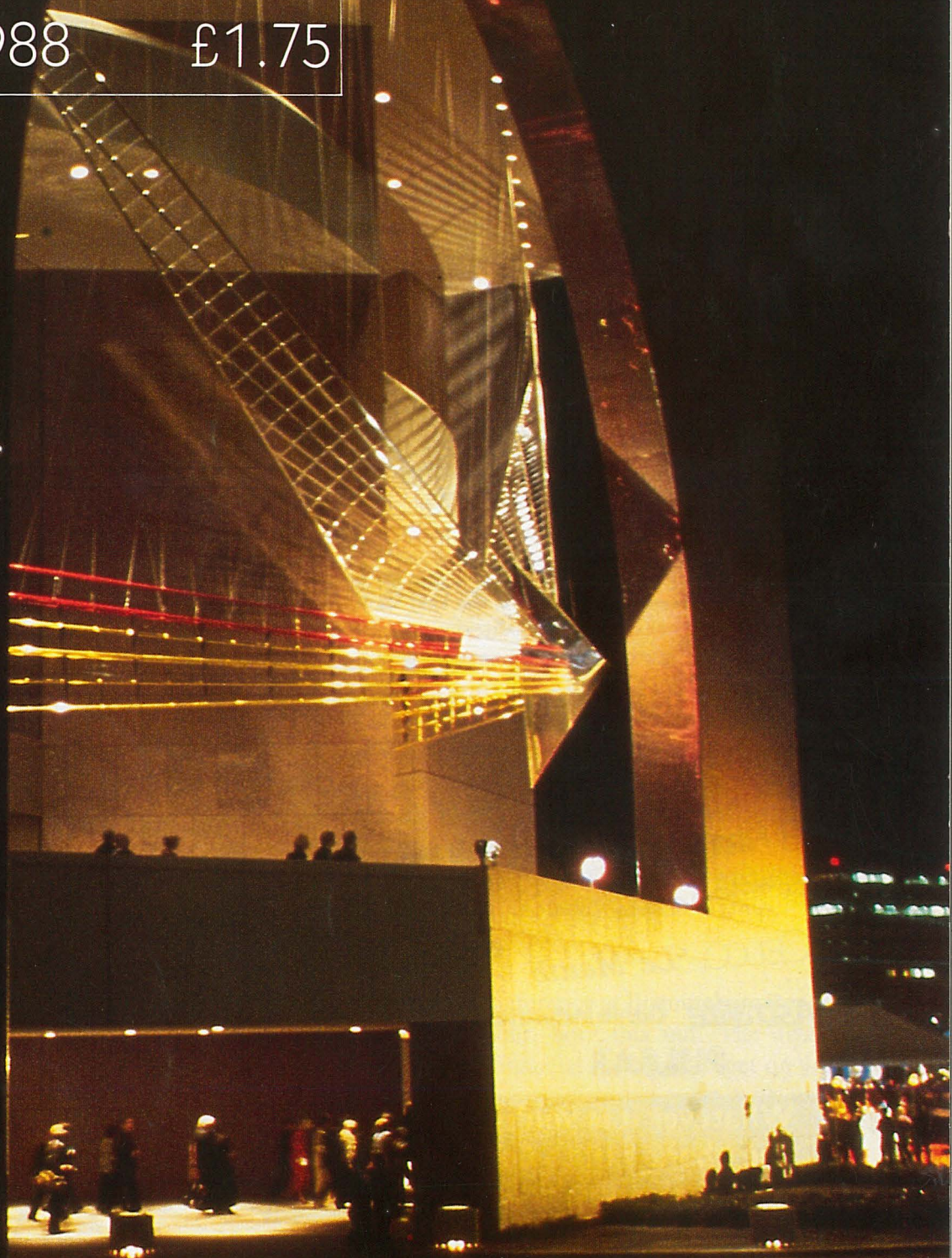


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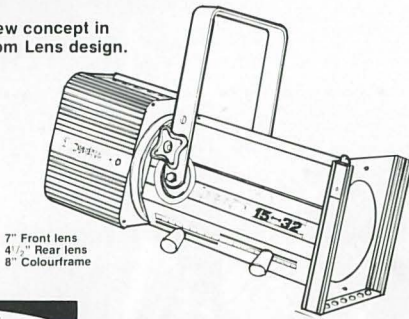
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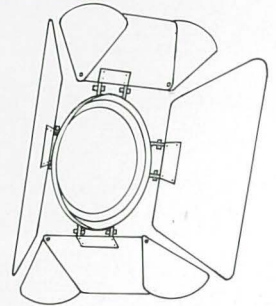
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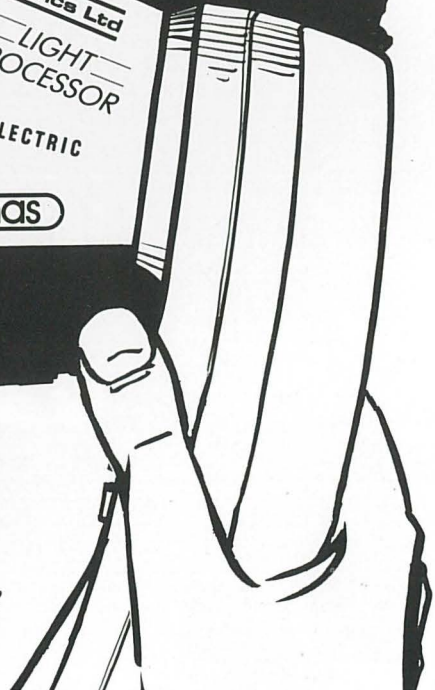
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Cover:
opening night at the Orange County
Performing Arts Center showing Richard
Lippold's 'Fine Bird' sculpture which graces
the exterior facade and interior lobby spaces.

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Enter the Producer

A new breed of person emerged some time in the seventies: the arts administrator. Now in the late eighties, another buzzword is going around the performing arts: the producer. This key figure is nothing new to commercial theatre, but he has seemed out of place in the world of subsidised theatre – until recently.

Now that many artistic directors, as well as their administrators refer to 'product' rather than 'productions' and our Arts Minister reminds us as often as he can that we must look 'to the market' for extra funds, it is clear that the day of the producer is about to be upon us. If you don't care for the title, never mind. Call him something else. But he is about to be created out of sheer necessity, because the present staffing structures of regional reps, touring theatres and perhaps even civic venues cannot cope with the job functions and staffing structures in today's more competitive, complex, busy theatre world.

A recent Arts Council-organised conference at Birmingham Rep for senior arts and theatre management, bore this out. The artistic director needs to be 'freed' from financial concerns to get on with his own demanding job; and the administrator must take more responsibility for each production, in all its aspects. He will have to become the 'fixer', like on Broadway or in the West End.

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This is THE ERA of Business Theatre

Australia report on the recently completed Adelaide Convention Centre

D.C. IRVING and RICHARD QUIGLEY

Convention Centres are strange places — hard to define, and demanding on their designers and their operators, especially, as in Australia at any rate, and one suspects in many other countries, the two (regrettably) seldom meet. Large convention centres have one common factor. This is, the instigators and initial project planners do not have a clear understanding of the technical requirements for a successful venue. Not surprising this, as many convention organisers and attendees are equally vague and unable to produce clear statements on their needs.

The minimum is, one supposes, a place where an audience (of how many though?) can gather in reasonable comfort to see and hear a collection of speeches/lectures/presentations or whatever, all somehow related to a chosen convention theme. Fine, and many hotels or local government establishments can offer meeting rooms for

up to two hundred or so conventioners, with a platform at one end, plus film, slide or overhead projectors if not always in house, at least on call from some nearby friendly hire company. Add to this, reasonable overnight accommodation, appropriate catering and sufficient (plentiful) liquid refreshment, and all is well.

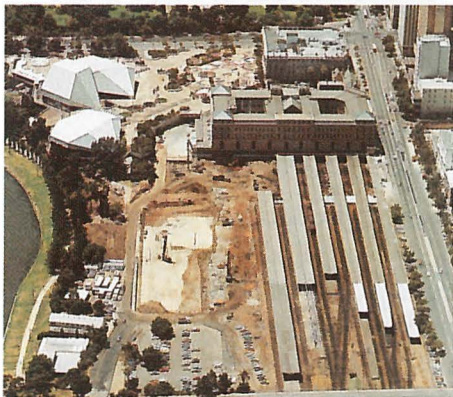
Preamble this, so we can work up to larger centres, which are created in order to compete in the world market for conventions hosting several hundred to several thousand delegates, who will be attending either by inclination or command, depending on the purpose and style of the relevant function. In this writer's experience, these larger centres are often politically motivated, and rightly regarded as important assets to their home town, being related to commerce, industry and tourism, representing large sources of revenue, and as significant employers of staff and sub-contract services. All straight forward good stuff, but the trouble starts when the secondary design phase begins — that is, when the location, delegate numbers, and architectural style have been stabilised, the car park and kitchens organised, and most likely the construction budget agreed.

It is then found that apart from the 'plenary hall' 'registration areas' and 'break out rooms', various other more technical problems arise, related to projection of optical or electronic images; exhibitions of anything from cotton reels or jewellery to bulldozers or plastics moulding machines; communications of all kinds; security factors, and 'presentations'. This last brings

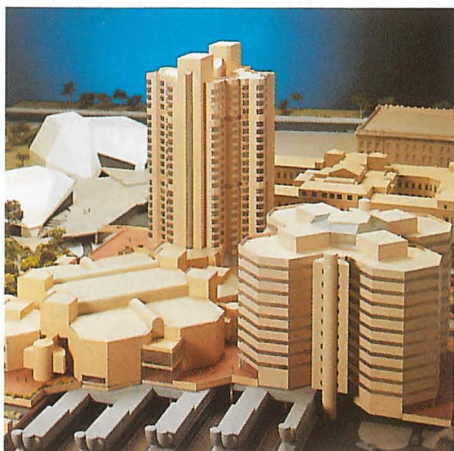
grey hairs to project managers, consultants and politicians alike, for a 'presentation' can be anything from one person with his or her own props, to a trade product launch with rock bands, fountains, dancing girls and the lot with half a day to get in and less to get out.

The Adelaide Convention Centre was at about this point when my company first became involved. The Centre is a key part of the Adelaide Station Environment Development (ASER) scheme, which is an imaginative change of use for the old local and interstate railway station on the northern boundary of the city, immediately adjacent to the Adelaide Festival Theatre Centre and State Parliament House. The interstate platforms have been relocated away from the city centre, the remaining platform areas reduced and roofed over, and the old grand style station building re-cycled as the Adelaide Casino. The prime site created by roofing the rail lines, carries a hotel, convention centre, office block, car park and eventually an exhibition hall. Here, we are concerned with the convention centre, which as can be seen from the drawings, is a life raft shaped building with a large central area surrounded by meeting rooms, offices, usual offices and foyers, in turn surrounded by plazas and landscaping.

The original brief considered an audience of some two thousand maximum, in a space capable of sub-division into at least four halls of around 500 each, together with exhibition and banquet space. The need for good sightlines sometimes and large flat areas other times, was recognised by the



Aerial view of the railway site above which the centre is built.



A model of the development which also includes an hotel and office building. The Convention Centre is seen bottom right.



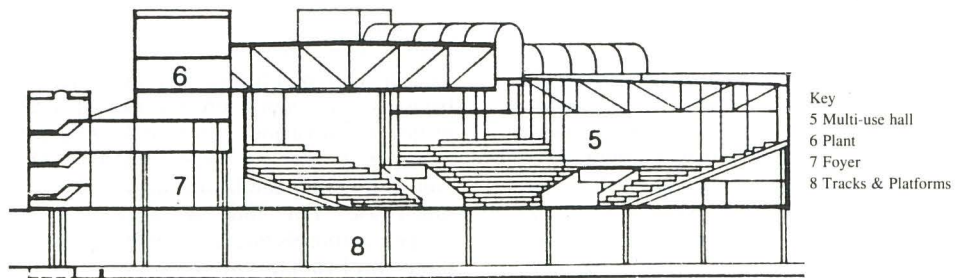
Aerial view of the realized Adelaide Convention Centre. The railway platforms can be seen under their new canopies right. The half completed hotel is seen top left. Behind the hotel is the old railway station building now a Casino.

architect John Andrews & Associates — the solution being the removal of the first 10 rows of seats when necessary. Early proposals, using demountable or folding tiers, were rejected in favour of a hinged structure. Each main group of front seating is mounted on a fabricated steel frame, hinged under floor behind the 10th row, the lowest step normally resting on the main floor. a series of heavy duty electric chain hoists mounted in the roof structure is used to life these sections until the undersides form a sloping ceiling surrounding the now enlarged central flat floor space. Readers with some knowledge of solid geometry will appreciate that the 3 sections in each corner presented some difficulties at the junctions, and also require discipline in the order of raising and lowering so as to prevent nasty jamming occurrences. Apart from the need to remove some individual seats before raising, the arrangement works well and has the considerable advantage of not requiring separated storage for unused seating.

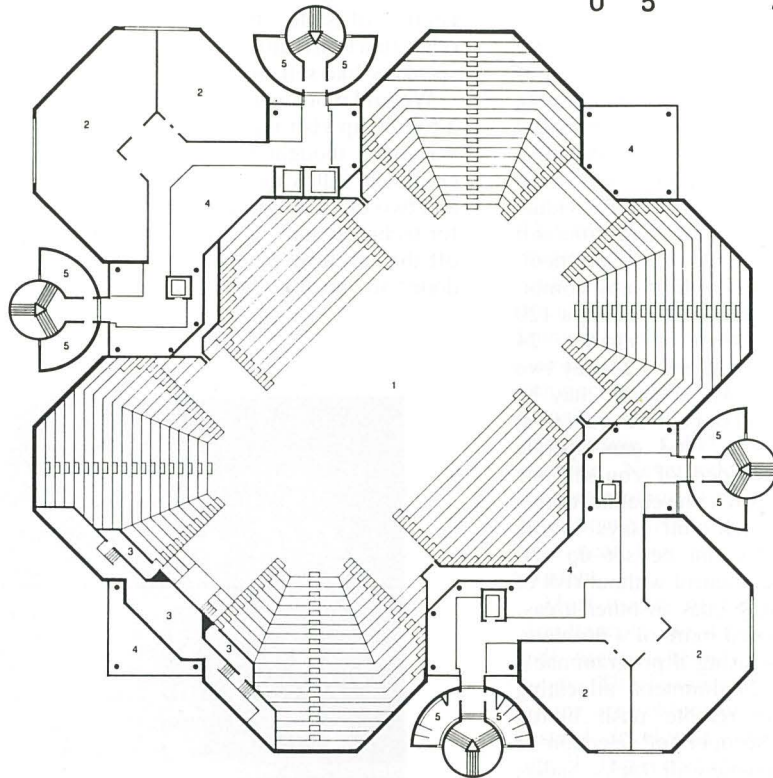
The original roof design had little or no provision for catwalks or suspension points overhead. It was possible to modify the basic roof structure comprising two major transverse trusses and longitudinal secondaries, to provide increased height over the central section. Cost limitations precluded a full grid over this area, the eventual compromise being six major suspension beams running 'up and down stage' with adjacent catwalks. Above and alongside each catwalk is another UB section, acting as a monorail, on which is a 1.5 tonne electric hoist. These hoists will have group control, so that trussing or scenery battens can be hauled up, then dead hung from girder clamps provided.

Further catwalks at lower levels follow the seating plan and lines of major trusses, with handrails designed to carry stage lighting. Access to these is by stairway from the control room at one end, or by easy steps from a lift on the North side. The arrangement of catwalks, control rooms and interpreters booths evolved after the main conceptual design, as technical needs were perceived — continuation of the process led to discussions on power supplies, communications, projection equipment, lighting, video and so on, with usual problems of balancing the available finance against the list of desirable equipment. By this time, some work had been done on advance marketing of the centre, indicating that a greater seating capacity was needed. Accordingly, the space (shown as Hall E) originally intended as flat floor only, was modified to include seating similar to the remainder, so that with all division walls folded away the Centre has arena form accommodation for over 3000 people in comfort.

