

CUE

Technical Theatre Review 54

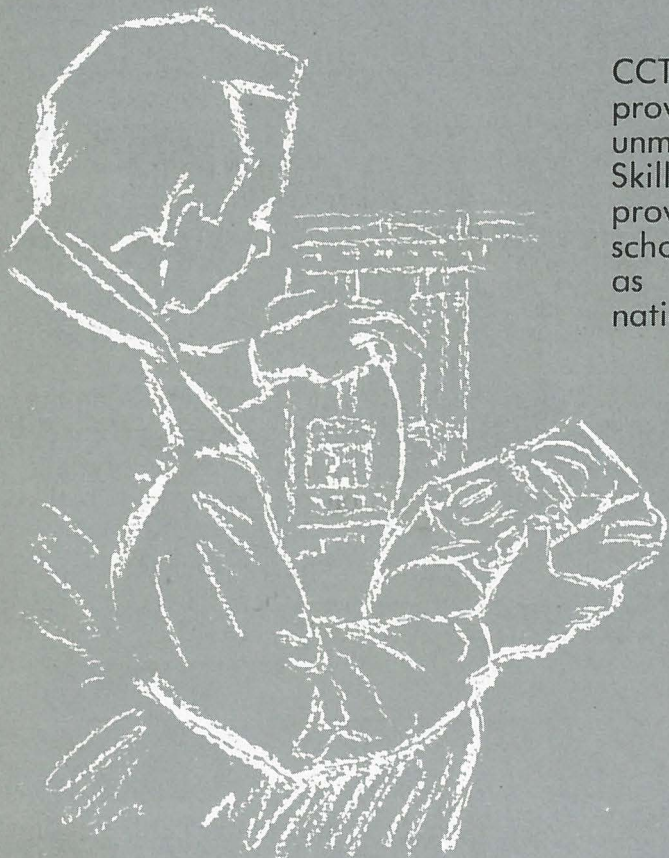
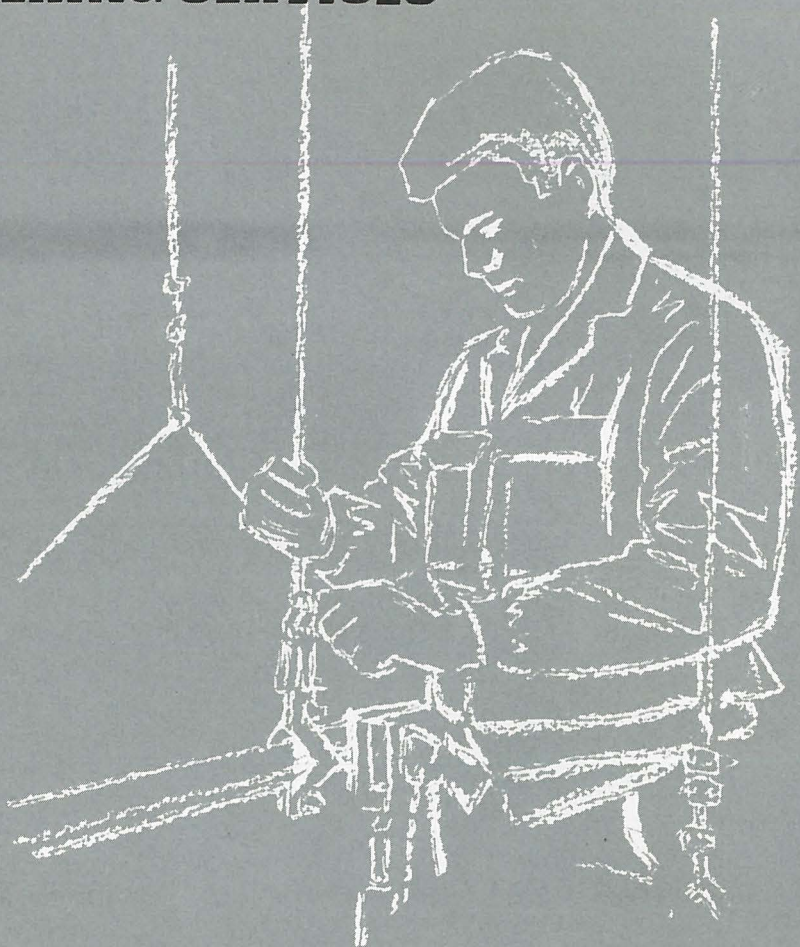
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Cover:

Sir Peter Hall, returns to Covent Garden to stage the first London performance of his much-acclaimed Los angeles production of Richard Strauss's one act opera *Salome*. It is designed and lit by John Bury, with choreography by Elizabeth Keen from the USA. Photograph by Catherine Ashmore.

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CONTENTS

Stage Design
David Fingleton 4

A new incentive in the drive for efficiency in the arts
Dawn Austwick 7

Autolycus 9

Product News 11

A pair of Real Theatres
Francis Reid 12

The Directory of Historic American Theatres
Iain Mackintosh 16

Time to share our Theatres' resources
Anthony McCall 20

Correspondence 22

Book Reviews 23

The Act Drops
David Wilmore 24

Arts and Entertainment in the Woods. 26

Merida and Italica
Francis Reid 27

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Better Business for the Arts

Nine months ago, Sir William Rees-Mogg, Chairman of the Arts Council, announced the establishment of an "incentive scheme" which would encourage arts organisations "to become more enterprising and self-reliant", as he put it. He also introduced a three-year funding system for clients, which would allow them "to exploit the funding opportunities presented in the current climate". For the Council had itself been advised of its own grant for three years ahead — 1988–89 grant, £150 million (an increase of 8.4%); 1989–90 grant, £155 million (3.3% increase); and 1990–91 grant, £160 million (3.2% increase).

