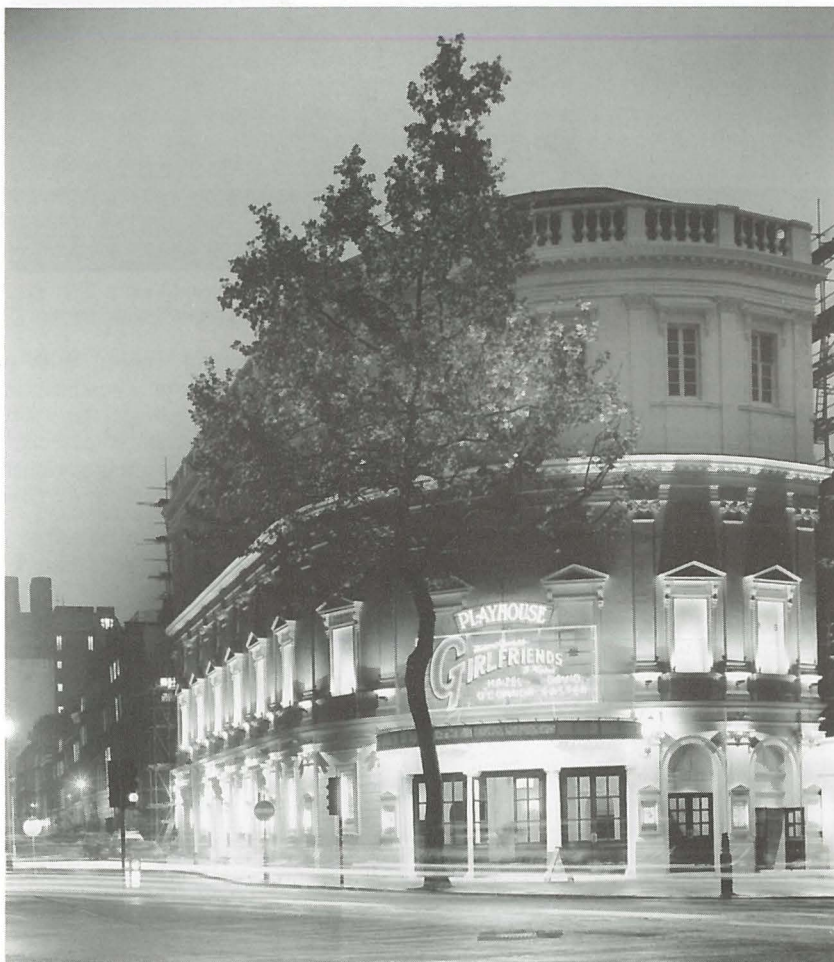
It is a pleasure to sit in the auditorium although the actual seats might seem just a little puritanical on a long-haul show. The boxes are framed in sufficiently exotic cherubims, and the lampposts at the end of the circle just avoid tweeness and so are rather fetching. The open balustrades to the circles help the intimacy and if I cannot raise enthusiasm for the unique way in which the circle springs arbitrarily from the midst of

the wall paintings, I certainly like the way in which these paintings deal with the wall space and relate to the ceiling.

The only jarring feature is the clean painting of the proscenium header. Without a decade of nicotine ahead, this paint rather

needs to be darkened down.

FOH lighting positions are always an intrusion in an auditorium such as this. However the problem has been dealt with rather sympathetically. Provision has been made for hanging an advance bar when



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required, and the booms are as discreet as possible. They would be even better if special boom arms were devised to avoid the kind of scaffolding modification which has already taken place. And of course it really is time we started painting foh spots to match the decor when they are hung near the proscenium.

The stage has nil wing space but it does have a splendid installation of Victorian timber stage machinery, all restored to working order by David Willmore. But will we ever see it in full production use?

Perhaps we shall. The original instruments movement in music has shown us just how much new we can discover in familiar old works if we attempt to perform them as written. I hope and think that the movement may spread to theatre. It will be over quite a dramatic spread of dead bodies. But certainly not mine. The Playhouse Management say they want to produce as well as to receive: let us encourage them to use their theatre for occasional productions in the style for which it was built.