With all division walls in, there are five spaces which can be used individually or in various combinations to create a range of auditoria with capacities from 300 or so up to the maximum, each having access from adjacent foyer spaces which surround the central area. This variable mode operation created problems in technical planning,



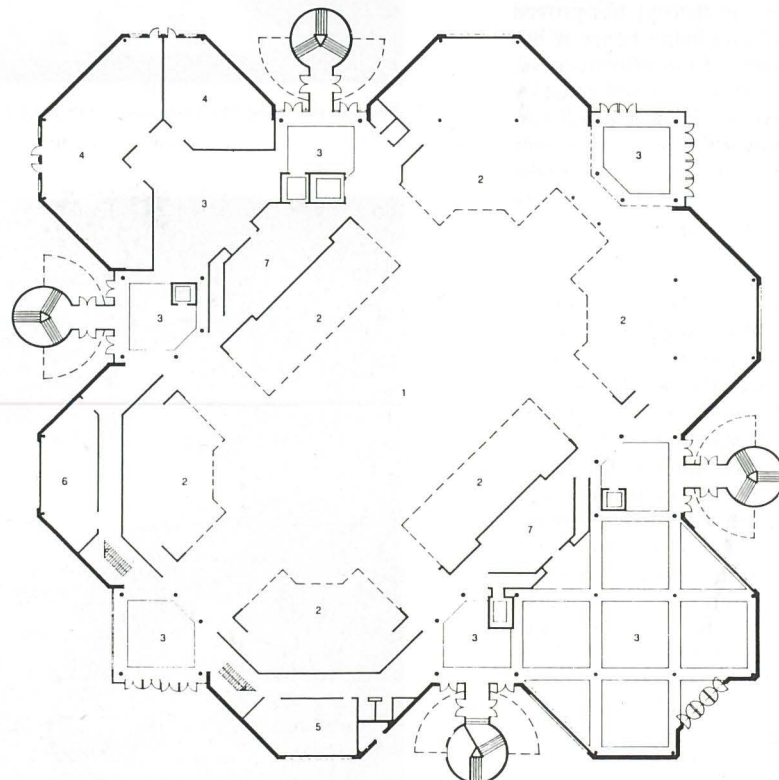
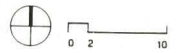
Section through Convention Centre.



Upper Level Plan

- Key
- 1 Multi-use hall
- 2 Meeting room
- 3 Control room
- 4 Void
- 5 Toilets

ASER CONVENTION CENTRE UPPER LEVEL PLAN



Plaza Level Plan

- Key
- 1 Multi-use hall
- 2 Retractable seating
- 3 Foyer
- 4 Meeting room
- 5 Administration
- 6 Press Officer
- 7 Service

ASER CONVENTION CENTRE PLAZA LEVEL PLAN



Specially prepared drawings supplied by the architects John Andrews International and Woodhead Hall Macdonald Shaw.

especially when considering control positions and projection requirements. The solution in this instance was to have a major control suite at one end, centred on the horseshoe seating formed when separating hall E only, as this was thought to be technically the most demanding format. There is a large central control cum projection room (of which more anon) flanked by two smaller areas for lighting and audio respectively.

Down one side of the main arena is a group of interpreters booths to ISO standard, and one of these doubles as control for one small hall. The other three have connector panels behind the last row of seating, enabling set up of remote lighting and projector control as needed. There are 410 x 5Kw dimmed outlets along catwalks and in various floor and seating traps. Each has a permanent connection to an individual dimmer, in turn driven via a stand alone soft patch working on DMX 512 protocol. Control into the patch is from any combination of three portable desks, being a 120 channel memory system, a smaller, 24 channel memory system, and a 24 way two preset manual desk. These desks may be plugged up in any hall or control room or at floor level in hall E, and can operate simultaneously (provided of course, one does not attempt to patch one channel to two desks!). As the patch unit stays in the control room, desks can be set up and handed over to local control without risk of unanticipated lighting cues in other areas. The house lights posed more of a problem, finally resolved by using a programmable logic unit driving 24 dimmers, allocating control to various remote push button stations according to operator selection or switches on the operable wall tracks. Sadly, this equipment, fine in theory, has proved temperamental and unreliable hence it has coloured all opinions as to its effectiveness.

Audio provisions also are complicated by the hall zone divisions. Each hall has two main loudspeakers over the 'stage' end (four for Hall E) and further fill speakers over the seating areas. Each group is fed by separate amplifiers, for operation as necessary via a large patch field and a main mixer (24 channel) in the control room, plus several cord return lines to various remote points in each hall. There is also a separate, portable concert sound system with its own mixer and equipment racks. The speaker enclosures for concert sound were originally envisaged as floor standing, but proved more satisfactory when hung a little below catwalk level. There are microphone and loudspeaker lines from patch fields to many points at catwalk, side wall and floor trap locations. The several smaller meeting rooms outside the main area have background music and paging speakers, with provision for transfer to portable local lectern/amplifier units.

For projection, the design brief called for 35mm and 16mm film, plus slides and provision for video. To have a large enough image for 1800 delegates, required a re-locatable roll down screen some 12m wide and a 4000w Xenon dual projector. Though

these were agreed, nay, insisted upon by 'them' at specification time (about 2 years ago) the march of technology since then has been towards much greater use of video projectors in various forms and sizes, with multiple screens for large audiences. One doubts now that the film gear will see very much use. For slide work, two xenon lamped carousels and a dissolve unit line in the control room, with more carousels and drive units re-locatable as needed. 3 small and one large lectern units are included, each with infra red links to give remote control of slide change, audio level and other functions, although not all lecturers or speakers like self-drive.

We said more anon re the control room — a follow up visit recently showed that what was once thought to be adequate is now crammed with video production equipment and two PC's, to say nothing of three desks for technical staff — which effectively shut off the carefully planned hoist and loading door "so you don't have to carry heavy gear

up all those stairs". So, future centre architects please note.

Aside from the hinged seating and operable walls, the only other room variable is a quantity of standard demountable concert staging which inevitably had to be augmented by much hammer and nail work to achieve a large enough stage for the opening performance — a performance which did achieve the anticipated one megawatt maximum power demand that had caused so much anguish when we first began to discuss 'presentation' facilities. The most anguish was actually due to our stressing the need for ready truck access into the main arena, as up to that point the surrounding plaza area was designed for pedestrian traffic loading only, but that is another story!

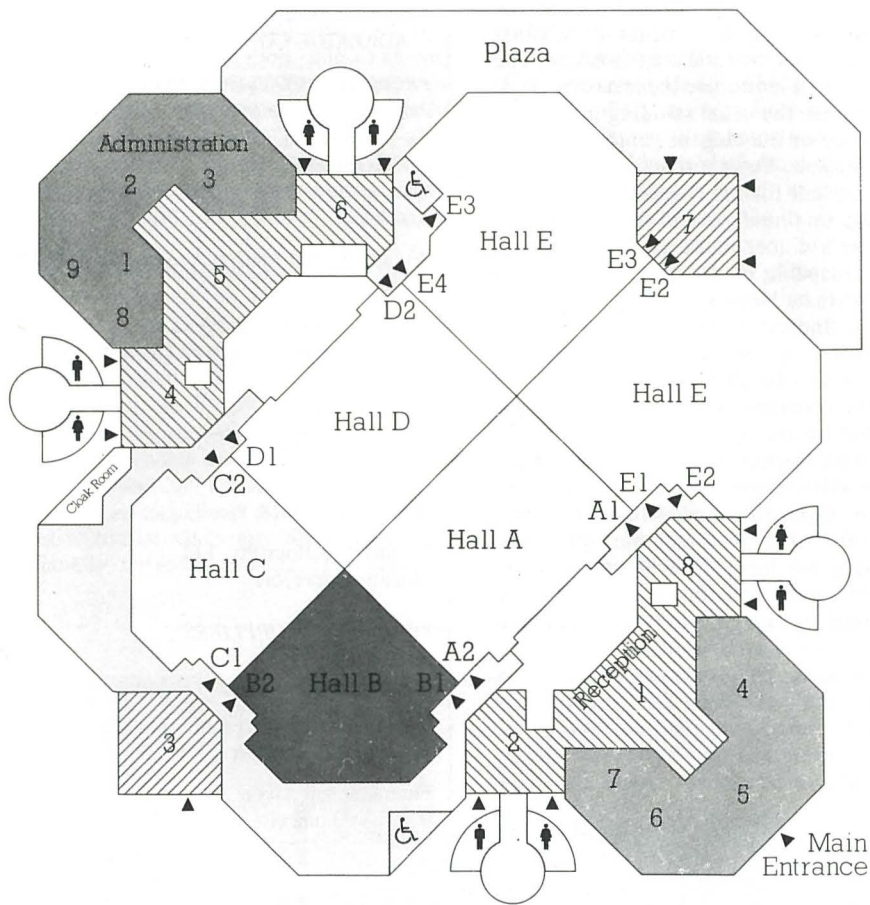
The centre has operationally been very successful, if booking density is a yardstick — we have invited the operations manager, Richard Quigley, to give us his own version which follows. Meantime, it will be



Looking down the main hall with seats raised for exhibition use.



The control rooms above the seating in B and C Halls.



With the division walls in place there are five spaces which can be used individually or in various combinations. Each unit has separate access from the adjacent foyer spaces shown cross-hatched on the diagram.

interesting to watch the usage and technical development of ASER, compared with the two other major competing venues in Australia, i.e. Darling Harbour (Sydney) which seats 3000 in a semi-circle and has no ground floor direct access and Melbourne Congress Centre (under construction) which seats about 1800 in a large nearly rectangular space at fourth floor level. One thing is now certain, all will have to operate as theatrical venues for a substantial part of their lives, as trade and sales functions become ever more elaborate.

D.C. IRVING

Assesment of the Centre's Operational Aspects

On those days when someone makes a mildly derogatory comment about the Centre, staff can be heard to reply. "This is

only the prototype! We'll get it right the next time!" One could, of course write pages of "should have been". Nevertheless, it is a great shame that financial and political "conservatism" do not allow good ideas to develop into great ones. One does not mean to say that the Centre is mediocre in any way. Far from it, the interior finish is of hotel standard. The flexibility of the spaces provide more options than some clients can cope with. The concept of the technical facilities is good remembering always that what is great for one is often awful for another, technicians being technicians. The beautiful simplicity of the tiered seating solution approaches genius; now, if only we didn't have to remove any seats to raise them! We are working on that one.

One of the fundamental errors made in the planning and design process Denis has outlined is in not addressing the "various other more technical problems" such as "security factors" and "presentations". These factors should be considered before the construction budget is agreed on. It goes without saying therefore, that consultants should be involved at an earlier time. Then perhaps, the operating budget would not have to make up for the shortfalls of the construction budget.

Denis alludes to the original undersizing and subsequent upsizing of the facility. Nine months of operation indicate that a capacity of some 8000 to 10000 would have been a very useful thing. Although another exhibition space is being considered in close proximity to the Centre there is now a demonstrable requirement for a facility capable of catering for conventions of 1000 to 1500 delegates together with a concurrent exhibition requiring up to 6000 square metres of floor space, all under the same roof. Add to this the current pressure in Adelaide for an 8000-12000 seat Entertainment Centre and you have some idea of the opportunity missed.

Returning to an assesment of the operational aspects of the Convention Centre let us look at the shape of the building. It is a series of interconnecting octagonal pods. This results in some very interesting room shapes and layouts. While this is architecturally interesting we are finding that some clients have difficulty with the concept of using a space that is not rectilinear. As a consequence some time must be spent convincing them that a proposed layout will actually work. I highly recommend an inexpensive CAD programme for this exercise. Nevertheless, this design results in a minimum of non-revenue producing floor space. As you might gather, storage area near the "field of battle" is non-existent.

Most usages of the facility involve the simultaneous use of two or more of the main hall areas together with some meeting rooms. This has meant that the main control rooms are seldom used as such. We have instead developed separate "room packages", these contain all of the commonly used audio, projection, video and communication control equipment and are stored in large mobile cupboards. Contrary to advance advice, the larger room configurations are not the most difficult to handle. Rather it is the smaller configurations that seem to present most of the problems. These problems stem from the desire of the client to have an invisible projector position comprised of a 35mm slide projector, video projector, overhead projector and perhaps a 16mm film projector as well. All of this must not obstruct any sightlines, must allow the chairman an easy view of the "large screen" and allow for a product display centrally located. We are still trying to solve this one and in the process have discovered many projector hanging positions.

Given half a chance in terms of room layout and set up time lighting can be quite well done. The number and location of dimmers is reasonable and the control system works well. We have aquired electronic adaptors so that virtually any dimmer control desk is able to drive the soft patch. Of the house light control I will say nothing in the event I expose myself to a libel suit.

The audio system has also performed well. Initially the experimentation in room layouts created real problems with equalization. We now recommend optimum lectern

placement and the results are much better. The system works well, is very flexible and sufficiently powerful for anything but a "Rock" show. As mentioned earlier the only problem is a control position that satisfies both the audio operator and the client.

Video projection has, as Denis says, moved away from film. We have not had any interest in 35mm film projection. The large screen has been used several times for multi image slide presentations and although it is difficult and time consuming to handle and store, it has its uses. We have also found that, even in the small room configurations the slide projectors originally specified are not up to the brightness that some of our clients expect. We are acquiring three more powerful projectors and a wider selection of lenses.

Denis spoke of the control room and the "carefully planned hoist". One asks why was the hoist necessary? We have got round the problem with our mobile cupboards. All that gear that would have needed two or three people to hoist up and down can now be handled by one. Future Centre architects please note!

The future development of the Centre will be directed toward finding methods of efficiently handling the widely varying requirements of our clients. These first

months have identified a number of problems in the area of material handling and the amount of time that it takes. The Centre is not a legitimate theatre or hotel. It does not have the usual standing machinery of the stage or the elegant simplicity of the hotel ballroom. Yet it is required to be both. A concert hall for the Adelaide Symphony Orchestra on one night and the glamorous venue for a dinner dance on the next. The venue is capable of this and in fact it has done just that. However it cannot do both perfectly. Indeed it may never be able to. Nevertheless, it is one of our objectives that the venue will be able to do these types of functions economically for the client and profitably for the operator.

It is with respect to economic efficiency that one wishes form had followed function. We are expanding resources of funds, energy and time in overcoming problems that might not have been created if a bit more research had been done on the operational aspects of this type of centre at an earlier date. Dennis is absolutely right in his summation. This is the era of "Business Theatre" and if the West End or Broadway had the \$/minute budgets that some of the business presentations have some very spectacular productions would be seen indeed.

RICHARD QUIGLEY

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THE MANOEL THEATRE

Theatric Tourist *Francis Reid* visits Malta

Valletta is built on a peninsula projecting into Malta's Grand Harbour. This gives the City Gate a major focus as the only entry point of any significance. And almost immediately through this gate we come upon the only building which remains more or less as the bombs left it in 1942: E.M. Barry's Grand (sometime *Royal*) Opera House of 1864.

Valetta's considerable bomb damage has all been repaired with the exception of the Opera House which remains as a bombed out shell. Whether this is an intentional decision in order to provide a stark memorial, or whether there is an intention, or a least a hope, that it might ultimately be rebuilt in all its glory is unclear. But what is clear is that today's survival of the splendid **Manoel Theatre** is due, probably entirely due, to the demise of the Opera House.

The Manoel Theatre was built in 1731 at the instigation of the then Grandmaster of the Knights of St John, Antonio Manoel de Vilhena. He met most of the costs himself but recorded above the entrance, where it can still be read, that his theatre 'was for the honest recreation of the people' (**Ad honestatem populi oblectationem**). There was already an established Maltese tradition of dramatic and music theatre: the vows of

charity and chastity to which the Knights were committed did not prevent them from getting involved in theatrical activities. Indeed they formed the cast for the Manoel Theatre's opening night performance of the tragedy 'Meriope' on 9th January 1732.

From that moment the Manoel entered into the kind of cycle of ups and downs that is the fate of most theatres. There was success for much of the remainder of the eighteenth century with lyric opera and French tragedy, and the Maltese gradually earned their place alongside the foreign writers and composers. After a dark period at the turn of the century, the arrival of the British brought some fifty years of success which included annual opera seasons of nine months. Indeed the theatre's success as a result of the island's garrison-led prosperity was such that by 1861 the Manoel was being sold to fund a new grander opera house. The Manoel's fate subsequently included dosshouse, dance hall and cinema, with only a brief reprieve while the newer Opera House was being restored after a fire in 1873.

Following the war time destruction of the Opera House, the Maltese Government acquired the old theatre, originally known as Public Theatre and later Theatre Royal,

to restore it as the **Teatru Manoel**, opening in 1960 as Malta's National Theatre with a performance by Ballet Rambert. A fine old house adjacent to the theatre was acquired a few years ago and adapted to form foyers which include spaces suitable for exhibitions and chamber concerts.