During the intervening months, the Incentive Funding Scheme has been discussed, developed and modified to meet clients' different needs. Now it is ready to go. We have taken a good look in this issue, at what the scheme involves and what it hopes to achieve by acting as a catalyst for change.

The Arts Council has published a booklet entitled, *Better Business for the Arts*, explaining the scheme and providing guidelines for arts organisations to apply for financial or managerial assistance. The Incentive Funding Office has advertised the posts of Scheme Manager and Administrator, which when filled, will run the scheme. All these measures, which are only a part of wider funding changes, come at a time of virtual standstill in public subsidy for the arts.

How ironic that this public subsidy is now shown to be one of the best investments made by the British taxpayer, in terms of financial return, export earnings and knock-on effect on jobs and allied industries. The first major report on the subject, a £200,000 four-volume report entitled *The Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain*, published by the Policy Studies Institute, was launched to widespread media coverage only days after the low-key, low-profile inauguration of the Arts Council's Incentive Funding Scheme.

So the arts are shown to be a first-class investment in financial terms, quite apart from any artistic considerations — where they also score highly. It is nice to know that at a time like this.

STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

An all-German director/design team makes its Glyndebourne debut — a satisfyingly designed *Salome* at the Royal Opera House and a more modest *Knot Garden* — Gratifying revival of *Ondine* by the Royal Ballet — The Olivier revolve is finally working and used to good effect by William Dudley in *The Shaughraun* — Stimulating settings and costumes for *The Changeling* at the Lyttleton — A new staging of *Uncle Vanya* at the Vandeville.

Last autumn's hurricane may have wrought a fair amount of havoc in Glyndebourne's beautiful surroundings — it was painful to find so many cherished trees now absent from familiar vistas — but fortunately had failed to impinge upon the habitually keen organisation of the Opera House. This year's Festival has offered two entirely new productions — *Kat'a Kabanova* and *Falstaff* — and one new to the Festival, but seen at Glyndebourne during the Touring Opera's season there just before the storm last autumn *The Electrification of the Soviet Union*.

Of these three far and away the most interesting staging was of the Janacek opera. The previous productions I have seen of *Kat'a* have invariably been naturalistic and romantic, and thus it came as an even greater shock that at Glyndebourne, of all places, one should have seen a staging of this opera that, far from being romantic and decorative, was a carefully considered and powerfully realised piece of German Expressionist theatre. The all-German team responsible were making their Glyndebourne debuts, director Nikolaus Lehnhoff, designer Tobias Hoheisel, and lighting designer Wolfgang Gobel and had worked together to considerable effect. Their simplified stage pictures were basically symbolist, with such occasional realist details as a hedge, gateway, or window, and remained true to the opera's dramatic source — Ostrovsky's play *The Storm* — as well as emphasising the material imprisonment that is *Kat'a*'s predicament. Colours were strong and primary: a yellow field, a red room, a blue, then purple sky; and costumes were nearer to Janacek's period than Ostrovsky's. The only false note was struck by the stars which suddenly began to twinkle in the cyclorama as *Kat'a* and Boris declared their love: a twee gesture out of touch with the dramatic strength around it. Overall however the production was clearly conceived, strongly realised and intelligently designed, leaving me eager to see more of this team's work.

Their approach was certainly a more effectively expressionist one than that of 'wunderkind' director Peter Sellars with designers George Tsypin, Duna Ramicova, and lighting man James F Ingalls in Glyndebourne's production of Nigel Osborne's

opera, *The Electrification of the Soviet Union*, first given by GTO last autumn and now presented in amended form at the Festival. Certainly the production looked less dreadful than it had at Glyndebourne last October: partly because I was now sitting

further from it, and mainly because some of the frantic movement of trucked scenery had now been eliminated, and some of the more irrelevant pieces had been removed. But the staging remains fussy, untidy and distracting, though decently lit, with much that is shown on stage apparently at odds with the careful stage directions in Craig Raine's libretto. Moreover when an opera that is sung in English actually needs descriptive surtitles to be projected onto the scenery, something would appear to have gone very wrong with the staging.

Glyndebourne's third new production was of Verdi's *Falstaff*, his opera that probably suits this house best. It is the third that the Festival has mounted: first came Carl Ebert's, lovingly and wittily designed by Sir Osbert Lancaster, then Jean-Pierre Ponnelle's 1976 staging, memorably beautiful and satisfyingly set in Falstaff's own period, the early 15th century. This new staging, by Sir Peter Hall, reverts to the late Tudor period and demonstrates a less sure touch than Sir Peter usually has when working in Sussex. Nor are John Gunter's



Royal Opera's new production of *The Knot Garden* by Sir Michael Tippett. Directed by Nicholas Hytner with designs by Bob Crowley and lighting by Robert Bryan. Photograph, Catherine Ashmore.