FRANCIS REID

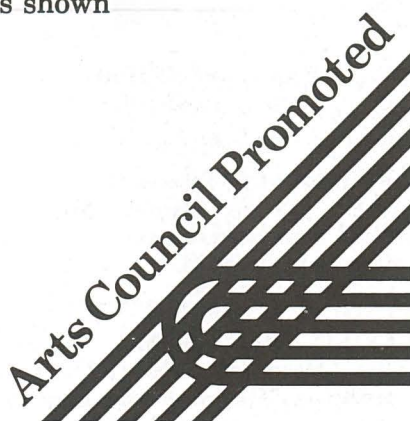
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He can obtain details from the Secretary to the Trustees, Lawrence Mackintosh, at the address shown below.

(Issued by the Trustees of the Pension Scheme for Administration and Technical Staff in the Arts, c/o 105 Piccadilly, London W1)



REIDing SHELF

Richard C. Beacham's new study of **ADOLPHE APPIA, Theatre Artist** has been published in the Cambridge University Press *Directors in Perspective* series. The significance of a designer appearing in a series about directors should not be overlooked. Although directors are normally given the credit (or take the blame!) for the concept of a production, the key originator of ideas is often the designer. Since most plays are about human relationships, most acting has to be rooted in naturalism: it is therefore the visual environment which can most readily effect that necessary transformation from reality which enables the deeper layers of a text to be explored. It is virtually impossible to achieve any true theatriac magic without complex collaboration, and in this respect designers tend to be unlucky. The nature of a director's work with actors requires the kind of extrovert determination which ensures that streetwise directors will soon find and acquire the kind of design collaborators who suit their style. Designers are mostly gentle creatures with the self-doubt that is inseparable from an artist's creativity, and they are less likely to sell themselves to the right directors even if they are able to recognise them.

Appia never found an ideal collaborator. At least, not during his life. However his influence has been such that most directors, scenographers and lighting designers have been indebted to him to the point of what amounts to posthumous collaboration. And many (and this is perhaps a little unusual in theatre) have acknowledged that indebtedness.

This new book is full of interest at several levels. It offers a well-researched factual biographical study, placing Appia's work in the context of his period. In examining the difficulties of a theatre innovator it makes us first believe how much more open minded we are now; then immediately wonder whether we really are. It explores Appia's visual thinking, exposing us to both original material and contemporary response. I was stimulated by both text and drawings. Only occasionally does he allow himself a curve. It is then that I succumb totally to Appia the visual artist.

Appia's vision was ahead of technology. Whose vision can even begin to use the technology of today? Or is there an unrecognised Appia in our midst?

To progress today's theatre into tomorrow's, we need to understand yesterday's, and John Russell Brown's admirable

detective series for Routledge & Kegan Paul continues reconstructing what it was like to go to the theatre at certain moments in time past.

JACOBEAN PRIVATE THEATRES is the latest title (the eighth and all of them reviewed in CUE). In it Keith Sturgess examines the performance style and methods of the indoor theatres which ran parallel with the rather more rumbustious productions of the popular stages in the bear pits of the south bank. It was the performance activity at Blackfriars and Whitehall which provided the womb for our mainstream theatre tradition — even if the embryo had to lie dormant from 1642 until the restoration.

Information on production techniques of all past periods is scant (I am even beginning to disbelieve my own memory of how we did it in the 1950s) and the evidence from the 17th century is particularly thin. Nevertheless with scholarly detectives like John Orrell and Keith Sturgess searching and researching constructively, an impressionistic picture is appearing with a slow but sure decline in the number of jigsaw gaps.

The approach of the *Theatre Production Studies* series is to consider the available evidence on the production of specific plays in specific theatres and, with the aid of what might be termed 'circumstantial evidence' about likely standard practice gleaned from other sources, try to establish what actually happened on stage during performance. Thus Keith Sturgess presents, as case studies, 'The Tempest', 'The Duchess of Malfi' and 'The Broken Heart' at the Blackfriars Theatre; and 'Bartholomew Fair' and 'Coelum Britannicum' at the Banqueting House. These studies account for about half the book and are well integrated into the general discussion, presented in a readable way which has certainly increased my access to 'what it was probably like'.

For lovers of opera or of theatre architecture (and I am both), **THE OPERA GAZETTEER** is a must. Robert Turnbull lists more than a hundred of the world's opera theatres, giving basic information on current policy, seasons, capacity and box office procedures including price ranges, opening times, addresses and telephones.