The Theatre now houses a wide ranging



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programme of local and international companies. With my usual luck, my visit coincided with cancellation, due to stormy seas, of performances of **Aterballetto** the dance company of the theatres in the Emilia Romagna region of Italy. I was also, alas, between concerts of the resident Manoel Symphony Orchestra and my courage failed at the prospect of Ibsen's 'Ghosts' in Maltese.

But the Manoel welcomes theatric tourists and the times of its daily tours of the building are to be found in all listings. Oh that every city were so aware of the importance and interest of its theatre history, and so happy to share it with visitors! And a Manoel tour is in the premier league: it includes the stage.

I suppose that there are two major questions which leap to mind when a theatric tourist visits any old theatre, and especially one as old as 1732. How accurate

is the restoration? And what are the peculiarities?

The standard references are rather silent. Even Baur Heinhold. Although the deeper recesses of my memory keep tantalising me with a certainty that sometime somewhere someplace, I have read about the Manoel.

Nevertheless my hunch is that what we are seeing today is close to the original. The decoration that was uncovered in the 1960s by removing layers of grime, whitewash and paint is surely at least that prior to 1863 when performances moved to the new opera house. There is every possibility that it goes back to the previous century and may well include the spirit of the original. What does disturb my instinct is a one-liner in the theatre's own little booklet given to visitors: 'There have, of course, been many alterations through the years, bringing the auditorium to its present oval shape. I find little to dissuade my eyes from believing



Theatre in Gozo



Opera House, Valetta



Manoel Theatre, Malta, built in 1731

that the auditorium structure is basically the original. But this is the point where those two questions of restoration and special features become interlinked. The unexpected is the way in which the box tiers are supported on arches so that the auditorium ground floor (ie the pit) area extends under the boxes. Which just begs the question *was it always thus?*

The boxes are a delight: very shallow and with little rectangular pictures painted on each fascia. The stage is virtually unframed with the proscenium only marked by the termination of the boxes. The stage mirrors the depth and width of the auditorium and has generous docks by the standards of many such theatres. Pattern 23s are tucked into the boxes and there appear to have been few amendments to an early sixties Strand installation which includes S-floats and cloud effects.

The only jarring feature is the stalls seating's centre gangway which seems very divisive when one takes the stage to embrace the house from the point of command. Otherwise, the Manoel remains, as it must have been since that very first night in 1731, a **Gem**.

Gozo

The Berlitz Travel Guide throws out an enticing remark under *nightlife*: 'Gozo has two big, elaborately decorated theatres, and there are a few plays and operas running throughout the winter'. Gozo, Malta's twin island, is a rural 9 by 4.5 miles with a population of 30,000. Regular Cuepersons will understand my excitement at finding a two night season of Donizetti and Bellini. But they will also expect the performances to be scheduled for next week. Right!

So I plan a return to both Malta and Gozo . . . but for my next visit, I hope to get my operatic timing right!

Arts Centres of the Future — what will they be like?

A new period of theatre building is underway: what is in store for us, and why? ANTHONY McCALL looks at the forces shaping the thoughts of those responsible for introducing change — or sometimes the lack of it.

Theatres are about perceived space, someone observed recently on a Radio 3 programme, about where you feel people are . . . in their tiers, boxes or the actor on the stage and his relationship with them. This subject was expanded upon in a wide-ranging discussion about changing trends, tastes and the nature of successful theatre. Three theatre specialists were kicking around their ideas, in an unusually frank exchange of views. They were Nicholas Thompson, architect for the newly-opened Towngate Theatre, Basildon; Iain Mackintosh, design director of Theatre Projects; and Michael Billington, theatre critic of *The Guardian* who chaired the discussion.

“Arrange the audience so that they have a relationship with one another, like books in a library” Iain Mackintosh said, quoting 17th century Italian architect. Why? Because it adds to the sense of occasion, of anticipation and to the feeling of *a part of an audience* you can see and feel around you. Likewise, theatre interiors should visually excite the audience, both in the auditorium and elsewhere in the building.

Somerset Maugham scoffed at modern theatres back in the mid-fifties. “Those modern playhouses which you visit with a sense of dread” he said. Well, theatre reflects and exaggerates the best and the worst of current architecture, observed Michael Billington. If you design too many tricks, for example, the style becomes too clever, too complicated. It starts to feel contrived.

Nicholas Thompson felt we had built “a whole lot of bland, dull theatres up and down the country, which we are now stuck with”. And most architects were afraid of colour; they used it badly, he thought.

Where did all these observations point? The programme was looking at the nature of live performances and judging by various tests what point we have reached today in Britain. Billington had kicked off with the question: “All new theatres seem to be flexible. Why?” The answer: because we cannot afford the luxury, especially in touring theatres as opposed to repertory, of choosing just one style of theatre. There needs to be more variation, to allow for different art forms and different performance needs.

“Young people don’t want to sit more than a few feet from the stage and actors”

Billington felt. “The Young Vic is a good example of this; Basildon is too.”

Then he asked whether we should be building for posterity. Michael Elliott, the late theatre director, felt not, Thompson recalled. His own reaction was: “The bigger the theatre, the more permanent it will be. Smaller theatres like fringe theatres can last only a few years. The Royal Exchange Theatre in Manchester (which owes its existence as much to Michael Elliott as anyone else) is one of the best theatres of recent years; but could it have been done on a bigger scale?” he asked.

Mackintosh’s reply was to recall that the essence of true atmosphere was a strong idea, simply but clearly stated. “Peter Brook admitted that he would prefer a bomb site in Brixton to a new theatre built by a theatre architect” he pointed out. That is because Brook seeks to strip away all possible distractions from the performance, zeroing in on the actors and the images they seek to create. All other elements, like a ‘fun’ auditorium, unfairly influence an audience’s mental attitude to a performance, Brook feels.

Asked which their favourite theatres were, Thompson voted for the Crucible, Sheffield, the Young Vic, London, and the Wilde, Bracknell. Mackintosh agreed with his choice, but added the Majestic, in Brooklyn, New York. It had been built in 1904 but fell into disuse in 1952 until Peter Brook chose it for staging his “Mahabharata”, which Mackintosh had found most impressive in that venue. Billington thought the Swan at Stratford outstanding, as well.

Thompson finished by reminding us that we are now in a period of fresh theatre-building in this country. “Tourism adds to the value of a city and theatres play a key part in all that” he said. “They generate more value in the surrounding land, which can then be exploited for the theatre. . .” A good example of prime siting was Milton Keynes, where the best site has been kept free for a good theatre, he said. The same was true in Huddersfield.

One of Theatre Projects’ clients, the Orange Tree in Richmond, was also looking for a good public site to relocate themselves in, said Mackintosh. He saw the concept of arts centres in busy public places, like shopping centres, coming across the Atlantic now. He had been involved in a

good deal of work in North America and he felt this concept was ‘a good thing’.

Nicholas Thompson, who works with architects Renton Howard Wood Levin in Covent Garden, was, like your correspondent, also one of several hundred delegates at a major conference in mid-April at Riverside Studios in London, to discuss “The issue of building for the performing arts with particular reference to small and medium-sized communities”. The event was jointly organised by the ABTT and ACA (The Association of Consultant Architects) and entitled ‘Artsbuild’. The programme mentioned that ABTT and ACA felt it was “timely to stimulate discussion on how the performing arts should be housed, particularly in those communities that are unlikely to be able to afford more than one auditorium.”

The conference aims were laudable. Undoubtedly this is an important topic in a world of changing theatre technology, consumer leisure habits and spending patterns, changing audiences (growing ones, may we hope?), and consequently both audiences and arts managers of increasing sophistication. In short, a world where expectations grow steadily.

The event considered three “fundamental” questions:

1. Why build for the performing arts in the last decade of the 20th century? — The relevance to the community (and otherwise) arising. The objectives for such buildings.
2. What to build? — The kind of buildings, their scale, shape and versatility. Where they might best be sited, what infrastructure they require and what questions may need resolution in order to meet the objectives.
3. How — the gathering of interest and support, the assessment of opportunity, the raising of capital funding, the roles of the public and private sector, the economics of operation, the sources of programme and methods of government.

Now a conference is only as good as its organisation — and speakers. Perhaps it was a pity that only those “professionally” concerned were invited to take part: architects, theatre consultants and arts administrators of different kinds. It might have achieved lobbying or educational value if investors, developers, local and national politicians and more press had been invited

as well. In the absence of a broader cross-section of interests involved in building arts centres, it became an opportunity to 'talk shop' instead, with speakers preaching to the converted. So who were the speakers?

Welcome speeches were by Frank Woods, ACA Chairman, and Richard York, ABTT Chairman, and the keynote speech was given by the Rt. Hon. Mark Fisher MP, Shadow Minister for the Arts. Session 1, 'Why?' was chaired by Denys Hodson CBE, Director of Arts and Recreation, Borough of Thame-down; speakers were Theo Crosby, architect and co-founder of Pentagram Design Ltd; Kim Heyworth, partner responsible for Peat Marwick McLintock's leisure and tourism arm; and William Weston, Administrator of Leeds Playhouse. Session 2, 'What?', chaired by Stephen Remington, Director of Sadler's Wells, had papers by Richard Brett, founder of Technical Planning Ltd theatre consultants; John Partridge CBE, a founder partner of architects Howell Killick Partridge & Amis; Remington himself; and Torsten Nobling, a Swedish architect of Arto Arkitektur & Teater and director of the new Uppsala Theatre. And finally, Session 3, 'How?' was chaired by William McKee, Chief Executive of the London Borough of Merton, with speakers Michael Holden, theatre consultant; and Anamaria Wills, Theatre Director at the Towngate Theatre, Basildon. Questions and general discussion was chaired at the end of the afternoon by Alan Yentob, Controller of BBC2 Television and a panel of speakers drawn from all three earlier sessions.

I gave the organisers high marks for the general quality of their speakers; but rather lower marks for the content of the individual talks and the sometimes vague direction the day seemed to be taking. Admittedly there is a limit to how much one can control one's speakers, but things could have been run in a 'tighter' fashion.

The conference intended to address a wide range of issues, however, not all received their fair share of attention. And some issues were not discussed at all. I was keen to hear discussed, for instance, such topics as: have we got it right (with our present buildings)? Who is our audience? Are they, the consumer, pleased with existing buildings? Are the workers and management who run them? What new facilities would different sections of the community like to see? And would such changes be feasible? But such market-led issues were not uppermost in our planners' minds. In fact, I didn't see much evidence of anyone trying to find out what customers like and want at any stage of the proceedings.

Now it is fair to say that by their nature, the arts are a blend of paternalism (stemming from the basic precept that 'the arts are good for you', experimentation, and an effort to please in some form (intellectually or emotionally)). So classical marketing rules are not enough when discussing the arts, or even arts centres. But on the other hand one cannot blithely ignore the likes and dislikes of the community one is trying to

serve. Or can one?

Denys Hodson, who has been active in numerous areas of the arts and its attendant committees, offered a note of warning on the subject of research. "It is very important to remember" he stressed "that consultation has strict limitations. This is a basic fact. You cannot ask people who do not know what an arts centre is whether they want to build their own or not. It is up to others to make inspired, correct guesses as to what is needed".

He was speaking after Mark Fisher's keynote speech, which underlined the need to listen to what people wanted, and not always to have ideas imposed on them from the top — as in the case of Liverpool's new gallery, the Tate in the North, for example. Or the new 4,500-seat auditorium proposed for London's Docklands. "Do we need it?" Fisher asked. A good question, that.

There is a meeting point, I think, where these two viewpoints can sensibly converge. One can find out, for example, whether there are specific things that people dislike about their present theatre: too much of a crush at the interval bar; outdated loos; too functional or grand a general atmosphere about the place; an offputting amount of time needed trying to book tickets beforehand; uncomfortable seats; poor sightlines and so on. These are not abstract, lofty questions about theoretical things, but down-to-earth reasons why, in some cases, people do not patronise their local theatre or arts centre. Going out to a performance is not, after all, a regular event for all audiences — it is not a habit. So the whole business of customer relations is surely of central importance. Let me illustrate with a moral tale.

A friend of mine took an arts marketing

degree at Lancaster University some years ago. For her thesis she decided to use the Duke's Theatre, Lancaster, as her subject. They had a problem: they couldn't get enough people in to support their seasons — or plainly put, they couldn't get enough bums on seats. My friend carried out her own market research (the first they had had carried out on their behalf) to discover why the public was not coming to the theatre. The answer was surprising. Not enough people knew *where the theatre was*, *what was on* (ie not enough publicity) or that there was a pleasant coffee bar which could be used during the daytime, encouraging potential patrons to use the building. . . and eventually tempting them along to performances, too. Three pretty crucial factors in wooing audiences, you'll agree. These ills were subsequently put right. But it goes to show how even rudimentary aspects of running the business had not been seen to. And I do not for a moment think that the Duke's, Lancaster was the only example of this kind in the country.

In different respects, there is still much backwoodsman thinking in parts of the theatre world. We seem to be only dimly aware that arts centres are in a competitive marketplace. Let's look at our competitors. Pubs, wine bars and coffee shops during the day and in some cases the night as well; restaurants, cinemas, nightclubs, squash and tennis clubs — and above all, television and videos, watched in comfortable living rooms, where there are no parking hassles, overpriced drinks, queues for the loo, the bar, the cloakroom and so forth, at night.

You will say I am greatly exaggerating. Yet the arts are a part of the leisure industry, in marketing terms at least. They are broadly speaking the upmarket end of the

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"A holistic culture is needed. Architecture is getting steadily worse," he said, "and to solve the problem, help is needed from our contemporaries. We architects are chasing around for something new, called 'Post Modernism', but there is something missing. We need skills and style, but the variety and numbers of craftsmen of former days are gone. Nor is there anywhere for them to practise their skills if they were around (which they are not). And the artists who go through their training get no grounding in building materials, weathering, or even an initiation, regarding invoices and contracts. They are not attuned to orientations such as profits. Arts buildings must be run as businesses, in the final analysis", he added.

On behalf of theatre consultants, Richard Brett gave a *cri de coeur* for practical buildings that allowed enough room for get-ins, and if there was to be no fly tower then please, could the planners remember to ensure that the roof was strong enough to suspend lighting, scenery and effects. The Derngate at Northampton, with its inflatable cushions (airfill methods) allows towers and seating blocks of two to three tons to be moved with ease by two operatives, he reminded. This technique had now improved to the point where gaps in the floor were no longer a problem. Equally, pros arches, walls and so on could be moved if necessary, he said.

The problems, or issues, could be isolated as three main tasks, Brett felt. (And in 17 years, he has been responsible for more than 100 projects in some 25 countries). They are: one, designing for more than one activity; two, methods of changing from one use to another; and three, the economics of points one and two. Sounds simple, doesn't it?/It ain't.

Next came practical insights into planning and building a suitable building. Stephen Remington, Director of Sadler's Wells told the conference, wisely no doubt, that most problems are solved as you go along. By the same token, you could become drawn into a project, say a building project, because it seemed the best solution to given needs at a certain time. If and when that project ran into problems such as planning application complications that were unforeseeable, funding problems, policy problems further down the line, neighbourhood issues and so forth the entire project could become a hot potato, without necessarily offering the option of pulling out. Too much time and money would probably have become tied up in the scheme.

In an indirect manner, it was in trying to solve an earlier accommodation problem within Sadler's Wells Theatre, that the opportunity presented itself to build what will soon be the new Lillian Baylis Theatre, a 200-seater in the bowels of the present theatre, for educational, community and professional use. It will be used by small-scale and medium dance companies, and have a rehearsal studio, garden and foyer on top, at ground level.

Anamaria Wills, of the new Towngate at Basildon, for her part waxed lyrical about



The Point, Milton Keynes

the need to keep a modern theatre in use all day long, from 10am until 11pm. "Sixteen months before opening, I realised that I was not the client," she said, "the local council was." I was employed by the company who was going to run the place and keep it profitable (ie the trust)." It took a good deal of diplomacy, table-thumping and insistence to get herself involved at all in any of the final decisions, before the building was handed over to her . . . for day-to-day running.

There was no facility for projection, for instance, she cited. This was vital commercially, to the profitability of the centre. Eventually some projection equipment was installed. Then there was the theatre kiosk. "The days of the kiosk are over" she declared, looking exasperated. "We need to draw people in to browse for tapes, records, papers, books, T-shirts and so on. It's not just a question of flogging a few sweets in the interval any more. You have to draw them in to the centre with your shop: we're talking about proper retail."