The Royal Ballet's revival of Sir Frederick Ashton's *Ondine* included the exquisitely painted designs by Lila de Nobile. This is her original design from 1958 for the *Shipboard Tableau* in the second act. Photograph, Donald Southern

designs as persuasive as I have known them in other operas. True the Tudor setting provides an opportunity — yet again — to model Ford's house on Glyndebourne's famous Organ Room where latecomers must wait for a break in the performance before finding their seats, but the three carved wooden ships projecting from its gallery, together with a full-sized vessel moored outside the window, seemed a clumsy device for illustrating Ford's success as a merchant venturer, and the room seemed too heavily formal for the plausible introduction of a laundry basket. Both the exterior of the Garter Inn, with the cyclorama containing Windsor Castle, its windows twinkling, and Herne's Oak in Windsor Great Park for the final scene were prettily atmospheric without making any particular dramatic points. But the opening set for the Garter's interior was less adept, being fussy, over-enclosed, and under-lit by Gerry Jenkinson. Somehow the concept as a whole did not seem to have been thought through: there is decoration with all too little

dramatic concentration.

The Royal Opera's three new productions at Covent Garden during the period have been similarly patchy. The most satisfyingly designed was Richard Strauss's *Salome*, first staged by Sir Peter Hall and his designer, John Bury, last year in Los Angeles. Here Bury gave us an attractive and highly appropriate Klimtian setting, true to Oscar Wilde's play as well as to Strauss's music, and beautifully lit with exquisitely coloured projections. Costumes too were strong, with the Dance of the Seven Veils powerfully and erotically achieved, though I could have done without the final 'night-club' spotlight.

There was also a new production by the Royal Opera of Sir Michael Tippett's *The Knot Garden*, directed by Nicholas Hytner with designs by Bob Crowley and lighting by Robert Bryan. Sir Peter Hall's original 1970 staging had been designed by Timothy O'Brien and Tazeena Firth, with superb lighting by John Bury. With its concentric maze of revolving aluminium rods it broke

new ground at Covent Garden, and this new production was an altogether more modest affair. Hytner and Crowley offered a more realistic and simple garden with real flowers in low bushes which may have convinced from above, but from the stalls actually looked like window boxes. There was a cyclorama containing an abstracted modern city skyline, and the maze was evoked by a transparent, revolving cage which rose, centre stage, and resembled nothing so much as a trendy boutique window display. Costumes had been well selected to establish character, and the lighting was precise. But as a new look at an intriguing contemporary opera one sensed a missed opportunity, and I was left with the feeling that Opera Factory's chamber version, with its stacking chairs, of three years ago had been altogether more stimulating.

But, whatever its defects, *Knot Garden* was much superior to the Royal Opera's final new production of the season, of Donizetti's *Anna Bolena*, mounted to honour Dame Joan Sutherland. This dim affair seemed to be precisely the kind of thing that the Opera House's incoming General Director, Jeremy Isaacs, seemed to be pledging to eliminate when he gave his first Press Conference, for the 1988/89 season, the next day. As well as designing the production, John Pascoe was also responsible for directing it, having previously designed productions of the opera for Dame Joan in Canada and the U.S.A. Pascoe is a capable and imaginative designer, as we know from his admirable Handel *Julius Caesar* for E.N.O., but as a stage director he is still a debutant, and by attempting both was overstretched on both counts. To minimalist stage direction he added minimalist stage design, with a cavernous stage swathed in gold and silver lurex which failed to mask some yawning gaps and the efforts of stage-hands to shift the scenery. One was reminded of those dear old Handel Opera Society productions up at Sadler's Wells, but at least those were mounted on a shoestring. John B. Read's murky, ill-focussed lighting did little to help, and costumes were unappealing at best, at worst, as in the case of Henry VIII's, totally misconceived. The whole effect was of watching opera at least 30 years ago: I thought we had now progressed beyond that kind of thing.

Not that all work from 30 years ago is undistinguished. The Royal Ballet's revival of Sir Frederick Ashton's full-length *Ondine* gave us the opportunity to see again Lila de Nobili's beautiful, traditional, exquisitely painted designs. If not always ideally lit, they still gave great pleasure, and in the second scene of Act 1 and the shipboard tableau of the second act demonstrated considerable dramatic power and romantic magic. Her costumes too were meticulously drawn and the entire revival gave much pleasure.

There is, at last, good news at the National Theatre: twelve years after the theatre's opening the Olivier's revolve is finally working and has been put to superb use by William Dudley in Howard Davies's



Janacek's opera *Kat'a Kabanova* from the Glyndebourne Festival. The all-German team responsible were director Nikolaus Lehnhoff, designer Tobias Hoheisel, and lighting designer Wolfgang Göbbel. Photograph, Guy Gravett.



Donizetti's *Anna Bolena* at the Royal Opera House last performed at Covent Garden in 1871. This new production is directed and designed by John Pascoe. Lighting by John B. Read, Photograph, Donald Southern.



The National Theatre production of The Shaughraun at the Olivier Directed by Howard Davies. Settings by William Dudley, Costumes Liz da Costa and Lighting by Mark Henderson. Photograph, Nobby Clark.



Richard Eyres production of The Changeling at the Lyttelton. Goyaesque settings by William Dudley. Lighting by Mark Henderson. Photograph, John Haynes.



Chekhov's Uncle Vanya at the Vandville Theatre. A new staging by Michael Blakemore. Set design by Tanya McCallin. Lighting by Mick Hughes. Photograph John Haynes.

enjoyable revival of Boucicault's Irish comedy melodrama, *The Shaughraun*. The revolve here rears up, corkscrew fashion, from below stage and presents a splendidly vivid series of Irish vignettes, such as the wicked Corry Kinchela's gothic horror house, the Shaughraun's own cottage kitchen, with his living 'corpse' on the kitchen table, a hiding place in craggy cliffs overlooking the sea. You name it, Dudley gave it, and gave us enormous pleasure. There were also some admirably accurate costumes from Liz da Costa, and some fine, precise lighting by Mark Henderson. It was all great fun.