There is a brief history of each house illustrated by a photograph of the theatre or one of its productions. Space requires that the history be slickly compressed: it is a bit gossipy and therefore of variable value, although this armchair traveller found it compulsive reading. The architectural photographs tend to show exteriors rather than insides, but are a pleasing selection. The factual information is not so readily assembled anywhere else. The opera houses in this gazetteer are mostly the great ones: I look forward to a second volume devoted to the lesser ones which are often more rewarding, probably because one's expectations of both architecture and performance are less.

The *Macmillan Modern Dramatists* series marches on with Frances Gray on **NOEL COWARD** and Dennis Carroll on **DAVID MAMET**, analysing the texts and relating them to the context of their writer's lives and philosophy and to productions received. Any book written primarily for an educational market should sow seeds for debate and I for one would certainly wish to disagree with Frances Gray's contention that the London theatre of the 1950s was moribund. I would be prepared to swop for it today's.

I wonder what Noel Coward or the west end actors of 1950 would have made of Christine Poulter's **PLAYING THE GAME**? These are games and exercises designed to develop observation, imagination, presentation and self-confidence. A supplement or an alternate to the Master's 'talent to amuse'? Perhaps it is a sign of the times in both theatrical and civilian life that these (and I quote the marketing blurb) are the same skills needed for job interviews, committee meetings and other everyday performances.

ADOLPHE APPIA. Theatre Artist. Richard C. Beacham. Cambridge University Press (*Directors in Perspective* series). £27.50 (UK).

JACOBEAN PRIVATE THEATRES. Keith Sturgess. Routledge & Kegan Paul (*Theatre Production Studies* series). £30 (UK).

THE OPERA GAZETTEER. Robert Turnbull. Trefoil. £14.95 (UK).

NOEL COWARD. Frances Gay. **DAVID MAMET.** Dennis Carroll. Macmillan (*Modern Dramatists* series). £18 (UK). £5.95 (paperback) (UK).

PLAYING THE GAME. Christine Poulter. Macmillan. £20 (UK). £6.95 (paperback) (UK).

PRODUCT NEWS

CCT's New Products Review

CCT and Donmar's recent *new products party* attracted much interest.

On show was CCT's complete luminaire range including the new 'Silhouette' 1200, which can take the latest T29 1200W lamp as well as the T19 1000W. Also to be seen were the completely new 2000W 'Silhouette' for those who need a particularly powerful profile spot, and the new 'Minuette' 650W condenser optics follow spot, a winner for clubs, disco's and the small theatre.

For CCT, an important object of this 4-day event was to solicit from the many technicians and designers who came along, views and opinions on several experimental ideas which CCT have been looking at. CCT are well known for actively seeking this user feed-back, and there was some lively discussion during the week which will obviously colour some of CCT's development activities.

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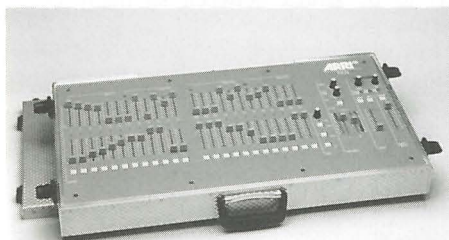
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ARRI Portable dimmers are available now in three ratings: 12×11.5 Amps, 6×23 Amps and 3×46 Amps. A variety of different socket styles is available, and all packs weigh in at a (reasonably) liftable 35 kilos! ARRI are quick to point out that light weight is not necessarily a virtue in dimmers, which must contain hefty chokes in order to meet international filtering regulations.

According to ARRI, a permanent installation dimmer range will shortly be announced.

Arri Fx Lighting Control Systems



The other new product release from ARRI (GB)'s Lighting Control Division is a range of small manual lighting control systems, intended for use by television and theatre professionals who demand high quality tools at a very competitive price. Interestingly, these systems are available either in neat, "briefcase-style" flightcases, or in elegant consoles for permanent installation.

As the name suggests, these new controllers are well provided with special effects functions, neatly filling a gap in the market between very basic low-cost systems and all-singing all-dancing rockboards.