There were many other sagas she regaled the conference with. But a neat illustration was that of the circle bar, which the architects and council builders had planned. Wills asked four brewers to put in tenders for building the bar with their own specialist joiners, with a view to obtaining the concession for the bar. A local brewery, Greene King, built it for less than half the originally estimated cost! And to cap it all, Wills had originally been asked if the bar could be scrapped to trim £40,000 off the construction budget. The moral is: councils prefer to overestimate than underestimate a job. Added to which, a specialist joiner (doing nothing but contract bar construction) can knock out the job in half the time.

An interesting footnote to the new Towngate is its potential speed of turn-

around in changing the auditorium layout. Ford, the major local employers, apparently plan to hold their new car launches at the Towngate during the day, with full press coverage and so forth. Then at 7pm sharp, the event is to be cleared away in time for the evening theatre production. This is made possible by a similar 'airfill' methods to those at Northampton's Derngate. Wills foresees beauty contests, trade fairs and all manner of varied daytime uses becoming commonplace. Will this bring a new meaning to the word 'multi-purpose'? And is this type of multi-use the shape of things to come? Wills has few doubts.

William McKee, now Chief Executive of the London Borough of Merton, has credentials in the field of planning which merit quick perusal. He has had earlier stints with the boroughs of Hammersmith and Fulham, Lambeth, Croydon and with the GLC. A qualified transport engineer and town planner, he lectured for 15 years at London University, first in his own subjects, then in local government and management. His publications include 'The Future of Planning', 'Inner City Regeneration', 'Privatisation' and 'Managing to Compete'. It was perhaps not surprising that he lectured fluently yet succinctly and clearly.

Let us be fully aware of the background to today's local government picture, he began. Ten years ago in the borough of Hammersmith, a typical London borough, spending on the arts had risen from a low of seven per cent to a high of some 27 per cent over the years. This growth of arts spending was commonplace. The situation was now different because central government no longer dished out the rate support grant if you were after more money. The reverse now applied. The more you spent, the less you got of central support, he said. Further-

more rate capping meant there were limits on how much you could raise the rates.

"For a long time local government had it very good in their involvement with the arts" he told delegates — who probably weren't expecting such candour from an obviously Labour-leaning technocrat. "They had not understood certain home truths," he added, referring to the fact that money did not grow on trees. McKee went on to unfold a three-point 'home truths' list, for councils throughout the country.

- "1. If you cannot find a solution (to your arts plans) with a developer, he will go elsewhere. There is no monopoly with any one council," he warned.
- "2. Some locations are more attractive than others. If a council does not possess certain benefits, there's nothing you can do about it." (You could not make a silk purse out of a sow's ear, in other words, not even with unlimited idealism and hard work.)
- "3. Developers need a level of profit of between roughly 10-20 per cent. If the profit is squeezed too far, they simply will not go ahead. Better by far to encourage them to make healthy profits, which you can then insist they divert into other uses, which either subsidise or pay for what you were after. It becomes the condition of the contract," he said. (The Lyric, Hammersmith was paid for by the office block behind it, which is now used by an American bank.). "If you want a developer's money, you have to understand his problems" he warned.

He pointed to Croydon's lessons for architects. "Croydon is an architectural failure, probably," he suggested politely, "but it is a highly successful retail and employment environment which is splendidly de-centralised". (Looks of surprise on many delegates faces, including mine; but he had a point).

So what were the golden rules, how did one deal with developers? "Land values for retail, residential or office development have their costs dictated by market forces. So if you need £1 million to pay for an arts centre, you may have no choice but to build offices to generate that kind of money. Residential development, however desirable, simply won't raise that sort of cash without needing twice the amount of land available. But," he reminded, "all this allows certain activities like the arts to be built without adding a penny to the rates. This makes it a great deal easier to raise the necessary building costs. And local councils have lots of land: the key is to realise this valuable asset".

The way to keep control over projects was to have joint involvement with developers, he advised. Councils didn't need to run the whole show themselves. Nor should income-generating activities be overlooked in the centre; be warned. Shops and other facilities, should be included, like a coffee shop, crafts centre, gallery, exhibition space or whatever. To illustrate his point, he recalled that football clubs had learned a long time ago that they were paid for by

their bar takings. Without these, the clubs would not pay. "So likewise," he urged, "let kids with their disco help generate cash and make the place alive, while at the same time subsidising the arts activities."

Summing up his arguments, which I have only skimmed over here, he warned against expecting to get everything one wanted in building and running a new arts centre — and still keep all allegiances and friendships intact. "To use an old cliché," he said, "you've got to break an egg to make an omelette. But if you have a clear objective and know what you are doing, and what the rules of the game are, you'll get there in the end."

Questions and discussion after the speakers was chaired by Alan Yentob, Controller of BBC2 Television — whom a colleague sitting near me nicknamed "arts yob" under his breath, for his apparently humourless do-gooding view of the arts being a kind of cultural stairway to Heaven. I knew what he meant.

Little consensus emerged on any major questions during the final session. Except perhaps that the biggest change to have been seen in the past 20 years, had been, without question, the need to use arts buildings all day long, not just for performances.

The Theatre Royal, Winchester, for instance, had seen earned income shoot up by 300 per cent in the last two years. This was because interest in the centre's ancillary activities had spread over into the theatre productions, their delegate said. This, in turn, fed back into the community by word of mouth, creating stronger continued support for the theatre programme.

No-one had much idea what arts centres would be like in the 21st century, though someone from South West Arts wondered if laser shows should perhaps be provided. Answer: no. One had to differentiate between technical gimmickry and genuinely changing tastes and art forms. On the other hand, audiences were now prepared to travel quite considerable distances by car or by train to see something of particular interest to them, especially in rural areas or towns with poor arts and leisure facilities. This trend was though likely to continue, as society became increasingly sophisticated in its tastes and travel progressively easier to major destinations.

Looking for glimpses of the future, the ten-screen (soon to become 16-screen) cinema complex at Milton Keynes, The Point, was held up as an illustration of the way arts centres might go in years to come. This aptly-named building, a glass and steel pyramid, mixed a pleasantly futuristic architecture (some would say flashy, others would say fun) with drinking and relaxing areas for patrons; bingo — or other leisure activities, depending on the market needs: acres of car parking to make it accessible to a wide catchment area; and the whole complex situated bang in the heart of downtown shopping and near the station. But Yentob shrank from the thought of auditorium seats being fitted with little cup holders for drinks à la Milton Keynes, and so our timid, all-

too-brief exploration of commercialism and its potential benefits to patrons, management or to the arts coffers died an early death.

While agreeing with Yentob's reaction, I think he — and others — over-reacted. I couldn't help detecting a little armchair socialism here — or to be blunt, pious hypocrisy. And this touches on a central issue that I feel merits discussion, since it concerns us all.

On the one hand, the whole day had been based on the premise, understandably, that the arts should be subsidised. Why? Because they are good for you: that is, they have moral, educational, emotional and intellectual value. And with continued arts funding, from numerous sources, one could expect to see a steady upward curve in the growth of the arts. But on the other hand, the tone of the arts had to remain serious; committed to grand ideals; and above vulgarity at all costs. (All three ideals are plainly open to question, but still). If newcomers were to be allowed into the cosy club called the arts world, they would have to leave any inappropriate ideas or behaviour at the door when they came in.

To my mind, this general attitude is fairly widespread. Of course Alan Yentob had a point — up to a point. But he, and others like him, take this preciousness too far. They only succeed in alienating non-initiates to the club by mystifying the subject, which helps no-one, and overlaying it with snobbery. No doubt this is unintentional, but it is often none the less real for that.

The creative impulse is to share, not to exclude. Even in the case of the closet revolutionaries of rose-tinted left-leaning persuasions, who are numerous in all branches of the arts. It is easy to become purist, intolerant and so clean-scrubbed in one's idealism that the unwashed proletariat with its infectious ideas can appear repellent. Like foresaking decorum and bringing drinks into the auditorium, for example. In my view, a little less smugness would be welcome, at being members of the arts club. Whether of the left- or the right-wing variety. We can do without accusations (by taxpayers especially) of elitism and snobbishness being laid at our doorstep. Greater generosity of spirit and sense of fun are better weapons anyway, in dealing with people's differing attitudes and expectations. It is also a sounder base on which to base customer relations and build audiences of the future.

All this is self-evident to large numbers of people, true. But the sentiments are not universal. And the subject under discussion is one of providing for the new requirements and tastes of the coming decades. Inflexibility will not prove an ally. Anyway, what would those great libertarians of the past say if they had been at Riverside Studios — Voltaire, Dickens, GBS, Goethe, Victor Hugo and others besides? Not to mention that irrepressible prankster who never left his crude sense of humour at the door, Wolfgang Mozart. He took it everywhere he went.

Is there a future for our piers?

Some of Britain's seaside piers still turn a profit — occasionally quite a tidy one. Others are on skid row. What are the reasons for such varying fortunes? And what are future prospects like? CUE decided to investigate. Report by ANTHONY McCALL.

Picture the lovely Menai Strait, which divides the north Wales mainland from the island of Anglesey. The 15-mile long strait is probably best-known for its suspension bridge and for the splendid view it affords from the island side of the opposite shoreline. But a few weeks ago, in early May, this was the scene of a remarkable opening, or should I say re-opening ceremony, which deserves all the public and professional attention that it is getting. Given the scale of the reconstruction, which involved building from the waterline up, the number of workers employed on the reconstruction and the determination shown to pull off this ambitious project, the gleaming new attraction can justly be said to provide the area's new showpiece. I am referring to that late Victorian gem, Bangor Pier.

It was built in 1896 but declared unsafe by the early seventies. Some 15 years and more than £3 million later, it was re-opened to the public by the Lord Lieutenant of Gwynedd, the Marquess of Anglesey. The restoration cost was contributed by the Welsh Development Agency, Bangor City Council, the National Heritage Memorial Fund and public subscription. Work was carried out by the council using Manpower Services Commission labour — between 80–100 workers, the largest undertaking of its kind to date by the MSC or by a local council.

In recognition of these achievements, the European federation of 22 conservation societies, Europa Nostra, has awarded its diploma to the venture.

Great contrast to this, the Wellington pier at Great Yarmouth, Norfolk, is under threat of demolition by its owners, the borough council, who want to grasp the nettle and redevelop the whole site into "something more viable", such as a theme park. Repairs have been neglected for years, since it is a long time since the pier rang up any profit. It has also lived under the shadow of its commercially-run sister pier at Yarmouth, the Britannia, owned by Britain's largest and most successful pier company, First Leisure Corporation.

The council knows many people feel nostalgic about the pier and its theatre, but they are not entrepreneurs and predictably, lack imagination. All they see is taxpayers' money being spent on keeping a loss-making entertainment facility open and a growing number of former summer season audiences heading to the Mediterranean beaches. Commercial producers may have the right shows to draw the crowds but it's an unequal struggle when the theatre itself

needs structural, electrical and other repairs, which its owners (the council) have neglected to carry out. Catch-22.

On the Isle of Wight, Shanklin pier collapsed in the gale-force winds of last October: an exaggerated reminder that the elements pose a constant threat to such constructions. Storms can unleash

enormous forces, occasionally sending hapless vessels crashing into the piles with disastrous results. Only a few months earlier, a three-year renovation programme had been announced by a Southampton leisure and construction group, to create a major leisure complex at a cost of £4 million. Ambitious car parking, conference and restaurant facilities had been planned, offering all-year round entertainment in a major resort attraction that used Shanklin's pier as its centrepiece, restored to its former glory.

Along the coast in Brighton, the 'hurricane' spared well-known landmarks, the Palace and West piers. That is, they are still standing. But it still struck with enough force to damage them, particularly the more fragile of the two, the only grade one listed pier in the country, the West Pier, which now totters on piles and struts too weak to support it. In February 1988, 110 feet of wooden deck and steel substructure was removed, at a cost of £18,000, isolating the pavilion and concert hall. This was aimed to prevent the damaged part of the pier pulling down the remaining sound sections.

Designed and built between 1863 and 1866 by Eugenius Birch, the foremost pier engineer of the period, it was allowed to fall into such disrepair that by 1975 it was declared unsafe and closed to the public. Plans for its demolition raised such a local outcry that the Brighton West Pier Trust was formed. A consulting engineers' report estimated the structural repairs at £4.5 million — essentially crossbracing for the horizontal substructure — spread over five years; and another £4 million to restore the pavilion, concert hall and kiosks — each one of them glories of oriental style Victorian architecture. At the time of writing, £1.25 million has been received from sources as varied as English Heritage and John Paul Getty.

Where, in all the varying fortunes of Britain's seaside piers, is there a common link? Are they basically all still viable commercial entities — or the reverse, a collection of lame ducks that we ought to scrap before they cost us any more money on the rates?

The truth is, they are really neither one nor the other. Some are successful commercial concerns; others probably have no independent future in prospect, and will therefore have to become museums or historic monuments — or be scrapped. And vexed question is: how do you know when a pier has no commercial options left? Rather like a theatre. For so often, it depends what you use them for.

The birth of the pier

There is an undeniable Britishness about seaside piers. Or rather English-and-Welshness, since none were built in Scotland. Only a smattering ever got built abroad: the idea never really caught on.

The pier was in fact a product of the Industrial Revolution. Its early development mirrored changing tastes and pastimes. As the spa towns of Harrogate, Bath and Tunbridge Wells began to lose their popularity in the early 19th century, fashionable society discovered the pleasures of the seaside resort — Weymouth, Margate and Scarborough.

The transport that got them there had been the stage coach and sailing vessel, but these were drifting into oblivion. They were making way for the paddle steamer, which provided speed and comfort. And as the seaside attractions grew to cater for this new kind of visitor, so the seaside hotels, boarding houses and bandstands began to emerge. With the Bank Holiday Act of 1871, the working classes also joined in the race to the sea.

Early visitors were rowed ashore in small boats, with breeches and crinolines getting wet in the process. Piers served the useful purpose of providing a landing point to disembark. Margate's was built in 1808; Ryde on the Isle of Wight in 1814; Brighton's famous chain pier in 1823. The pier also provided the perfect place to stroll, sometimes undercover, to take the sea air, and to view the distant shoreline from the end of the pier. Attractions of all kinds flourished on the piers over the years, catering for changing tastes and publics. As Britain's industrial and commercial prowess grew, so did the Bank Holiday business. Steam trains now emitted an endless stream of day-trippers on to the sea fronts and beaches all over the country. And the different classes sought to blend with the aristocracy, jostling for social status — especially on the seaside piers, more than almost anywhere else. The resorts provided the ideal sense of excitement and change from routine needed for such 'social chemistry' to take place.



Bangor Pier

Their options are basically either an entertainment-based on tourism-angled appeal. Or a mixture of the two. Naturally they need to be used throughout the day, and for as much of the year as possible. Naturally only good shows with the right stars draw the crowds to the theatres or concert halls. Yet piers haven't made much effort to move their image away from the fortune teller, soft ice cream stalls and broad popular appeal type shows of their former days. You may ask why they should seek to become something they are not. Fair enough. But the answer is, in today's commercial climate of increasing competition for every pound in the consumer's pocket, it makes business sense to review existing policy: especially when your pier is threatened with closure. Preferably before then, since by that stage it will doubtless be too late to innovate.

For example, what is the potential for opening a really original or fantasy-type restaurant, bistro or theme cafe on the pier? Or disco, or roller disco, or specialist concerts that only draw medium-sized crowds? These are natural benefits to most towns, since these activities can be noisy, hence town planners and insomniac citizens could be expected to smile on the proposal. And would such businesses succeed on a pier? If properly promoted, perhaps better than on land, although suitable measures would need to be taken to protect patrons from bad weather down what would otherwise become a windy and rainy gauntlet out of season.

Are there any lessons to be learned from piers abroad? Apart from the USA, piers are really a very British concept, indeed they played a major role in promoting the idea of the seaside. But there are a few piers to be found in Europe.