Richard Eyre's first production of his new regime at the National, of Middleton and Rowley's Jacobean shocker, *The Changeling*, in the Lyttelton, was also impressively stimulating. Eyre had decided to shift the play's setting from Spain in the early 17th century to a Spanish slave colony early in the 19th, which enabled his designer, William Dudley again, to use the influence of Goya's paintings to telling effect. The single basic setting was of a Moorish hall with central archway, far upstage, metal staircases on either side, and a top gallery across the proscenium with central balcony. I gather that the staircases obscured the centre stage from those sitting in side seats, something which surely could and should have been avoided, but from the centre, where I sat, the ensemble looked highly effective. The staircases were used to denote most strongly the madhouse that contains the sub-plot, and served as a constant reminder of the claustrophobic frenzy that imbues the play. The gallery and balcony offered an intelligent solution to the setting of De Flores's murders, as well as serving to denote this African slave, turned senior servant's dominance of the action. Costumes too, powerfully defined characters, as well as looking suitably Goyaesque, so that the contrast between Beatrice's pale Hidalgo and De Flores' immaculate white uniform, but African tribal scars instead of a scrofulous skin disease on his cheeks, was grippingly effective. It cannot have been an easy set to light, but Mark Henderson succeeded in doing so to masterly effect.

I wish I could have felt as enthusiastic about Michael Blakemore's new staging of Chekhov's *Uncle Vanya* at the Vaudeville Theatre, but Tanya McCallin's designs, rather erratically lit by Mick Hughes, seemed to miss the mark. For a start the set seemed miserably shallow, so that much of the action seemed to be happening in a railway carriage, with a very artificial backdrop of lowering trees eternally behind it. Moreover the interiors seemed artificial too and conveyed almost no impression of a home that had been lived in, let alone one loved and cherished by Vanya and Sonya for 25 years. The effect was thus to distance one from Blakemore's lucid and intelligent production, despite the aptness and ease of Michael Frayn's new translation. With such a fine cast — Michael Gambon heading it in top form — it seemed something of a missed opportunity.

Carrott and stick — a new incentive in the drive for efficiency in the arts

DAWN AUSTWICK

The Arts Council's 'Incentive Funding' scheme was launched a few weeks ago. Cue invited Dawn Austwick, who has project managed the scheme since its inception, to outline the ideas behind this initiative and explain how it will help arts managers. There were a number of surprises she relates, particularly since the basic aims were misunderstood.

I recently attended the closing session of the Council of Regional Arts Associations (CORAA) annual conference in Cambridge. Having added an early morning visit to Ely Cathedral to my schedule, I was sufficiently at peace to enter the tempestuous environment of the arts funders and policy makers. I was there to listen to the Minister for the Arts, Richard Luce, address delegates, and managed also to witness the tail end of an ideological dog-fight between Mr Douglas Mason and 'the floor', who were less than happy with his views on their industry.

The Minister, however, was working to a different agenda in his session and came offering commendations and olive branches. One such branch was to acknowledge the valuable role of the Regional Arts Association in helping the Arts Council to introduce its incentive funding scheme.

It was something of a 'one year later' address, as the Minister reminded us that it was exactly a year previously at the 1987 CORAA conference that he had first publicly voiced the idea of incentive funding. Here we were one year on and the Arts Council had well and truly grasped the bull by the horns and was about to launch details of the 1988/89 programme for incentive funding.

And this is where I fit into the story: for the last six months my waking hours have been occupied with the complex subject of incentive funding, management and the arts. In January, I was assigned to the Arts Council

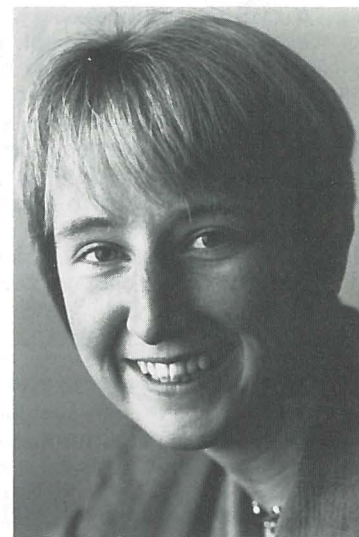
for a six-month period to project manage the introduction of the incentive funding scheme.

Since that first ministerial speech of July 1987, the Arts Council had moved fast to devise a skeleton scheme, loosely based on American models and to negotiate some £12.5 million additional funds from government to run the scheme. All this at the same time as achieving a three-year funding package which

'The aim has been to replace rules and regulations with guidelines and to encourage the idea of a flexible and responsive rather than a restrictive scheme'.

would allow it, and its clients, to plan beyond the short-term. Clearly it would be a full and difficult year for the Council.

The scheme as it then stood consisted of two programmes called Enterprise and Progress. These were modelled on the Challenge and Advancement Programmes run by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) in Washington. Enterprise was aimed at larger organisations and Progress at smaller organisations: the assumption being that Progress applicants would have greater consultancy requirements. In the autumn of 1987, officers of the Council held a series of consultative ses-



sions with clients to discuss the draft scheme. Final details were then drawn up in the New Year. The full details of the scheme was to be launched in July thus allowing six months to test the scheme through a pilot study. The aim of the pilot study was to add the 'flesh' to the 'skeleton' by developing procedures, application forms, and guidelines for the operational aspects of the scheme but also, and more crucially, to see if it could work.