Programmable flashkeys, chase and audio functions augment a sophisticated split time auto-crossfader, which may be set to run fades between 3 seconds and five minutes long. Of course, manual control of fades is always available, and the output of each channel is always proportionately displayed by leds on the operator panel.

Lee Colortran new sales operations centre

From January, sales and marketing functions of all Lee Colortran International products will be centred on Manchester. A move designed to improve service to customers and product distribution throughout the world.

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ABTT Trade Show 88

The ABTT's TENTH ANNIVERSARY TRADE SHOW is returning for the fourth year running to the Riverside Studios; each year the Show has grown in size, with 64 manufacturers and suppliers exhibiting last year, and in 1988 every available square metre of the premises will be used.

Among the products and services which will be on display will be lighting equipment and accessories of all kinds, sound and communication equipment, scenic paints and materials, scenery fittings and hardware, special effects, props and prop makers, tracks and trusses, stage flooring, costume fabrics, drapes, and much more.

The opening hours will be:

Thursday 14 April	10.00–18.00
Friday 15 April	10.00–20.00
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THE BRITISH COUNCIL International Specialist Course THEATRE LIGHTING

Following the successful *Theatre Planning* course last year the British Council is continuing its programme of short specialist courses with a *Theatre Lighting* course. The course will examine the role of lighting in today's theatre and topics will include – Lighting Design * Lighting and the new technologies * The economics of lighting * Education and training for lighting personnel * Visits to specialist equipment manufacturers * Backstage and performance visits to London's West End and regional theatres.

The Director of Studies will be Francis Reid. The course is structured to interest all those who are involved in the provision of lighting for performance. In addition to specialists responsible for lighting design on all forms and sizes of stages, it is hoped that participants will include people concerned with designing and manufacturing lighting equipment.

The aim of the course is to enable a small selected number of academic and professional people to learn about recent developments relating to their work both in Britain and abroad and to participate in international discussion at a high level.

There are vacancies for 25 participants.

Further information and application forms are available from British Council Representatives overseas or from Courses Department, The British Council, 65, Davies Street London W1Y 2AA

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Taiwan's Post-Modern Triumph

Francis Reid visits
The new National Theatre and Concert hall in Taipei

Taiwan is the latest joy to join the international theatric tourist trail. No one planning a major theatre or concert hall can now fail to include a Taipei stopover on their survey of the international best. Architects should take their eyes, acousticians their ears. I guarantee that they will be stimulated. And if they are not also pleased, then let them henceforth desist from theatre construction.

Taiwan's newly opened National Theatre and Concert Hall are for those of us who like *real* theatres. Theatres which excite from the moment when they first appear on our horizon. Theatres with a compulsive *come hither* whose insistence cannot be ignored. Theatres whose foyers sweep us onward in a tingling embrace towards an auditorium whose threshold induces that little catch of breath which confirms that we are indeed in a house of magic where we may hope to extend our discovery and understanding of life's mysteries.

Taiwan's National Theatre and Concert Hall are real temples of thespis: a triumph of post-modernism. These are not concrete performance supermarkets, devoted to the short-lived and now thankfully outmoded

concept that theatre should be treated as an ordinary everyday experience. Such routine is the role of television: theatre is the special occasion. To be experienced in palaces. And that, precisely, is what the Taiwanese have done. Architect Yang has taken a moment from China's architectural heritage and grasped it uncompromisingly to produce a bold statement which is monumental yet welcoming. His choice of the period style that accords with the standard international image of Chinese architecture is not universally applauded in Taiwan. Inevitably there are those who wish to look only forward. Yet when asked to amplify their vision of a truly contemporary architectural style, national yet international, for housing the arts, their eloquence becomes somewhat subdued. But was ever a theatre built without critics? The debates about style, about scale and above all, about costs, are universal. Perhaps such discussion is essential to the nature and purpose of theatre. And if some measure of controversy is not essential, it certainly seems inevitable.

However, in Taiwan, the critics will just have to swallow their moans because their

country has acquired stunning buildings whose fitting out for performance has avoided virtually all the mistakes that are depressingly standard when a compromise has to be struck between so many conflicting priorities.

My own presence in Taiwan was in a critical role. Invited by the Ministry of Education, my brief was to observe the Theatre and Concert Hall in action in order to assist in the determination of whether the specified criteria for design and installation had been met.