The best known is that of Scheveningen in the Netherlands. Built opposite the Kurhaus, it allowed hotel patrons to enter the pier free of charge on an upper level, or deck. The lower deck was open to the general public for an admission charge. It was replaced in 1961 with three 'islands' built off it (which may provide a pointer to future uses of British piers), containing amusements, a restaurant, an aquarium, a

submarine replica and a cycling track. A fourth island was added in 1964. Along the coast in Belgium, at Blankenberghe, the 1895 pier was made entirely of concrete. Attractions include a concert hall, casino, restaurant and aquarama. Oh, and a pier train. There are other piers in East Germany, France (at Trouville, Nice — on the Promenade des Anglais — Archachon by the Bay of Biscay) Italy (notably at Sorrento, Senigalia and Lignana Sabbladora), Switzerland and Austria. In the case of the last two, Zurich has a wooden pier attractively decorated with lampposts; and Pertisan am Achensee boasts an entrance building and two spans like a suspension bridge.

The National Piers Society (14 Freshfield Place, Brighton, East Sussex BN2 2BN. 0273 603705), which campaigns for Britain's piers and for greater public awareness of the issues involved in neglecting or saving our historical seaside relics, published an instructive check list of myths about Brighton's West Pier. It serves as an interesting model on the subject of all piers.

The West Pier should be left to sink.

The pier is in shallow water and will never sink. It will remain a monumental eyesore, unless it is removed at an estimated cost of £2 million.

The West Pier is worthless.

It is a listed grade I building, meaning it is of national importance to Britain's architectural heritage. Since no other pier is so listed, it is recognised as the finest pier in the country.

It is beyond repair.

The pier sub-structure can be economically restored for about £4 million, said Lewis & Duvivier, consulting engineers on marine structures, in 1985, after conducting a thorough survey, costing £75,000, of every structural member.

The West Pier is about to fall down.

£200,000 has already been spent on strengthening and stabilising the structure, with a further £70,000 about to be spent. None of this work is visible to the public.

The pier is closed to the public
£230,000 has been spent on renovating the first 100 feet of the root end, which is planned to be open to the public shortly.

Restoration would require enormous sums.

The 1986 estimate for restoring the remainder of the pier to deck level is £4.4 million, which is not much compared with the Royal Pavilion and Grand Hotel (each £11 million). Organisations taking leases on the superstructure like the concert hall and pavilion could be expected to restore these buildings at their own expense.

Hove has no responsibility to the West Pier.

The West Pier is only a few hundred yards from the Hove boundary and is in full view of Hove's seafront. Hove is the only town of its size on the south coast of England without either a pier or a harbour. This fact might justify Hove adopting the West Pier, which could become a major tourist attraction from which Hove's tourist trade would benefit.

The government should restore it.

Central government has already put £450,000 into the West Pier, most of which has been spent on the above works. They pledged a further £400,000 in September 1986, provided that the local authorities concerned matched it, which they so far declined to do.

The private sector alone should restore it.

In the 12 years since it was closed, no businessman of substance has offered to restore it at his expense, although many have considered it, and acknowledged that it could again be profitable. The derelict docklands were not developed by the private sector until central government gave commitment and pump-priming infrastructure investment. Similarly, no businessman looks likely to invest in the West Pier until the local councils (Brighton, Hove and East Sussex) decide that they want it restored and commit their ratepayers' money to matching the government's offer of £400,000. That would meet 20 per cent of the total, which could trigger a national appeal.

This check-list was published in September 1987, but it should be added that a singular anomaly is at play concerning "the government should restore it". The £400,000 which came jointly from the English Heritage and National Heritage Memorial Fund, was made on condition that Brighton Council match the grant. But the council is disinclined to do so, because if they do they will be ratecapped by the government by at least twice the amount! This situation has led to deadlock, but the National Piers Society is trying to seek a solution. For anyone interested, either in West Pier or in the case history, Brighton West Pier Trust appeal is to be launched in May 1989 at the Brighton Festival. (Write to: North West House, 45 West Street, Brighton BN1 1PR).

Both restoration and demolition work

brings its pitfalls. Continual upkeep is needed on piers, like anything else: painting, galvanising and repairing. Council engineers tend to be "gloomy" about costs, according to John Lloyd, the National Piers Society's honorary secretary. "They tend to under-estimate reconstruction and maintenance costs, for reasons of optimism; or over-estimate, for fear of allocating insufficient funds to complete the work. In Torquay, it finally took only one quarter of the estimated cost to re-do the building work".

Lloyd notes that in Bournemouth, where the pier renovation cost £3-4 million, a great success has been made of the pier, which is now proving to be a "good

business venture for the council", according to Lloyd. With an amusement hall at the entrance, a theatre in the middle and a buffet, cafeteria and bar, the pier is ringing up healthy tills for the council, to the evident satisfaction of everyone concerned. If there are any pier buffs reading this, an excellent quarterly journal is produced by John Lloyd's Society, called 'Piers'. It gives regular updates on piers around the UK and elsewhere.

Now the big question still remains, what lies in store for Britain's piers? There are some 45 left of the original 90 piers built. Is that too many to keep going, or can a new life be found for them?

First Leisure Corporation, the country's

largest and most successful pier owners, currently run seven of the 'best' piers around our coasts: Blackpool's North, South and Central piers; Britannia Pier at Great Yarmouth; South Parade Pier at Southsea; and the Eastbourne and Llandudno piers. They are run at a profit, with summer shows, star attractions, catering and other leisure facilities to match their clientele. They run a year-round maintenance programme for all their piers, much of it carried out during the winter to avoid the busy holiday season and its crowds. An isolated example of their maintenance responsibilities at Blackpool: although the cast iron pillars survive the elements remarkably well down the years, the rest of the steelwork and decking has to be replaced periodically — a bill that comes to £60,000 a year per pier. Formerly they used an Australian timber, jarrah, from the eucalyptus species. Now they use a West African timber, opepe, which is so hard that the nail holes have to be pre-drilled and the nails extra strong galvanised steel. A full-time maintenance team of seven men are employed on Blackpool's North Pier alone. So keeping these seaside structures in peak condition is an important part of keeping them open. But that is just good business, like any entertainment of leisure venue.

Peter Hepple, Editor of 'The Stage' feels there is a future for piers if they can manage to bring back into fashion some of the pursuits for which they were originally built. For example, if pleasure steamers could run trips along the coast, using the landing stages at the end of the piers. Or if themes and hobbies were incorporated into the covered sections. "Piers were the forerunners of the theme park" he notes, "though they are also among the most expensive leisure attractions to repair". Victorians used to stroll in rooms filled with exotic plants and greenery, and the slot machines like 'what the butler saw' became huge successes around the end of last century. If today's interests could be exploited in such a fashion, we might yet see a revival of interest in a broader cross-section of the British public. As a footnote, Hepple recalls that most of the piers in the south of England were partially destroyed during the last war to prevent them from being used for enemy landings. Which is why so many of them have gone, unlike say, the north east coast. "And considering the variety of things people now think of restoring," he adds, "why not include a pier or two?" Quite so.

John Lloyd, of the National Pier Society, despite an understandably jaundiced view of most attempts to save Britain's piers, since so many attempts are poorly orchestrated, nevertheless detects a change of mood in public opinion over the past ten years. He recognises a distinct swing in favour of preserving piers, like other older buildings, which the taxpayer now expects to see preserved. For the sake of finding original new uses for these peculiarly British aspects of our culture, let us hope that he is right.



North Pier, Blackpool



Llandudno Pier

SCENIC ROOTS

The 10th ABTT Trade Show, at Riverside Studios, Hammersmith between the 14th and 16th of April, was busier than ever. JAMES LAWS explores some of the highways and byways of the exhibition.

This year, not having a stand of any complexity to set up, I arrived at Riverside late on Wednesday afternoon. The usual 11th hour bedlam was replaced by studied calm. Most stands were up, electricity from switched, shuttered sockets was all laid on; the show could have opened that evening. This set the keynote for the 10th ABTT trade show – the trade is fronting itself like a Profession at last.

I suspect that the reason is partly that many stallholders (and visitors) are stalking more varied prey these days. As Architects get more involved with colour, plasticity, form and contrast, they are realising that these have been part of the Theatre's stock in trade for a long long time. I suspect that the ability to create the one off at a realistic price must be an attraction. What's more, the colossal investment in new technology and new techniques by manufacturers means that new markets have to be found for the businesses to remain viable. Judging by the parade of elegantly suited visitors, the Trade Show was moving up-market at just the right time.

For the first time in London, following ABTT North's lead, there was a conference on the Friday of the Show. "Artsbuild '99" was well attended and the 300 delegates in the cinema were scarcely missed from the throng of visitors below. I hope the conference was better lit than the awards ceremony which took place in Stygian Gloom in the same cinema. Not many people came to hear an interesting choice of winners.

The Awards Committee had clearly decided to focus on scenery for Product of the Year. The nominations were:— FORMID, BURCHILL AND DICKSON and the winners, TRIPLE E, for their curved-track linear motor. This can move scenery or curtains along any shape of track as it needs no cables, deriving power and control signal from overhead tracks. It is currently in use at Covent Garden for the Knot Garden, where four motors each control 90° of a complete circle. Control from an Epson PX 4+ gives 99 cues with programmed speed, acceleration/deceleration load compensation, and positioning to within 5mm. At the Garden the system will be rigged and de-rigged every day for 2 months.

Of the runners up, BURCHILL AND DIXON were perhaps trying to emulate David Edelstein's earlier triumph with the pin-hinge. Probably worthy of the prize for the Heaviest stand, half a ton of coal weights



Charlie Paton – PALS, David Edelstein – Triple E and Del Trew – Cyberdescence all had a hand in "Product of the Year".

hung from a block and tackle all went to prove the strength of their new Flying Iron which uses a bolt rather than the familiar bottle strainer. The flying iron was dwarfed by the testing gear on their stand, which was a pity – try and spot it in the picture! However they are primarily scenery builders and their models, testimonials and credits are impressive.

The third contender for Product of the Year, PETRUS SYSTEMS LTD for BAILEY REDMAN for STAGEPAC are the suppliers most likely to alter the stage carpenter's way of life. After the initial outlay on planed 3"×2" timber and the appropriate steel jointing system, the savings by re-using timber time and time again are claimed to be immense. FORMID builds any timber framed structure whilst STAGEPAC is specifically for self-assembly platforms. In practical terms it means, for a scenic shop using these systems, no more mortice and tenon jointing and a less conventionally skilled workforce can assemble a 3D set very quickly. With electric screwdrivers a small team dismantled the complex structure on their stand faster than many seemingly simpler stands.

In fact the PETRUS stand won the next award – Stand of the Year against competition from LIGHTING TECHNOLOGY, LEE COLORTAN and



Burchill and Dickson's Flying Iron.

D.H.A. All of these had a theatrical feel, particularly LEE, whose "Ascot Gavotte" display of subtly lit dummies (even Actors won't pose for three days) was a super contribution from new boy (ex Furse) Bob Massie. This was the soft backing to the hard sell of the Master series of 12 way modular controllers with split time cross fade and the Power Master dimmer series in 6×10 amp and 6×5 amp modules. Interestingly, LEE COLORTAN has standardised on 12 way control cables with assign switches on the dimmer racks.

For LIGHTING TECHNOLOGY, read David Morgan, Jack Excell, Bob Peach, David Lomas et al. Action lighting has now taken over Valiant and the resultant stand was very busy, with such diverse elements as a Francis twin searchlight, the ultimate in remote pan and tilt, and an animated head of Sir Christopher Wren. D.H.A. was less cluttered, relying on visitors' imagination to find uses for their ever increasing range of moving effects which are considerably cheaper and neater than the conventional projector and effects discs, but more impressionistic. However the new indexing Yo-Yo gobos give such delights as the



ABTT's Ken Smalley congratulates Bailey Rodman on "Stand of the Year" award to Petrus Systems.



Flint Hire's corner shop display.

Opening Door, venetian blinds and train windows. All in all, D.H.A. had a stand which repaid study.

The third award was Technician of the Year. JOHN LEONARD, for many years in charge of sound at the RSC was pipped by DAVID AYLIF, whose contribution to Stage Management in general and the Association in particular has been immense. Tony Bond in presenting the award described David as "a good example of someone who commits their life to Theatre and to passing on that information." David's response? "I'm even older than Sean Connery — the motto must be hang on in there!"

Staying with the Theatrical/Scenic element of the Exhibition, there were several other stands which, in earlier, less competitive years, would have certainly been nominated. FLINT HIRE AND SUPPLY had their usual fantastic array of scenic hardware, this time in a corner shop display. ROSCO's Temple to Design Drapery featured, every two hours, Jamila, the belly dancer, who was a good deal more customer — friendly than last years' robot-man. A stand which relied on excellent scene painting was NORTHERN LIGHT, who staged a prompt-corner's view of the stage to set off their working light and prompt-desk systems, for which they publish a comprehensive price list.

A.S. GREEN is another company which is involved in the supply and installation of theatre machinery — in their case the accent is on lighting trusses, rostra and grid systems. Combining with P & G Draperies they give a splendidly illustrated brochure of their work. EUROLIGHT is another company with installations to show — their patch panels are very compact and besides prompt desks and talk-back systems, EUROLIGHT make and market the large range of Midilite/Microlite control systems and peripherals.

I thought ZERO 88 were unlucky that this was "scenic year" for the awards, otherwise their Sirius controller would have

been a strong contender. This 24 channel desk gives 2 manual presets and an easy way of recording, modifying and playing back 99 memories, which can include chases. The price is affordable and certainly within the budget of the many Arts Centres now entering the up-date market. Perhaps egged on by the three free desks raffled during the show, interest was intense and many orders were taken through a well set out dealer network.

CELCO and AVOLITES were between them serving up the top end of the Rock and Roll market with the Celco Gold and the QM500 range respectively. The attention to

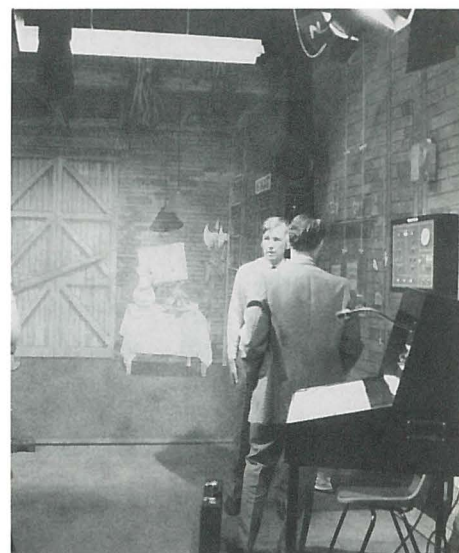


Enter Jamila, pursued by smoke on the Rosco stand.

layout and detail on both stands was reflected in the neatness of the controls and dimmer systems. Both companies have their faithful users who wouldn't be happy with anything else.

From two well known names to a big first-timer. TEATRO SRI of Italy has been formed by Mike Lowe (ex M.D. Rank Strand) and Bruno Dedoro (president of Coemar) to create a complementary Theatre range to Coemar's studio luminaires. Coemar's designs have always stemmed from the extensive use of castings, which gives potential to break away from the now universal "black box". Although nothing as blatantly sculptural as the Pattern 123 was on view it was plain that these are very well made and constructed luminaires and it was a great pity that, except for some floods and one spot, there was no possibility of trying them. It is not very often that a solid new range of lights hits the market and excuses such as "we've only got 15 amps supply" and "we're not allowed trailing leads" do not win sympathy. However, there were some design points worth noting — the Dilurio modular floods lock to each other, 500 watt locks to 1000 watt to make up battens or groundrows as required and the beam light is very like the Coemar 1kw/2kw Antares.

Meanwhile on the COEMAR stand, Roman Walenta was showing the German



Prompt corner Technology and scenery by Northern Light.

Dedo Light — a compact low voltage system with an amazing beam spread (3.5° to 40°) and three colour temperature settings.

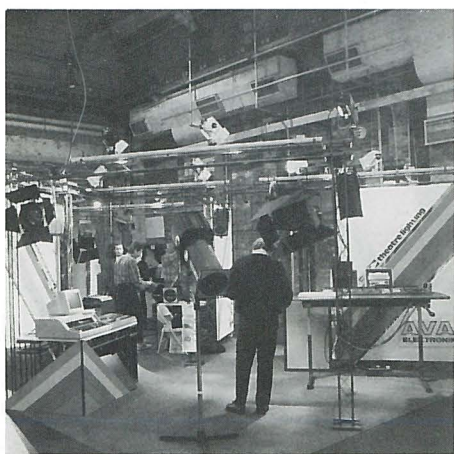
The other memorable luminaire innovation was the C.C.T. Starlette and Silhouette Two Five with 2 1/2 kw CP91 bi-plane lamp. These will be welcomed in the largest theatres where theatrical beam control and punch are not easy to marry. The 10" Fresnel also has variable-angle ears to two barndoor leaves.