In order to do so, we selected nine clients and persuaded them, despite the fact that it might be a bumpy ride, to act as guinea pigs. The director of the NEA Challenge Programme, Jeanne Hodges, and their financial analyst, Les Denison, also came over and spent an invaluable couple of days talking through their experiences of running challenge funds. Looking at how far they had got in ten years, my heart sank at how much we had to do in six months.

At the same time, I undertook a series of visits around Britain talking to clients and officers in the funding bodies, keeping them informed of progress and eliciting their views. One of the strongest messages I received was how little understanding there was of the scheme, and how much hostility. Whatever else was needed, a programme of advocacy would need to be developed.

This lack of understanding was echoed by the experience of the pilot studies where clients were not taking on board what the scheme was all about: better long-term planning and defining and controlling their own futures, in a world of static public



Dawn Austwick is a Senior Consultant in Peat Marwick McLintock's Leisure and Tourism Group and has been project managing the introduction of incentive funding for the Arts Council. She previously worked at the Half Moon Theatre and at the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts (ABSA).

'While people had many ideas, they were rarely able to translate them into plans, let alone act upon them'.

funding. A cynical arts constituency was saying, "Show us the hoops and we'll jump through them in order to get the money that's rightfully ours anyway."

One of the most prevalent dangers in the scheme was that it could spawn a bureaucracy that encouraged, or even demanded, that very state of mind. The more we tried to define the scheme and map out rules for every eventuality the more we came up against the vision of the arts manager as contortionist desperately

trying to squeeze his or her square pegs into round holes. In preparing the new brochure that explains the scheme, the aim has been to replace rules and regulations with guidelines wherever possible and to encourage the idea of a flexible and responsive rather than a restrictive scheme.

The pilot study also demonstrates that while people had many ideas, they were rarely able to translate them into plans, let alone act upon them. Only one of our nine 'guinea pigs' (the Arvon Foundation) was able to produce a full business plan within the very tight timetable.

The pilot study clients were sent a lengthy application form which was designed to prompt the planning process necessary to produce a business plan. The result was that they filled in the forms but didn't produce the plans.

Obviously timing made this difficult, but the first year of the scheme would also be working to a very tight timetable. A process was needed that would handhold people through business planning without spoon-feeding and without eating into the scheme's budget too drastically. The spectre of a hundred individual consultancies on how to prepare a business plan was looming!

The process for the 1988/89 programme has been adapted to address this issue: applicants submit an initial short form. From this, those organisations who look like they have the potential to succeed and benefit from the scheme will be invited to attend a workshop session on business planning and subsequently to submit a plan together with a more detailed form. The best of these will then be put forward for assessment. An assessment will involve a one or two day visit by a business assessor who will interview key staff and board members assessing the applicant's ability to deliver the growth in income set out in their plan. Should the assessor consider that the applicant is not ready to do so he or she will identify what help is needed for the applicant to become ready.

The pilot study showed that the type of help required could be very varied and would not necessarily be a 'consultancy'. Only one of our guinea pigs is currently working with consultants; they are the Wolsey Theatre in Ipswich who are undergoing a strategic devel-

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The course will be of great interest to all those contemplating building theatres, opera houses or concert halls whether their responsibility is to draw up a brief, design the building or some technical aspect of it, or to run the building when it is complete.

Applications are invited from senior staff from ministries of culture and other governmental or non-governmental bodies concerned with theatre planning and the briefing of architects for theatre projects, and directors of arts or cultural centres, as well as architects interested in the problems of theatre design, and other senior people involved in aspects of theatre planning.

There are vacancies for 25 participants.

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The course sessions will take place at the Art Workers' Guild in central London. Participants will be accommodated in a convenient hotel.

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

'The scheme's significance, after all, lies not in the sums of money involved, but in the assistance it offers to arts organisations'.

opment study. The Arts Council is paying for consultants to work alongside the Wolsey staff and board and guide them through the process of planning for their future. This has involved the Wolsey in identifying its own position in the market place as well as defining the market place itself and looking at where it wants to be in the future. The end result of the study should be a business plan which, ideally identifies income increases which enable the theatre to receive an incentive award. The role of the consultant in all this will not have been to write the plan or prepare the strategy but to prompt and guide the Wolsey through the process so that next time they can do it all themselves. In other words, the consultants have acted as facilitators.

In the case of the 369 Gallery in Edinburgh it was clear that facilitation would not help: what they needed was an extra pair of hands linked to a commercial brain. We have provided six months' funding for a business manager to work with the gallery's artistic director, examining the 369's income-generation prospects, developing the financial and management controls, and drawing up a business plan.

For other applicants, a training course may

be what is needed, and there is provision within the scheme to find a whole range of help programmes for clients.

The nine pilot clients were selected to provide a cross-section of art forms, geographical spread, size and so forth. Some of the lessons learnt from the pilot applied across the board, regardless of type of organisation. For example, the poor long term planning and the vulnerability of arts organisations to the loss of key members of staff.

However, each type of organisation also brings with it a different set of difficulties. The pilot study suggests that the scheme may suit some types of arts organisations better than others. But, a sample of nine can hardly be considered conclusive, and we will need to monitor carefully how different categories of organisations perform through each stage of the scheme. The scheme is set up in such a way that, the programme can be altered next year if necessary, in the light of the first year's experience.

One of the final tasks I have set myself, is to try to explore more fully some of the concerns arts organisations have about the scheme and to look at other programmes which keep to the scheme's overall objectives, but are perhaps made to address particular problems. One example would be how to help organisations for whom income projections over three years are unsuitable. Some of the problems may, of course, fall outside the parameters of incentive funding, and there is a danger of placing too much importance on this one scheme. Its significance, after all, lies not in the sums of money involved (£3.5 million this year, out of a total Arts Council grant of £150 million) but in the assistance (both financial and managerial) if offers to arts organisations.