My visit was towards the end of the performance-commissioning phase, a three month festival season which tested the ability of the stages and auditoria to respond to the needs of a wide range of international performance modes. Not just traditional Chinese Opera but the New York City Opera with *La Boheme*, *Traviata* and *The Student Prince*. The National Dance Troupe of Korea and the Netherlands Dance Theatre. The Cleveland Orchestra as well as Taipei's own two symphony orchestras. Soloists included Barry Tuckwell, Isaac Stern and Nicanor Zabaleta. And lots more. I caught two concerts which included new works for traditional Chinese instruments accompanied by western symphony orchestra. And the premiere of a new opera which successfully looked to both eastern and western musical and dramatic traditions for its inspiration.

Everyone who took part in the opening season, whether as performer or in backstage support, was invited to fill in a questionnaire. As far as I am aware, this is the most positive attempt ever made to assess a new performance building by analysing the response to its users. I left immediately after the final questionnaire session, just as the statisticians were facing up to such problems as relative weighting. So I am unable to report on the effectiveness of the end result. But as a means of seeking an objective analysis of subjective opinion, it certainly warrants our attention.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire began with three summary questions requiring a simple yes or no answer: Do you consider that (a) the acoustics, (b) stage facilities and equipment and (c) theatre systems are among the best in the world? Then came a series of questions where facilities could be commented upon and graded in five categories as:

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The Park showing Chang Kai-Shek Memorial (left) with the National Theatre (centre) and Concert Hall (right)



The new National Theatre, Taipei.



National Theatre auditorium (seating 1524)



Grand Lobby National Theatre

- * Excellent
- * Very Good to Excellent
- * Good to Very Good
- * Fair
- * Poor

[A] *Acoustic*

- Intimacy
- Liveness
- Warmth
- Loudness of Direct Sound
- Loudness of Reverberant Sound
- Balance & Blend
- Ensemble
- Freedom from Echo
- Freedom from Noise Level
- Tonal Quality

[B] *Stage Equipment*

- Overall Function
- Rigging
- Wagons
- Curtain
- Masking
- Revolving Turntable
- Cyclorama
- Elevators
- Floor

[C] *Theatre System*

- Overall Function
- Lighting: Quantity
- Layout
- Intensity
- Final Effect
- Control
- Scenery Transportation
- Recording
- Audio System
- Projection

Those without experience of specialised areas were asked to omit comment on these areas, but everyone has ears and so acoustic definitions were provided. As someone with critical ears but lacking in acoustical jargon, I found these particularly helpful and therefore worthy of sharing with fellow Cue readers.

Intimacy

A Concert hall has acoustical intimacy if music played in it sounds as played in a smaller hall. The listeners impression is formed by the sound which arrives directly to his ears and the sound reflected from the walls and ceilings. The delay gap between direct and indirect sound should be short in order to avoid echos. The direct sound must not be too faint relative to the reflected sound. Intimacy is considered to be the most important factor in the subjective evaluation of a music hall.

Liveness

A hall with a good reverberation is called lively. Liveness in a hall imparts fullness of tone to the music. Liveness primarily relies on the reverberation time for middle and high frequencies above 500 cycles per second.

Warmth

Warmth in music is defined as fullness of bass tone relative to that of mid-frequency tone. The difference of the reverberation time for different frequencies must be small to avoid uneven effects.

Loudness of Direct Sound

The direct sound created by an orchestra must reach all listeners even in the back rows with adequate loudness. A good music hall is of limited length and the stage enclosures are designed to direct the sound evenly to all seats, with adequate loudness.

Loudness of Reverberant Sound

The indirect or reverberation sound reflected by walls and ceilings should arrive at the listeners ears with necessary intensity and should blend with direct sound comfortably.

Balance and Blend

Good balance entails the balance between sections of the orchestra and the balance between orchestra and vocal or instrumental soloists. Good balance requires a well designed stage enclosure with irregularities on its inner surface to provide the orchestra with early reflections – an immediacy of response. Blend is defined as a mixing of sounds from the various instruments of an orchestra to sound as a harmonious whole to the listeners.