What other innovations were there? CEREBRUM were showing the Telehoist and Truss Tower from Powerdrive, the latter will lift up to 30 Par Cans on 30ft of Astralite or Trilite, to a height of 5.5 metres. This should bring trusses within reach of small touring companies for the first time.

LANCELYN LIGHTING's new wired bar box is designed to take any connector likely to be used on an internally wired bar and enables standard bar drilling for a multitude of socket types on one bar. Still on lighting, WHITE LIGHT were showing some of RR Beard's range of photographic (stills) lampheads and a comprehensive



Sirius attracted enormous interest on the Zero 88 stand.



CCT always come up with a fresh development and this time it was the STARLETTE and the powerful new SILHOUETTE TWO FIVE with 2½ kw CP91 bi-plane lamp.

stock of Strand lantern spares.

Three other firms were interested in the Pre-Rank, Strand Electric lanterns still to be found everywhere you look. TRAFALGAR LIGHTING buys and sells them, ARKLIGHT renovates them and ANCIENT LIGHTS markets the conversion kits to enable them to run on today's lamps. This firm has recently established its headquarters in Cambridge and the new association with Stage Electrics should enable ANCIENT LIGHTS to bring its unique brand of salesmanship to a much

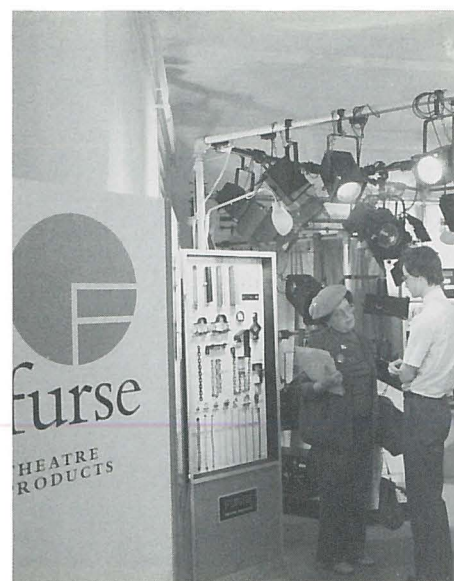
wider catchment.

Another company to change its logo recently was newly named FURSE THEATRE PRODUCTS. There was nothing spectacular to report about this stand but there was a large attentive, cheerful sales force and the ambient light was conducive to a photograph. Their location next to TURBO SOUND's 90 DB bunker couldn't have been much fun. Next year perhaps Turbo Sound would like to take their weatherproof pod out on to the terrace — it really was too loud in the gallery.

The other sound stands which impressed me were ELLIOT BROTHERS (Audio Systems) and SENNHEISER. Both had CD players with instant programmable line up for spot sound cues. Sennheiser showed the Denon DN 950F which claims to be "the world's first CD Cartridge Player".

Before writing this piece I decided on the title of Scenic Roots because of the somewhat larger presence of the non-electricals, a presence acknowledged in the awards. Other scenic firms included SUFFOLK SCENERY who have the European franchise for Foy Invention, leaders in the art of flying effects. Recent commissions include Zeigfeld at the Palladium and the Swedish National Theatre.

Textiles were represented by VARIA TEXTILE LTD and GERRIETS, both of whom noticed a rise in the quality of visitors this year — it takes a textile person to fully appreciate the elegant suits referred to earlier.



Yes, this was a smart trade show; I hope that the search for the golden egg doesn't take the ABTT away from Riverside or a comparable theatrical venue. It would be much better to discipline stallholders to a maximum size or put the mega-stands in nearby Novatel, arranging a shuttle service. This show has everything at the moment, including the all-important food, drink and power supply. There's even parking nearby. See you next year!



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AUTOLYCUS

Unconsidered trifles

Autolycus is back. After a spell away from Cue on secondment to the world of bureaucrats, big business, fast cars, good living and so forth, this column of arts trivia returns with a greater determination than before to report on anything offbeat, new and if possible of only small consequence. My desktop dictionary defines me — Autolycus, that is — as, “a thief, a plagiarist, a snapper up of unconsidered trifles”. It adds that I am a character in the Bard’s “Winter Tale” and spring from Greek mythology.

Well, a snapper up of trifles I may be, but in my opinion, these are usually the most entertaining and sometimes profound observations about this silly old world anyway. And only those dreary old intellectuals want to be serious *all* the time.

‘Flo’-rid Ziegfeld and those leggy girls

Wondered how Harold Fielding’s new “extravaganza” (thank-you, the publicity blurbs) would turn out. No nudes, “but plenty of legs”, Fielding told us beforehand — 40 pairs to be precise, chosen from dancers and showgirls throughout the world. We are talking about “Ziegfeld”, naturally, for which Stoll Moss chief, Louis Benjamin, had been holding the London Palladium since “La Cage aux Folles” came off early in 1987.



The Ziegfeld girls at the London Palladium

By the time the curtain rose on 26 April 1988, the production costs were in excess of £3.2 million — some say nearer £4 million. This budget has, not surprisingly, broken all production cost records. £2 million was allocated for costumes alone, and the elaborate settings were working out at £70–80,000 each.

Director Joe Layton, who staged “Barnum” in New York, writers Ned Sherrin and Alistair Beaton, designer Robin Don, musical adviser Michael Reed and two of America’s foremost lighting and costume

names, Tharon Musser and Theoni V. Aldrege spent the past 12 months collaborating on the production. It avoided the conventional book show, choosing instead a dramatised biography of the life of Florence ‘Flo’ Ziegfeld. With that kind of money and those names, music by Gershwin, Kern and Coward, among others, all of them taken from Ziegfeld shows around 60 years ago, plus a cast with Broadway star Len Cariou (“Sweeney Todd”, “A Little Night Music”, “Applause”) and the legs parade led by Amanda Rickard, principal dancer from the Paris Lido and identical twins Jaynee and Michelle Jordan, how come the show failed to seduce the critics?

Because it is neither a full-blown showbiz heart-throb, with big dance routines, nor a traditional Palladium-style evening with speciality acts and comedians. Rather, it reproduces the spirit of those Ziegfeld “Follies” — yards of female form, in all manner of costumes and poses — interspersed with episodes of Flo’s own cavorting personal life (ie chasing every woman he could set eyes on). The formula doesn’t hold together. *The Independent*, for example, said: “With ‘Barnum’ and ‘George M!’, Layton raised the dance styles of the period to contemporary standards. Here, most of the movement is as ponderous as in Ziegfeld’s day. True, two of the girls do fly over the stalls, but only with Palladium stagehands to hook them up and

stand grumpily by to catch them as they land. Whatever happened to the magic of the theatre?”

But the solid advance bookings show once again that Fielding never relies too much on the critics. He’s a showman, in the business of selling a good night out, and the show does have its musical and its dance show-stoppers, as well as the tableau-style posing, girls dressed as Xmas trees and planets, and nymphs imitating statues atop Greek columns that rise 18 feet up through the stage. The arbiters of taste may feel that

Fielding has missed an opportunity, that it doesn’t hang together, or involve the audience. But the punters don’t seem troubled. And so long as those seats keep selling, it’s hard to imagine our Harold suffering sleepless nights. That’s not his style.

Enlightened self-interest

Late last autumn we saw Coopers & Lybrand, the big accounting firm run a two-day marketing course for orchestras at Stratford-upon-Avon, under the aegis of the Arts Council and the Association of British Orchestras. This spring, a Birmingham accountancy firm, John Seeley & Co, followed up its successful ‘business management for the music industry’ seminar of last year with another one on 7 February. Response was so good that they had to run it again a week later to fit all applicants in. Now they’ve decided to run seminars every two months, free of charge, on different aspects of the music business.

John Seeley told me they’re thinking of extending their seminars to embrace the arts in general, including theatre, since there’s so much overlap in the industry. For example, one of his clients, a small theatre group, recently asked him to advise on how to approach a recording company to make a record of their songs from a show. With years of handling specialist questions of this kind, Seeley had little difficulty in setting the facts before them. How much easier than guessing one’s way. And not everyone has, or needs, an agent; but everyone who is self-employed has an accountant.

Perhaps it’s time a theatre specialist accountant like Harry Nash at Blinkhorns in London talked the Arts Council into collaborating on similar seminars for the theatre. If there is demand for six sessions a year (there were 130 people in April alone) to instruct the music industry on how to run their affairs like a business, then I am sure there’s a need in the theatre world. I think these accountants have hit upon a splendid PR stunt: it’s a friendly and intelligent way of meeting more industry faces and potential clients; and for the clients, business issues or problems can be discussed in a useful, informative way. I think the Victorians called this enlightened self-interest.

Let’s see your profile

It might surprise footballers but not theatre managers to learn that more people go to the theatre every week in this country than to football matches. Not long ago however, more precise figures came to light, for the first time, I believe, in a comprehensive survey carried out by British Market Research Bureau. It emerged that a wider cross-section of adults attend arts events than was previously supposed: some 40 per cent of the adult population have attended “an arts event”, they tell us. (I wonder what that means?).

MBRB’s prestigious Target Group Index on audience profiles has now included

questions about arts attendances for the last year. Here's a sample:

- 2 million adults aged 35–44 are playgoers
- 1.8 ABC1 adults go to the opera
- 1 million AB adults go to the ballet
- 2 million adults aged 35–44 attend classical concerts
- 2.9 million CI adults attend art galleries and exhibitions

Probably sounds obscure to a degree; and indeed it is. But it is somewhat historic. This is the first accurate breakdown of audiences, however rudimentary that there has been to date. BMRB plan more detailed data with next year's figures. These will not only, one hopes provide a sound base for arguing cases for sponsorship, but also a clearer profile of different types of audience generally, for our own use.

Upstart starts up

Cajoling money out of the private sector is one of the Arts Council's new tasks. And this they appear to have managed quite well of late, especially for a quango. The latest smart move is their entry into touring theatre production, with a joint venture entitled, appropriately enough, Upstart. They have injected £200,000 and will look to commercial investors to bring the capital base up to £1.2 million. Upstart plans to specialise in regional as well as overseas touring.

The production company's managing director will be William MacDonald, formerly Business Development Director of Apollo Leisure Group. Non-executive chairman will be Tim Bell, Deputy Chairman of advertising agency Lowe, Howard-Spink and Bell, who was formerly media adviser to 'that woman' at Number Ten. He is also one of the seven judges of the ABSA Awards and a governor of the British Film Institute.

Arts Minister Richard Luce's remarks at the time of Upstart's launch were so trite I can't bring myself to repeat them. MacDonald on the other hand, pointed to the strong regional demand for quality marketable shows that pull in big houses and get bottoms on seats. "My principal objective will be to bridge that gap in the marketplace" he said, "and to take advantage of the many refurbishment schemes which have given new life to old theatres, up and down the country".

"I shall also be looking for new markets for our productions and to bring together talent and expertise from other fields within the entertainment industry." he went on. "Upstart will achieve commercial success with the maximum possible commitment to quality production".

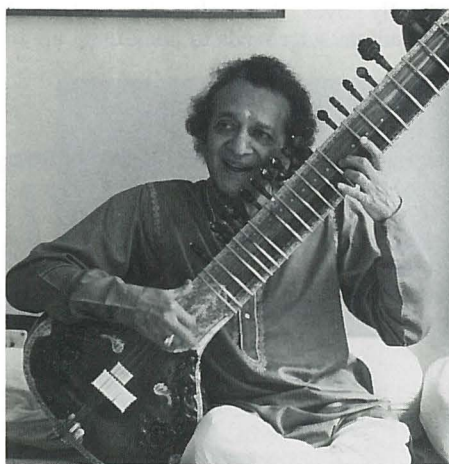
Tim Bell very gamely said MacDonald was "the vital appointment" and explained that he is now preparing the first production schedule. They wanted to "capitalise" on the public's demand for theatre, Bell added, "and the great talent available in Britain in acting, directing and writing".

Autolytus sneaked a quick word a few days later with Anthony Everett, the

ACGB's Deputy Secretary-General, in the passageway, to ask what the difference was, if any, between Upstart and those glossy musicals of nearly ten years ago, like "My Fair Lady" and "Oklahoma!", which had been their entrepreneurially minded Finance Director Tony Field's initiative, along with West End producer Cameron Mackintosh. "Oh, this new idea is quite different", he replied. "Upstart is there to provide for the needs of the regional theatres, not just to try out London-bound musicals around the major touring theatres. Upstart will plan all its productions one, two or even three years ahead", he confided. "Managements can then choose whether to incorporate Upstart shows into their programming with due care and regard to choice". If I wanted to go into detail, perhaps I would care to talk to Jack Phipps, Head of Touring, he added with a quick, but friendly, Terry Wogan-like smile, of the kind arts mandarins always manage so effortlessly. And before you could say Upstart, he was off to talk to someone else. Well I doubt there's much more to know for the moment. I'll keep my ear to the ground though, and let you know.

Body language — but which language?

At a public 'do' recently to launch the first major festival of south Indian arts in Britain "Nayee Kiran", (meaning a new way of light) in Crawley, that doyen of Indian music, Ravi Shankar related a lovely anecdote. Back in the fifties, when



Ravi Shankar

Shankar first arrived on these shores, he was the first performer we had ever seen from that sub-continent. India may have been the "jewel in our colonial crown", but for most of us, there were precious few ordinary, live Indians we had ever clapped eyes on before. So, he relates with a mischievous smile, audiences looked worried, even dismayed, when they saw him shaking and swaying his head from side to side as he played. Not recognising this as "spontaneous involvement and enjoyment in the music", said Shankar, "they thought I was showing public disappointment, or

that something was wrong". Today it's hard to imagine Indian heads not rocking gently from side to side, in conversation, even. Predictably, gales of laughter followed Shankar's reminiscence. We've come a long way.

Two footnotes. One, the Nayee Kiran performers are all Indians living in Britain, therefore much of the classical Indian tradition has subtly altered to include an element of European influence. The other, is that the festival is based at Crawley's new theatre venue, The Hawth, which opened on 10 May 1988.

It took an age — but it was worth it

It often takes quite a while for a book to be adapted for the stage, but 2,500 years is a long wait by any standards. But judging by the reviews, Glasgow audiences were well pleased with the final result, nine hours of sitting on plastic seating notwithstanding, or Peter Brook's "Mahabharata" or, "The Epic Story of Mankind".

Inside the cavernous brick and iron auditorium of the former Transport Museum, in Glasgow's Pollokshaws district, extensive adaptations had had to be carried out, and the stage floor covered with 120 tons of specially prepared clay (shades of his "Carmen" and "The Ik"). Ventilation, it seems, was not among the changes carried out, however. After a while, 700 people soon began to turn even that barn-like space into a giant Scottish sauna, with the help of the theatre lighting. But the heat, the lack of circulation in the legs and thighs, the Portakabin loos and the vast Renault truck-filled foyer — courtesy of the sponsors — counted for little as the first night audience (day and night, really) of playwrights, actors, directors, critics, media men and politicians testified. Tired and cramped but happy, they rose to their feet spontaneously at the end of the nine-hour marathon to give a standing ovation to one of the most powerful theatre performances most of them had witnessed in a long time.

High-tech cuisine at the NT

I understand that Sir Peter Hall is not exactly the most ardent proponent of commercial sponsorship. I was tickled therefore to see that the National Theatre has opened a new function room sponsored by the London Electricity Board, who also fitted out the hi-tech (and much larger) adjoining kitchen. Crammed with micro-computer control and the latest in kitchen technology, this high-profile answer to the NT's entertaining needs will cater for sponsorship events with a new-found sense of style and an enviable level of comfort and convenience.

ORANGE COUNTY PERFORMING ARTS CENTER

Francis Reid visits a 3000 seat Californian Music Theatre
with an Asymmetric Approach to Acoustics

The design team for the Orange County Performing Arts Centre was led by acousticians who prescribed a tight geometric brief for the architects. The main house has to double as a concert hall and as a stage for every form of music theatre from opera through dance to musicals with electronically processed sound. A natural acoustic for music is a major problem at 3000 seats, much of the difficulty stemming from the reduction of lateral reflections when auditorium width is increased. At 3000 seats the rectangular shoe box shape with restricted width can become too long, while with a fanshape the centre seats are so far away from the reflective surfaces that they are starved of sound energy. The solution was to go for an asymmetric design where cliff walls between seating levels would define a series of smaller spaces within the total volume of the hall. These would aim for a width approximating to the 75–80 feet which is characteristic of so many of the famous but smaller concert halls of Europe.