AUTOLYCUS

A new Fringe benefit, at last

One can only applaud the ambition of another Edinburgh Festival Fringe award. But this time, outside organisers and sponsors have the vision to offer a London run as well. All credit to the idea, which is self-evidently beneficial to all involved, including the London public.

The Independent Theatre Award, organised by the newspaper of the same name in association with the Half Moon Theatre, is being launched at this year's Festival Fringe. Any company mounting a new production on the Fringe for at least 10 days, is eligible. Critics from *The Independent*, guest reviewers and a judge from the Half Moon will announce the winner by the end of the Festival on 3 September. A special London showcase will take place between 7-19 November 1988 at the Half Moon Theatre, with free technical help. The newspaper will provide promotional help and a £1,000 grant to help cover other expenses. A copy of the rules is available from *The Independent* and companies may, if they wish, nominate themselves for consideration.

Until now, only cabaret shows winning the Perrier-sponsored award have received a London run. Looks like a promising piece of theatre sponsorship, this collaboration.

Back from the dead — in style

I have not yet seen the resurrected D'Oyly Carte Opera Company myself, but the music critics have been singing its praises. The new productions bear only a partial resemblance to their predecessors, staged by that venerable British institution that died six years ago. A major new asset is Bramwell Tovey, D'Oyly Carte's new music director. His freshly-minted *Iolanthe* (one of G&S's more lightweight operettas) combines, by all accounts, just enough of the usual routines to keep the traditionalists happy with a production style that introduces a new vigour, charm and interpretation . . . as well as new faces.

"No Gilbert & Sullivan fan should miss this glorious *Iolanthe*", crowed the *Daily Express*; "The audience received it with whistles and cheers", added the *Observer*; "Magical . . . jovial and rompish" said the

Guardian; and "Full of verve and fun — immensely witty", opined the *London Standard*.

Richard Suart, formerly of English Music Theatre and John Freeman's Opera Factory, is a worthy successor to John Reed, the remarkable doyen of the former company. And Vivian Tierney's *Phyllis* and John Cashmore's *Strephon* are reportedly a delight. There was always talent in the old days, but productions then seemed jaded and uneven. Like that grim old joke about going to the dentist — the more you went, the less painful the experience was. Today's revival in fortunes and new creative drive owed its new financial lease of life to a bequest from the estate of Bridget D'Oyly Carte and sponsorship from British Midland Airlines. They also corralled Dick Condon, best known as the Theatre Royal, Norwich's irreplaceable general manager, to help them fight their way back from the dead. Which they have done, in style.

(*Iolanthe* runs in repertoire with *The Yeoman of the Guard* until 12 September at London's Cambridge Theatre).

A wonderful witch's den

I had forgotten what a rich source of theatre prints and allied memorabilia was to be had at that excellent little shop, *The Witch Ball*, in Cecil Court between London's Charing Cross Road and St Martin's Lane. Strolling past it the other day, I decided not to resist the urge to go inside. What an Aladdin's Cave of prints for the buffs: opera, ballet, drama and a handsome collection of reasonably-priced material on the Bard, the Siddons and Kemble dynasty, Garrick and of course, on our erstwhile theatres — the Fortune Playhouse, Golden Lane (1811), for instance; the Surrey Theatre, formerly the Royal Circus near the Obelisk, Great Surrey Street (1814); or the Swan Theatre on Bankside as it appeared in 1614. These hand-coloured copper, or copper stipple, engravings range in price from £25-£45, unframed.

But what charm and indeed fascination is to be had browsing the racks: a collection of Marie Taglioni the dancer (these can be dearer, as some are collectors' items); a playbill for Lucia di Lammermoor playing at the

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If you can't find the time to browse yourself, they have lists of their stock. Ring Rosslyn Glassman or Richard MacMillan on 01-836 2922.

Second time around

A new scheme is being introduced by the Arts Council to offer financial incentives to theatre companies to encourage them to work with writers to produce second productions of their plays. In the 1988-89 year, the Council hopes to make about 16 awards of £2,500 each for this purpose. Priority will be given to regional second productions, large-scale projects and to projects moving to the main stage from a studio theatre. Anyone interested in further details can contact Moss Cooper, Theatre Writing Officer at the Council's Drama Department.

In a different vein, I see the Council has also awarded its second bursary for financial management in the arts. Catherine O'Sullivan, an Oxford grad, trained as a chartered accountant. She will now join the Royal Opera House for nine months and another arts organisation for a further three months, using her experience in commercial finance as a way in to arts administration.

Placido Domingo — 20-foot high

Now, in the rock world, giant screens are often used to relay the singers' performance to the far reaches of the venue. They are used at the Olympics, most recently at Calgary, and by the like of Michael Jackson and even the



Royal Opera's Placido Domingo concert in the Covent Garden piazza, (photo Richard Smith, Dominie Photography).

recent out-of-doors Nelson Mandela concert. Bruce Springsteen and Genesis both use two screens for their concerts. But it was definitely an experiment when the Royal Opera House gave the idea a try last year and then repeated it with a Placido Domingo concert in the Covent Garden piazza. Last year they relayed La Boheme; this year it was a concert of songs, which was simultaneously recorded by EMI.