Ensemble

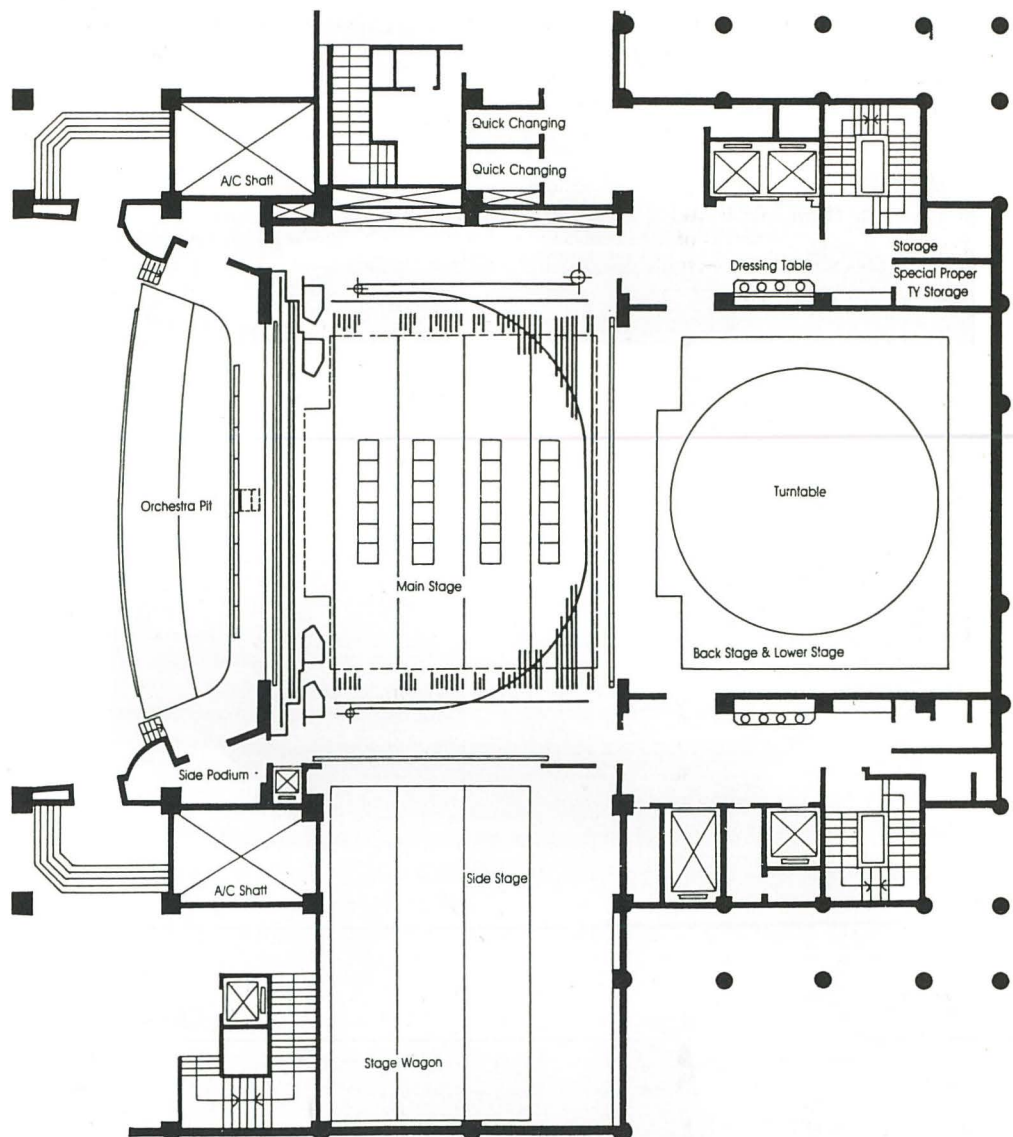
Ensemble is the ease of hearing among performers in order to enable them to perform in unison so that many voices sound as one.