The acoustic team was led by Jerald Hyde and Dennis Paoletti of California with Harold Marshall of Auckland. They started with a quarter inch scale model, using flashlights then lasers to check where the sound was going. This was followed by electronic testing on a 1 to 10 model constructed by Harold Marshall in his New Zealand lab. Electronic testing including miniature microphones linked to an oscilloscope: speech and music played in the model was speeded up ten times to hear the sound of the hall before it was built. This model also gave a preview of the architecture. Indeed at this scale the architect can stand inside to check sightlines etc. The model raised the clients confidence in the design with the result that a quarter inch architectural model was commissioned for publicity purposes. This was complete with 3000 audience and a symphony orchestra.

In association with the structural break-up of the space by the laterally reflective walls of the asymmetric seating levels, there are various acoustic treatments including reflectors at the top of the proscenium for the musicians to hear themselves, permanent reflectors on the side walls, and 10,000 sq ft of adjustable curtain.

How does it sound? Alas I cannot report the only evidence that I can truly believe: my ears. I roamed the building, I listened to its builders and its users. But I was not able to hear a performance. However there is no hint of doubt or modesty in the official line which claims that 'the design combines the excellent sight lines of fan-shaped theatres

with the acoustic excellence of shoebox-shaped concert halls by surrounding each tier of audience with reflective surfaces — predominantly lateral — to achieve strong, clear enveloping sound with ample reverberance'.

Without experiencing a series of performances in different tiers when the theatre is full and also when it is not-so-full, it is difficult to assess whether the use of the asymmetric seating blocks has a divisive effect on audience contact. Certainly the seats are comfortable and the sightlines excellent. And although the back rows are inevitably a long way away there is a pronounced absence of the vertigo factor that I have encountered at the top back of theatres a third of the size of this one.

What I did find was a very positive architectural eye-distracter, and that was the prominence of the exit doors occupying that trickiest of all theatre surfaces, the side walls leading towards the proscenium. The score here is definitely Orange County Fire Safety Code Ten, Architects Nil.

Proscenium Zone

Proscenium opening width is adjustable from a maximum of 69ft to a minimum of 52ft by the use of independently variable motorised proscenium panels, painted the

same dark red as the auditorium walls and shaped so that the opening is narrower at the top than at the bottom. Further narrowing down to 31ft is possible with hard-framed black velour tormentors semi-permanently hung from tracks on line 2. Maximum proscenium opening height is 42ft 10in at the edges. A winched proscenium masking unit with the same stepped profile can be positioned at any height down to 10ft above floor level. This unit also contains the speaker cluster which has a designed operating height of approximately 32ft. If the sound system is in use, the masking should be at this height and so there is normally a black border on line 1 for additional top masking.

The Stage

Wall-to-wall stage width is 124ft and there is 64ft of depth from the curtain line to the back wall of the stage. There is a trappable space downstage, 64ft wide by 30ft deep. Beyond the stage there is a rear space (130 to 140ft long by 15 to 75ft deep) which can be used as workshop, scene assembly, storage or even, via the large access doors, a vista stage.

The street level loading dock can accommodate three trucks simultaneously. The dock is at stage floor level which is also



The Orange County Performing Arts Center

normal truck floor level of 3ft 6in above ground. However a load leveller is available for one truck at a time, capable of adjusting a load capacity of 20,000 lbs 6in below or 30in above.

Flying is by 92 single purchase sets with trussed pipe battens 70ft long but with removable 12ft 6in sections at each end. Lockrails are duplicated on fly floor (at 34ft) or stage level. Grid height is 110ft. Six single speed one ton chain hoists with 120ft chains are located on the grid and may be spotted at any location for single or group operation. There is a further grid over the apron stage. The apron comprises two elevators 8ft and 7ft wide which offer pits of 50 or 85 capacity, with use of the second elevator eliminating 58 seats in two rows.

Acoustic Shell

The orchestra shell has ten modes to enclose various sized spaces for all acoustic situations from soloist to large symphony orchestra with chorus.

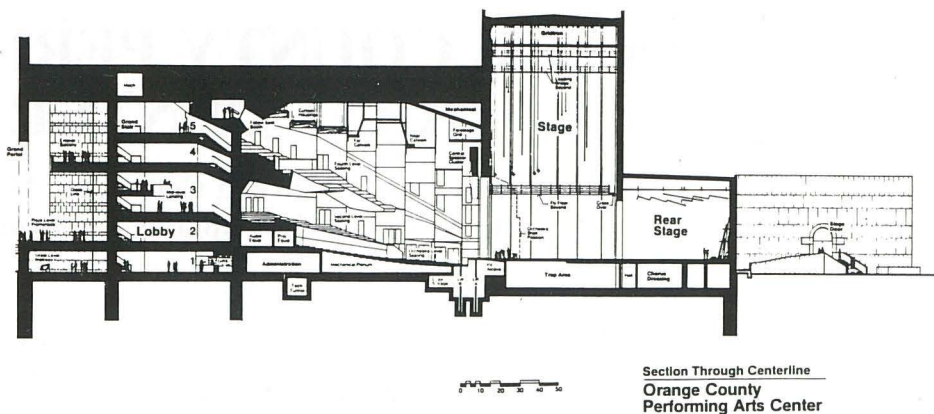
Lighting

Lighting control is by a Strand Light Palette II with 570 dimmers (504 of 2.4kW & 66 of 6kW). The inventory includes 228 lekos, 48 fresnels and 72 parcans. Backstage there are no permanently designated electric pipes: in line with usual anglo-american practice, they are hung as and when required. Ladder tracks (50ft long) hanging from motorised hoists, carry five lighting ladders on each side of the stage.

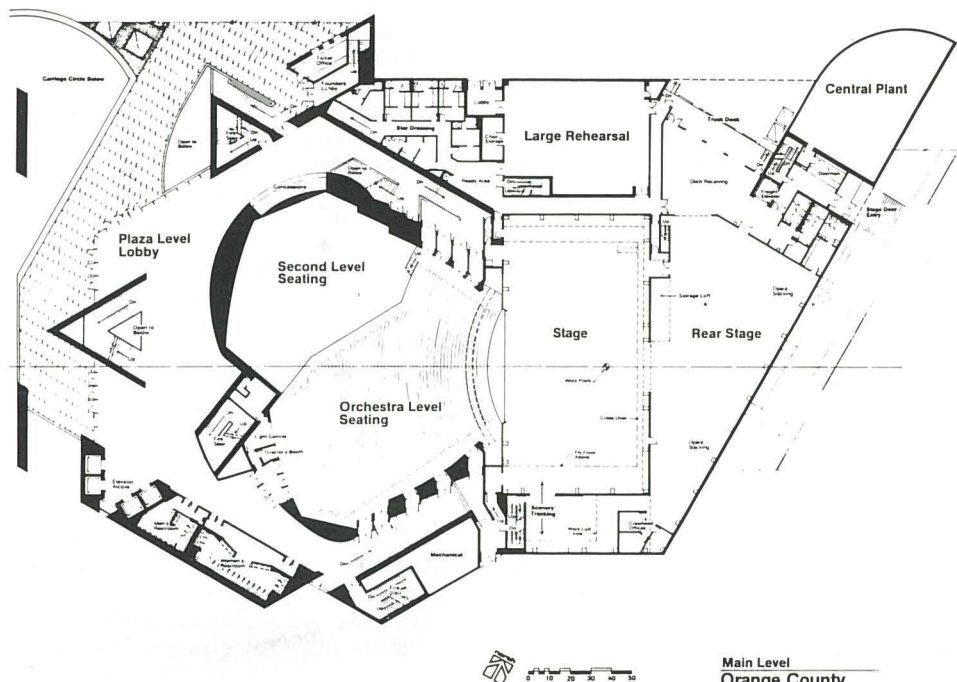
Two ceiling bridges, the far one tiered, provide appropriate high frontal angles. Lower flat frontal angles are available from rails on the balcony fronts; however the asymmetry of the balconies results in these being a series of short pipes, all with different angles and throws, rather than the conventional balcony rail extending full width. Side foh is something of a problem. A lighting designer who has worked there regularly says: 'The box booms are killers - you can't get where you want to.' There are three opening panels on each side wall. Each of these has a short boom, canted forward, with a capacity of 8 instruments. This is particularly difficult for touring companies who plan on the assumption of a standard box boom with 16 instrument capacity. There is, incidently, that standard American touring theatre feature: a disconnect panel which allows local foh to be picked up on the road board. (It is some 12 years since I first asked whether we should not be considering this for British touring theatres.)

Sound

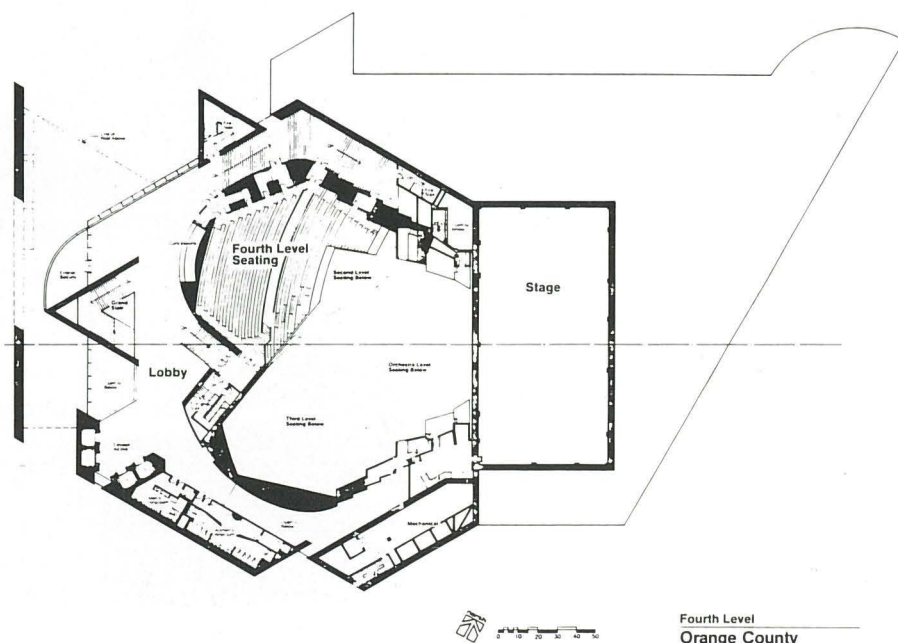
The mixing position is an open space just above the rear of the orchestra stalls seating level and just off the building centre line. The house mixer is a Yamaha PM-3000 with thirty two inputs, eight sub-groups and a ten by eight output matrix. There are eight auxilliary sends which can be either pre or post fader. The auditorium speaker array



Section Through Centerline
Orange County
Performing Arts Center



Main Level
Orange County
Performing Arts Center



Fourth Level
Orange County
Performing Arts Center

comprises three main clusters: a centre cluster plus a stereo pair of clusters. These clusters are each designed to serve the orchestra stalls, first tier, and front of the second and third tiers. The rear of the stalls and the first tier are augmented by speakers mounted under the balcony, while the second and third tiers are enhanced by two auxiliary clusters beneath the far lighting bridge position. All speakers auxiliary to the main clusters are subject to digital delay. A comprehensive inventory includes 97 microphones.

Sound users pinpoint two weaknesses in the system: the balcony overhang cuts off a clear line of sound from the centre cluster to the mixer's ears; and the provision for touring sound desks is poor.

Rehearsal Rooms

The main rehearsal hall, with dimensions equal to the stage without wings, can also be used as a neutral box studio theatre. Three additional rehearsal studios have ballet barres and two of them have mirrored walls.

Associated Activities

Adjacent to the big theatre, and sharing its sunny green grazed sites, is the *South Coast Repertory*, an intimate fan shape playhouse matching the ideals of the British regional rep building explosion of the early 1970s. Three hundred performances of seven productions playing to 97% paid capacity, supported by a very healthy level of playwright commissioning and outreach activity. Future development at this intersection of major freeways at the hub of Orange County includes a second planned theatre to provide an appropriate setting for smaller ensemble and regional presentations, particularly of contemporary dance, chamber music and solo recitals.

Programme

The new theatre (named Segerstrom Hall in honour of its major benefactor) is essentially a touring house, receiving all the major national opera and dance companies, orchestras and Broadway-originated musicals, plus a goodly selection from the international scene. (The inaugural season was on the level of New York City Ballet, American Ballet Theater, New York City Opera, Cleveland Orchestra, Chicago Symphony, Orchestre National de France, Warsaw Philharmonic etc). And there is a major commitment to housing regional groups from Orange County and other areas of the Pacific Coast. As is normal in a new arts centre, the very existence of the building has stimulated existing initiatives and developed new ones.

Finance

Construction cost was \$72.8 million US, raised privately. The center opened without loan charge burdens, and with an on-going endowment already in place to assist programme provision. The support structure includes:

* *The Guilds*: 43 adult chapters and 6 youth chapters located throughout Orange County, sponsoring fund raising and social events to the tune of more than half a million dollars annually.

* *Center 500*: an organisation of young professionals and executives who wish to further their knowledge of, and involvement in, the performing arts. They sponsor an annual Triathlon as a major fundraiser.

* *Performing Arts Fraternity*: A professional men's organisation providing support through annual dues, and increasing its members knowledge of the performing arts through educational and social events.

* *The Center Stars*: Brings together women throughout Orange County who share a desire to raise their personal understanding of the performing arts. Membership is by invitation and dues provide ongoing support.

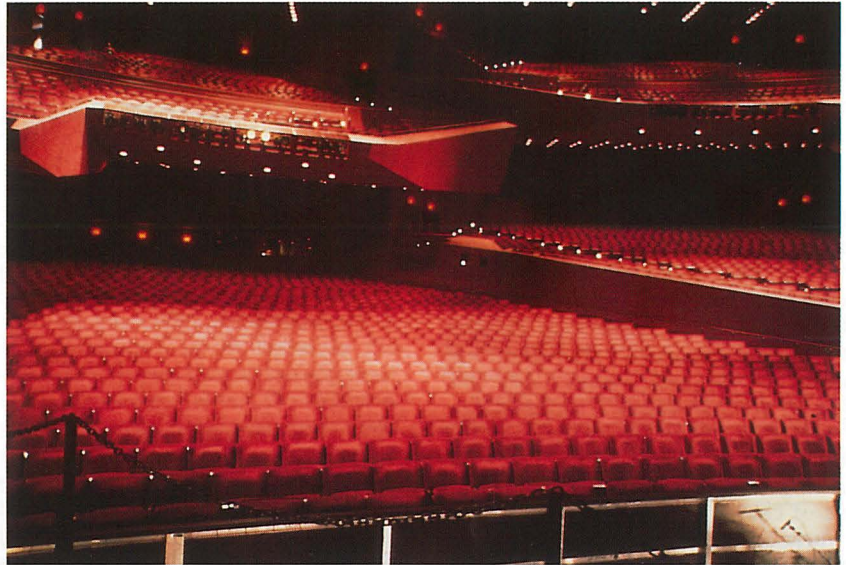
* *Angels of the Arts*: Founded by the wives of the Center Trustees, their dedication to the artistic goals of the Center includes the donation of Henry Moore's 'Reclining

Figure' for the outdoor plaza.

* *Dance Alliance*: Committed to continuing support for dance events.