The producer of the event, Jan Martin of Independent Producers (65 Shelton Street, WC2) explained that the outdoor audience that gathered for the free concert had "that euphoric feeling that you get when you're seeing something that's happening live" even if it was coming from the opera house nearby. There were two camera places in the Grand Circle, one on each side of the house, so producer Jan found herself whispering her instructions to the cameramen, to avoid intruding on the concertgoers' enjoyment — only feet away from her. "We had to play it more straight recording an opera" added Jan Martin, "than when we are covering the opening of a factory, say, for a commercial client. There's more informality then, and you can 'busk' it more, improvise. Obviously when people come to watch Domingo perform, the camera is expected to stay on him for most of the time".

The 9m x 6m screens themselves fold in half to open up to the full height. They are made up of tens of thousands of cathode ray tubes and manufactured by a GEC company called EEV (tel: 0245 493493, contact Tim Petty), which specialises in installing the screens in fixed locations like large-capacity venues. The specialists in arranging mobile locations, like the Covent Garden concert recently, is a Southampton firm, Ivesco (tel: 0420 541114, contact Dave Crump). These screens, which cost around a cool million to buy out-right, work out at about £17,000 for a day's hire. On top of that, one has to add the producer, director and cameramen's fees. So it isn't surprising that the Royal Opera House had to find a sponsor to finance the undertaking.

However, the idea is likely to become a firm fixture in Covent Garden's list of annual events. There is talk of doing Turandot in 1989, with the Swedish Folk Opera company — and also of an LPO event on the South Bank.

Doing business behind the Iron Curtain

With a drink in my hand, I was chatting and talking shop recently with Steve Hall, Head of Marketing for Lee Colortran International, when the conversation turned to the Soviet Union. I have heard and read about a number of companies who manage to get a toehold in the potentially huge and lucrative Soviet market, and they're frequently not the large multi-nationals either. How were Lee tackling this, I asked?

Obviously sales trips and sheer enthusiasm is a total waste of time, first of all. Indeed the business of getting an entry visa can be impossible if you do not know the names and addresses of who you are going to visit, together with their written agreement to see you. This is the first of several Catch-22 obstacles. Lee resolved this by using a well-

established sales agent with a permanent office in Moscow, a man called Barry Brown of B. B. Exports Ltd of Cheshire, who specialises in the field of entertainment equipment — sound and lighting, in particular.

What kinds of doors does this open? One Russian company wanted to exchange lenses for luminaires for electronic switching gear, for example. An idea that may come to naught, although the lenses are of excellent quality, Hall relates. On the other hand, the Bolshoi Ballet use their lighting equipment and asked them to install it, too. Other interested theatres include those at Kiev and Leningrad. They are talking to the Ministry of Culture, the Moscow State Circus and the giant Mosfilms, to whom Lee have 'loaned' some £20,000 worth of their equipment for six months. Mosfilms were interested in Lee's Daylight Flicker-Free systems for films, which they wanted to put through their paces.

But probably the biggest coup thus far was being invited to take part in April's 'Kultur 88' the leisure and entertainment industry exhibition in the Park of Technical Achievements, Moscow. Apart from Mosfilms, whom we've already mentioned, Steve Hall now has high hopes for a huge circus deal and a cultural centre in Minsk that includes two theatres. The old bugbear is, of course, Roubles are a non-convertible currency (could *perestroika* change that eventually?). And hard-currencies like the dollar are in limited supply for Soviet theatres and film companies. So what's the moral? Sales are one thing; payment is another.

Importance of being Candide

I know it's a bit old hat to ask this kind of question, but what have Dorothy Parker, Stephen Sondheim, Jonathan Miller, Leonard Bernstein and John Wells got in common? Answer: they've all been involved, at some stage or other, in *Candide*, which Bernstein wrote over 30 years ago. It went from operetta to Broadway musical, and from musical to opera. As Miller, its new co-director said in a recent interview, "It's really a sort of Frankenstein monster the way it's been stitched together out of bits and pieces. There have been transplants, transpositions and skin grafts over the years — it's a question of can we make this work and make the creature walk?"

John Wells, he of *Private Eye* scribbling tendencies and co-director of the new production, has reworked the script, which was originally based on the novel by Voltaire. The joint Scottish Opera — Old Vic production opened in Glasgow a couple of months ago, before touring Newcastle and Edinburgh; it starts a London run at the Old Vic on 2 December.

It is one of those works which somehow has attracted an almost cultish mystique in the theatre world, perhaps because it is so difficult to get right. This is no doubt the challenge for Jonathan Miller, who is no stranger to novel production either in theatre or opera. But how nice to see the Vic's lyric theatre potential being exploited once again. Yes, it does have

a pit, for those with poor memories.

And a most apposite tale it is, too. Voltaire has a good-natured go at that threadbare philosophy that suggests that everything is for the best in this best of all possible worlds. Voltaire tells the story of *Candide*, who takes this as his guiding principle as he travels the world. It becomes apparent to him that this is a principle that is simply not borne out. The modern parallel is that we are probably quite right to question whether the majority of things going on around us make any sense, or not. Often they are proof only of man's folly. It is a message for any age.

"Voltaire is a very good tonic and I think well presented on stage", says Miller. "Candide will jolt people into some sense of folly in endlessly putting up with what we are asked to grin and bear".

Success or failure: a 5 per cent difference

Trevor Nunn was taking up cudgels in the newspaper columns recently on behalf of Terry Hands, who took over from him as RSC chief executive in 1986. While elaborating a number of points, he made the fascinating observation that, "as one who has experienced a good deal of both successes and failures" in staging would-be successes aimed at commercial transfers, "the difference between make or break is invariably a miscalculation of no more than 5 per cent".