Freedom from Echo

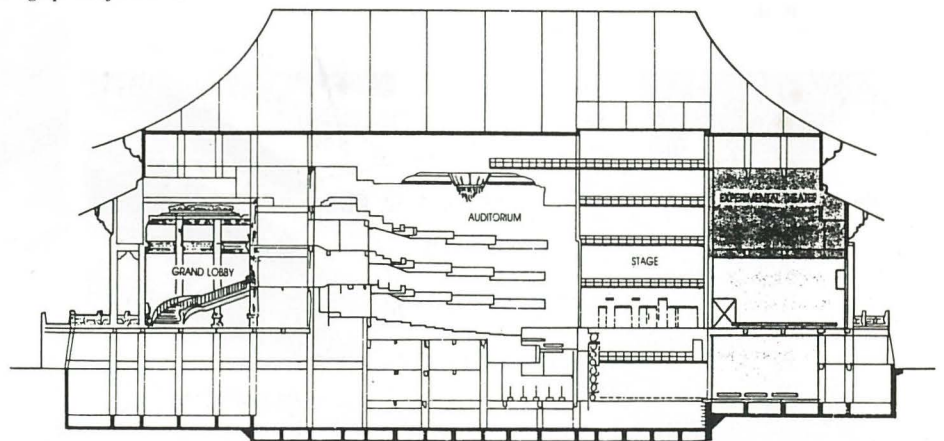
Echos should not occur in a good hall since they are disturbing to the listeners.

Freedom from Noise

A concert hall must be free from noise from traffic, adjoining halls or practice rooms,



Stage plan of Theatre



Section through Theatre

from subways, airplanes, airconditioning system and footfall noise of latecomers. The music hall should be isolated from any external noise source.

Tonal Quality

Tonal quality is the beauty of tone. A fine instrument has a fine tone quality and similarly a concert hall can have a fine tonal quality. If there is:

- * No loss of a band of frequency by abnormal sound absorption
- * No rattling or ringing of surfaces or claddings
- * No rasping sound
- * No flutter echos
- * No peculiar buzz

Then the tonal quality of the hall should be favourable.

My ears told me that the acoustic of both concert hall and theatre are excellent. And analysis, using the above criteria as a check list, confirmed by initial empirical impression.

My analysis of the technical functioning of the building hit a uniform high as well — give and take some matters of detail, most of which were in particularly subjective areas.

Incidentally, the questionnaire had some potential to bite the Consortium who contracted to design and provide the acoustic and equipment installations. If 50% of the questionnaires rate any aspect below the category very good to excellent, and 60% of such answers proposed the same remedy, then the Consortium are obliged to carry out that remedy at their own expense. But consideration of this possibility in terms of the laws of either statistics or chance will suggest that any bite will be from dentureless gums rather than fangs. Nevertheless, the debate which accompanied the questionnaire meetings provided a useful means of getting the final detailing correct and ensuring that the facilities were of the standard required. (The contract calls for the highest international standards, with each facility and each item of equipment to be among the best in the world for the purpose for which it is intended.) One cannot overestimate the value of the questionnaire as psychotherapy for the performers and other users. And, they are reported to

have responded, on the whole, very favourably indeed. Particularly to the acoustic.

The Auditoria

The questionnaire however did not ask for comment on what I found to be a particularly exciting feature of the whole enterprise. The one which, despite everything else reaching perfection, can sink the ship. And that is, of course, the ease with which the audience can acquire a corporate identity and then form a sympathetic relationship with the stage.

In this respect the Theatre is not just successful but remarkably successful. Indeed I am tempted to say spectacularly successful. It has 1526 seats but seems smaller. Much of the intimacy stems from the three shallow balconies which reach out, slightly descending in steps, along the walls towards the stage, terminating at the orchestra rail. (Or the edge of the forestage when this is formed by raising the pit elevators.) Yet every seat has an unimpaired sightline, with the single row of side balcony seats angled towards the stage rather than requiring their occupants to hang over the rail in courtyard fashion.

From the glowing timber walls to the plush of the seating there is warmth everywhere, set off by the cool elegance of the balcony fascias. With its exuberantly coloured exterior, its grandly sumptuous yet

not overwhelming foyers and its warmly intimate auditorium, this theatre will provide a sympathetic environment for a broad range of the larger scale works, especially those embracing music.

And the Concert Hall with its similar but by no means identical exterior and its equally sumptuous foyers is a performance room where the fascias emanate something of a cooler more classical restraint, deferring to the organ the privilege of making the dramatic visual statement.