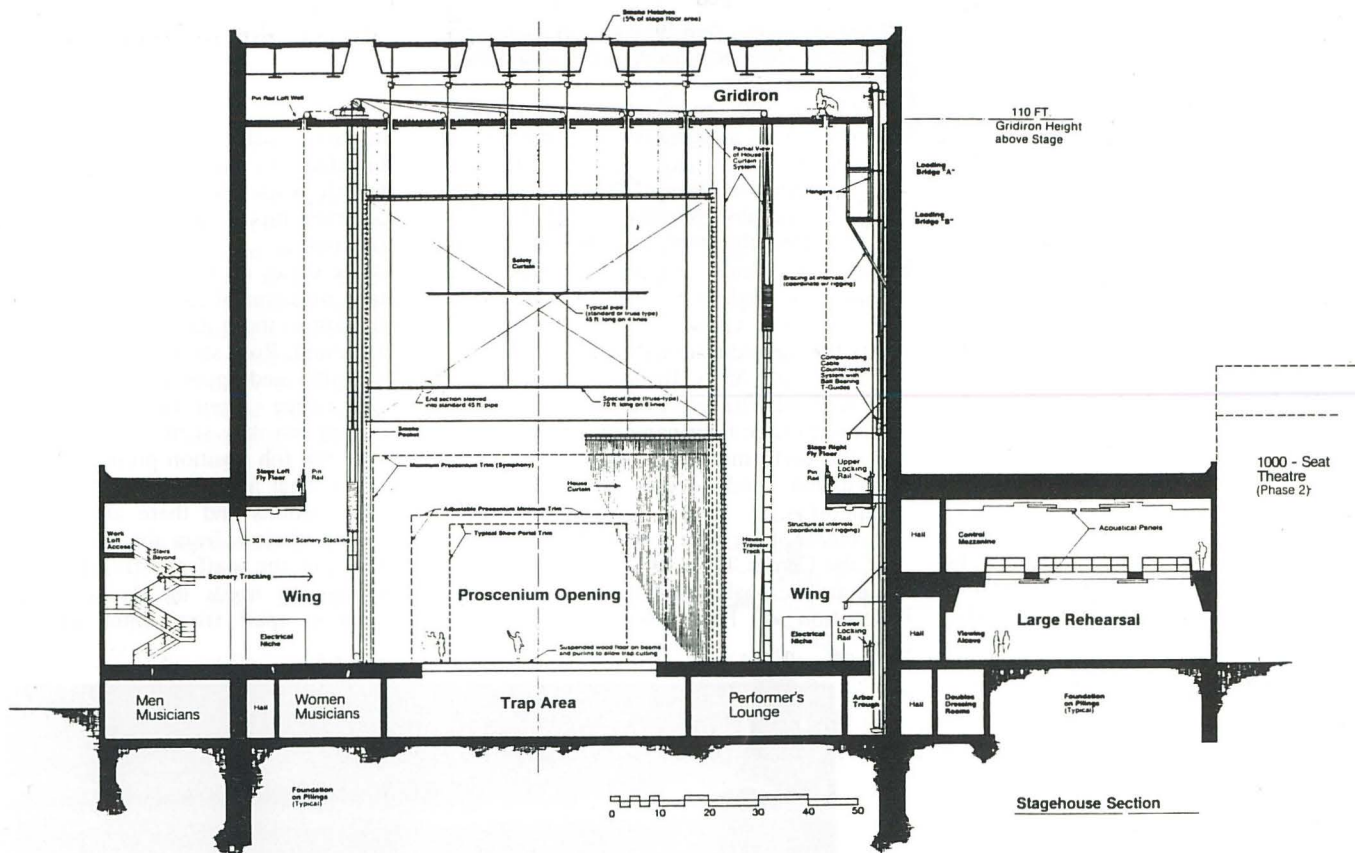
Success?

So how well does it work? Mikhail Baryshnikov says It's a paradise and Beverly Sills called it a Jewel. While for Leontyne this is not a hall . . . this is an Experience . . . Perfection. Technical user's views as reported by the Center's stage management include the following in addition to those already noted under light and sound. Road shows like the easy load-in capability and appreciate the lots of backstage space. Their main problem is the lighting but they seem to be able to overcome the foh position problems. The non-professional miscellaneous shows find too many options and there are problems of making choices from the too much available, but the staff are trying to help by anticipating needs in advance. The one-nighters, apart from initial problems in



The 3,000 seat Segerstrom Hall's asymmetrically designed and acoustically advanced configuration is said to provide an unusual sense of intimacy between performer and audience.





finding the stage now being rectified by new signs, do not understand the acoustics and how the building can easily become overloaded with sound energy. House management problems include the long distance from some seats, especially the highest and cheapest, to the rest rooms. And the asymmetry poses problems of audience flow with various levels and irregularly shaped landings.

But in general the staff liked it and the people of Orange County have voted their overwhelming support at the box office.

And me? Well, while I personally prefer to have my theatric experiences in a more intimate environment, I do acknowledge that theatres of 3000 seats and upwards just have to be a realistic option if the large numbers of people wishing to see the big works of music theatre are to be accommodated at seat prices they can afford. The expensive good seats are very good, but the cheaper not-so-good seats are much better than the ones from which I first met the great classics in my youth. To be won over, I would need to take my ears to a performance. When I take only my other antennae, I admit to feeling a little let down by the auditorium after the tremendous visual statement of the exterior and the welcoming generosity of the foyers.

So until such time as I can schedule my ears to be in Orange County at certain time, I can only state that this is a building which no one planning a big music theatre can fail to visit.

And it does my heart good to find a theatre treated as a matter of civic pride. The Italians and the Germans have always done so and it is spreading around the world.

Orange County have produced a table comparing their stage facilities and this shows that in most particulars their theatre tops Los Angeles and San Francisco.

Architects:
CRSS with the Blurock Partnership.

Acoustical Team:
Jerald Hyde, Harold Marshall & Dennis Paoletti
Stage Lighting Consultants:
Jules Fisher Associates
Audio, Video & Security Systems:
Paul Alan Magil & Associates
General Contractor:
C.L. Peck

REIDing SHELF

There is a new edition of Rod Ham. Anyone contemplating building, renovating, contriving or briefing any space likely to be used for staging performances needs two starter books and this is one of them. (The other is *Theater Check List* but it will not be required reading much longer unless the American Theater Planning Board Inc., if they still exist, also go to a new edition.)

Roderick Ham's original book, *Theatre Planning*, stemmed from a series of articles on various aspects of theatre design, prepared during the 1960s by ABTT members with ABTT committee support and published in the *Architect's Journal*. In the new edition, now called **THEATRES** and subtitled *Planning Guidance for Design and Adaptation*, the author has continued to have access to the experience of a group of technology specialists from among ABTT membership.

Very few architectural practices get enough theatre building opportunities to provide sufficient accumulation of

experience to enable them to dispense with specialist advice. Ham's book does not absolve them from the necessity of seeking such advice, but it will help them to enter into a more constructive debate with both clients and consultants. It raises questions to be asked and options to be considered, and it provides a vocabulary for the discussion.

Every technician will doubtless home in on their own specialism and find some aspect on which to raise an eyebrow or pick a nit. That is inevitable. But the importance of the book lies in its achieving a balanced coverage of an incredibly difficult topic, and dealing with an emotive subject in an objective manner.

The immense value of George C. Izenour's *Theater Design* as a historical record was considerably obscured on its publication in 1977 by controversy arising from his concept of the ideal theatre. This was presented with the same polemic skill that

many of his critics displayed in the advocacy of their own opposing alternatives. The result was a healthy constructive debate and, at the risk of re-igniting the controversy, let me suggest that *Theatre Design*'s principal effect on current thinking about theatre architecture seems to have been to accelerate the swing away from its author's neo-wagnerism towards a revival of the Italianate form, tempered with outbreaks of asymmetry.

The companion volume **THEATRE TECHNOLOGY** has now been published and is unlikely to cause a similar controversy since it does not confuse its role as a historical record by making proposals for the future.

Firstly let me quite clearly offer my opinion that, despite its price, no library servicing a serious course in any branch of theatre design and technology can afford to be without this book on the reference shelves. I do not know of any comparable single volume source of the history of stage machinery and lighting. Indeed I would like to suggest to the publishers that in due course they consider paperbacking chapters 1, 2, 3 and a precis of 6 as a separate book which would contain the material of general interest.

The remaining chapters of the book are an account of Izenour's personal contribution, both through his Yale laboratory and his professional consultancy practice. It is very right and proper that he should have had an opportunity of placing this valuable record at the disposal of posterity's historians. But until the historians are ready for this specialised material, its function can only be to entertain we small band of oldies who share a nostalgia for steam-age lighting boards.

Like the earlier volume, all drawings are to the same scale and an invaluable source of information. It is interesting to compare Izenour's drawings with those of Richard Leacroft. Izenour's have the technical precision and cold objectivity of the pure engineer. But Leacroft has an artist's eye which effects a transformation of factual information so that his drawings breathe life. George C. Izenour will, I think, take this as a compliment for he is sceptical of the

views of what he calls 'theatrical romantics' and I guess that includes me. But his book is full of pleasure for romantics and I anticipate consulting it for the rest of my life.

If an encyclopedia of opera is to be compressed into a single volume, it has to be compiled from a point of view. However, although **THE METROPOLITAN OPERA ENCYCLOPEDIA** uses the Met as a focus, it can lay legitimate claim to its subtitle of *A Comprehensive Guide to the World of Opera*. The Met connection is used mainly to provide a checklist for who, what, which, where and when should not be left out in the sifting process. Encyclopedias are intended to be consulted rather than read, but I went through this one from page one, reading not every single one of the 2,500 entries but the very many which caught my eye. I offer the adjectives tight, accurate and readable as my response. Illustrations are relevant and well printed. Any doubts I have about the book's concept arise from the fifty pages devoted to guest essays by operatic names. Although mostly interesting, they are pieces to be read once rather than referred to. But they are written by stars and the Met is a star house.

THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY has been a star house throughout the century, apart from the early post-war years when, for the first time, it became the nation's opera house in the funding sense and opted for nationalism rather than internationalism. Frances Donaldson is obviously a Covent Garden admirer but this does not stop her from analysing the house's failings as well as its successes. But she does so in the constructive way of one who loves the old place and wants it to succeed. She uses her access to press cuttings and board minutes in what appears to me to be a balanced way. The book certainly makes a good read and its appearance is timely as the house stands on the brink of a new phase which will include a fresh directorate and a modernised stage. Of the future perhaps only one thing is reasonably certain: all opera houses will continue to be centres of controversy and our Royal Opera House will continue to be underfunded in the twenty first century as it has always been.

Arts magazines are one of the more fragile areas of publishing: ask anyone who publishes, prints, distributes, edits or writes for them — or read Peter Roberts's Preface to the **THE BEST OF BRITISH PLAYS AND PLAYERS 1953-1968** where his account of a particular encapsulates the general. Plays and Players, along with the other titles (on Art, Books, Dance, Film, Music and Records) in the Seven Arts stable coincided with the rise, flourish and institutionalised decay of the post-war arts renaissance. The titles were not of a uniform standard, too often slipping into

facile, somewhat sycophantic, interviews with the stars.

However P&P was relatively immune from this, finding many then unknown young critics such as Michael Billington and Benedict Nightingale, and giving them sufficient space to debate the excitements with which writing and direction were aglow at the moment when the coincidence of a talent wave with the early pre-beauracratc subsidies began to liberalise theatre. And articles by, or interviews with, allowed us to share the thoughts of young activists like the Peters Brook and Hall, George Devine and Clifford Williams. Roles were not sacrosanct: authors could become critics and a particularly perceptive review by Frank Marcus of *Cabaret* is included in the anthology.

It is not all deeply analytical: Peter Bull (the original Pozzo) in *Waiting For God Knows What* brings a welcome touch of light hearted cynicism. But these were serious times (although, strangely, we seemed to have much more fun working in theatres then than we do now) and technicians organised their diaries to ensure their presence at the monthly ABTT meetings when Strand's King Street basement became the centre of an exciting debate on how technology and architecture could best serve and house the new theatre. Essays in the P&P anthology by Stephen Joseph and Sean Kenny catch some of this flavour and throughout there are hints in both text and pictures of the new design wave, although few of the designers are credited. There are many pictures, mostly by Zöe Dominic, to help remind us what we saw and regret what we missed, although the many tiny reproduced covers can be infuriating to peer at since they are too small to yield the detail that many of them promise.

A welcome book to read now and refer to later: a further volume carrying the story forward into the nineteen eighties is promised and this is good news.

THEATRES *Planning Guidance for Design and Adaptation* Roderick Ham. Architectural Press. £49.50(UK)

THEATER TECHNOLOGY. George C. Izenour. McGraw-Hill. £146.25(UK)

THE METROPOLITAN OPERA ENCYCLOPEDIA. *A Comprehensive Guide to the World of Opera.* Edited by David Hamilton. Thames & Hudson £20(UK).

THE ROYAL OPERA HOUSE in the *Twentieth Century.* Frances Donaldson. Weidenfeld and Nicolson. £16.95(UK).

The Best of PLAYS AND PLAYERS 1953-1968. Selected and Edited by Peter Roberts with photographs by Zöe Dominic. Methuen. £14.95(UK)

L

Lancelyn Lighting

Theatre Equipment

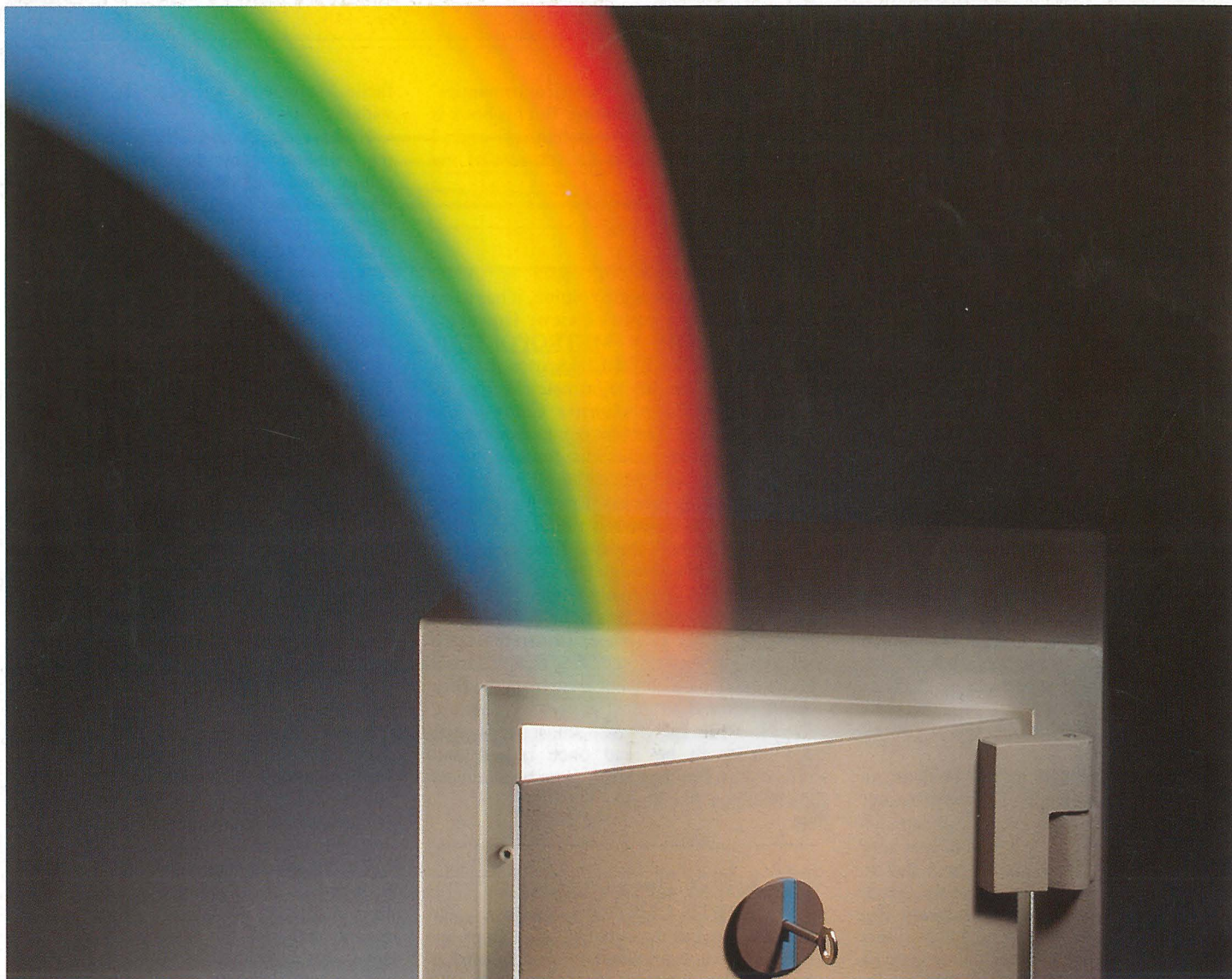


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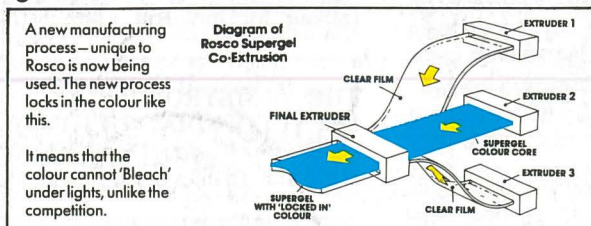
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