My enthusiasm for all the audience aspects of the architecture is so positive that I almost feel the need to apologise! I did try very hard to find nits to pick and it was not easy. I do have some flickers of unease at the structure and decoration of the walls in the area between the orchestra pit and the proscenium: always a tricky area because it can intrude into one's peripheral vision when focussed on the stage action. But I do have to say that I felt this when I sat in critical mode before the show rather than when it got going and I got involved. So, no quibbling, this is a splendid piece of theatre architecture on all counts: the forms, the decoration and especially, the scale. Everything is in proportion. . . . and that is perhaps the most difficult thing to get right.

The Concert Hall building also includes an attractive Recital Hall with a good chamber acoustic. The National Theatre's studio is, alas, a gesture to the dwindling school of black box believers.


The Technology

But so much for the public areas. What about the technology? Well, it is essentially that of a German opera house. The main stage is four elevators, each 16m wide by 3.15m deep. Sets mounted on the rear wagon (which includes a revolve and is the same area as the main stage) can be rolled forward on to the main stage area and dropped flushed into it. Or sets can be rolled from the side on any or all of the three wagons which correspond in size to the elevators. These elevators are capable of dropping full height sets to below stage where the wagons can be run upstage into the lower backstage area for parking or resetting. Storage racks are mounted on the forward wall from where the elevator can collect cloths or the special stage carpets which define the acting area for chinese opera. And four table elevators (6m wide x 1m deep) can be inserted as required.

With the exception of the revolve, the intent of such machinery is not for production effects but to facilitate technical management of the stage. However Alan Nieh's sets for the premiere of *Journey to the West* used the elevators as a dramatically effective visual device.

There are 30 lines of computerised flying and 20 with hand-operated counterweights. To watch the computerised flying was a dream come true. Here was technology offering a smoothness and proportional timing that is virtually beyond the human hand!

The lighting installation is also in the style



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Concert Hall Foyer

of a German opera house, with a lighting bridge and side towers forming an adjustable false proscenium. However there are also two midstage lighting bars and a back lighting bar. Side ladders can be positioned via hoists as required. There are good foh side wall slots at the end of the pit rail. Auditorium design does not lend itself to a comprehensive bridge installation but there is a good accessible position at the back of the dome and a further one at the central chandelier.

Control is by a 414 dimmer Mittronik system which uses Israeli software in an operational philosophy with which any experienced Strand operator would soon feel comfortable. Mittronik have also provided the entire spotlight rig which is in the German heavy engineering tradition appropriate for rigs that are intended to be permanent and rarely re-hung. (When I first looked up at this rig, I thought the spots were Niethammer.) It is a comprehensive rig with a large contingent of profile spots of appropriate beam angle in good positions, enough low voltage to make me envious and plenty of svobodas for backlighting. The inventory is perhaps short on flexible light weight equipment but that can be added. (It is a long time since I, for one, lit a show without parcans!)

Sound reinforcement is based on a Studer 40 inputs into 8 outputs and the recording system is Studer 24 track. The inventory seemed generous to me, but I realise that this could be a dangerous statement for any non-sound man to make! And the lavish scale of the video systems leaves me stunned into silence. Yes, the technology matches the architecture!



The Concert Hall by night



Concert Hall Auditorium (seating 2074)

So Taiwan joins the big league. They set out to do the job properly and in my view they have succeeded. To have achieved either such a Concert Hall or such a Theatre would have been a tremendous achieve-

ment. But to achieve both is. . . well, it is really rather incredible. I offer my congratulations, and I will not try to conceal my envy.

Architect : C.C. YANG & ASSOCIATES

Client : NATIONAL THEATER AND CONCERT HALL MANAGEMENT & PLANNING COUNCIL (for the MINISTRY OF EDUCATION)

Consultant : SINOTECH, Taipei.

Builders : RSEA, Taipei.

Design and installation of acoustic, stage and lighting systems

A CONSORTIUM led by PHILIPS, Eindhoven & G+H MONTAGE, Ludwigshafen.

Specialist Subcontractors to the Consortium

Climatic: TKT, W. Germany
Acoustic: WERNER GENEST Ludwigshafen
Stage Engineering: MAN, W. Germany
Stage Lighting: MITTRONIK, W. Germany