Examples to illustrate RSC successes: *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, *Les Misérables*, and productions that took Broadway by storm in 1984 like *Cyrano de Bergerac* and *Much Ado About Nothing*. An example of failure: *Carrie* — which was what the correspondence was all about. Thus 'failure', Nunn pointed out, "does not amount to evidence of a finished career or washed-up talent". Not with a 5 per cent margin, one would have to agree. Can this really be true?

Wall-to-wall tickets

Jules Boardman, formerly of the National Theatre and now managing director of Ticketmaster, was explaining to *Autolycus* the wonders and the joys of his company's new Viewtickets scheme, which was launched a few weeks ago. "Viewticket has just gone live linking hundreds of travel agents — including 200 branches of W H Smith Travel — to its central computer bank in London's West End" he said. It means that anyone planning a mini-break or group outing can now make all their travel and entertainment arrangements locally. No need for costly long-distance phone calls", etc. etc.

There has been talk of this kind of thing for years now, though it is quite common in the US. Perhaps the biggest development, if I understand correctly, is that punters can now see seating plans of the different venues on a computer terminal in Land's End or John O'Groats. I'll speak to the Editor and see if we shouldn't look into this subject further — I'm a bit out of my depth here, without looking at Viewticket in more detail. I heard their ads on Capital Radio though, so it's getting a good plugging, by the looks of things.

PRODUCT NEWS

CCT Lighting acquire FURSE Theatre Products Division

Don Hindle, Managing Director of CCT Theatre Lighting Limited, ("CCT") has announced the acquisition by CCT of the Theatre Products Division of W J Furse & Co Limited, ("W J Furse").

In making the announcement, Mr Hindle said that "CCT", having made a worldwide reputation for the excellence of its stage and television studio lighting products would now benefit from the expertise of Furse, in the broader areas of stage equipment, lighting control and electronics. Mr Hindle, also indicated that in view of a growing order book, particularly from overseas, that it was hoped to relieve some of the pressure on it's Mitcham factory by further developing the Furse manufacturing resources in Nottingham.

"W J Furse" first became active in the nineteen thirties in regional and educational theatre particularly in the Midlands where they have always been strong, and have gone on to expand their business into specialist industrial engineering on which they now intend to concentrate.

Rosco move to Sydenham

Having outgrown their Southbank headquarters Rosco have moved into more commodious premise in Sydenham, South London. "This give more scope for increasing our range of customer service" says Michael Hall, Roscolab's Managing Director. "As well as all this extra working space there are ample parking facilities for our visitors. A twice daily delivery service will cater for distributors and customers in Central London."

Rosco's new address is Roscolab Limited, Blanchard Works, Kangley Bridge Road, Sydenham, London. SE26 5AQ, telephone 01-659-2300, fax 01-659-3153, telex 8953352.

Lee Colortran opens in Nottingham

As part of its strategic move into the theatre market, Lee Colortran International has opened a new theatre lighting premises in Nottingham.

The new base will offer an over-the-counter service and from September 1988 professional consultancy to the theatre industry. A theatre equipment rental department will also be established.

The shop will provide replacement lamps, filters, luminaires, and dimming equipment for the TV, film and theatre industries.

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A Pair of Real Theatres

FRANCIS REID

The British call them courtyards and talk of rediscovery. Elsewhere they are known as Italianate in celebration of the only people with enough sense never to have reacted against them. To me they are just real theatres.

A couple of new ones have opened recently. Both display form and function to very high standards, although one of them demonstrates the decorator's properly exercised right to take a risk — and to fail.

NEW TOWNGATE THEATRE BASILDON

In Basildon the auditorium form and function is enhanced by paint. This is plushly red theatre with the Georgian intimacy of a pit enclosed by shallow tiered shelves. In Cue 39 I responded to the plans and model with considerable enthusiasm. Two and a bit years later we have the reality. How is it? Well, my Cue 39 musings included a six point checklist for my first visit to the finished buildings: so that offers an obvious start.

Will the outside have the right mix of dignity and come hither?

There is a lot of dignity in the clean positive statement of a stage tower dominating the prime central site of a town whose low rise pastoral ambitions are enshrined in the naming of the adjoining streets — Broadmayne, Great Oaks, Pagel Mead, Southernhay and Fodderwick. The fly tower will eventually crown a civic centre block including library and council offices, and the dignity inherent in this situation can only be enhanced by contrast with the bland utilitarian style of the adjacent shopping precinct. So, dignity? — Yes. Come hither? — probably also yes, once the adjacent buildings are finished and pedestrian traffic has a normal route past the glazed entrance's view of the continuous daily pleasures within. Final judgement must be reserved until the whole block is complete but I must here confess to a growing feeling of dismay that so much post-modern civic building seems to seek refuge in rather bland discretion.

Will the foyers welcome and impress, yet still allow a moment of excitement as one crosses the threshold into the auditorium?

No doubt about the excitement on crossing the auditorium threshold: one is embraced in a warm tingle of expectancy. In the opening weeks the foyers tried to welcome and impress, with some success. However these spaces have something of an air of being understated and unrelaxed. Time and tuning will doubtless fix this and I am sure the architectural and theatric teams are working at it.

Will the proscenium zone be equally convincing in all its arrangements?

The interface of stage and auditorium is varied by pivoting proscenium towers on air castors. While these are very effective in their open position, they are somewhat uneasy when forming a proscenium frame because they provide boxes that are both inward facing and inaccessible. In the years ahead their form will

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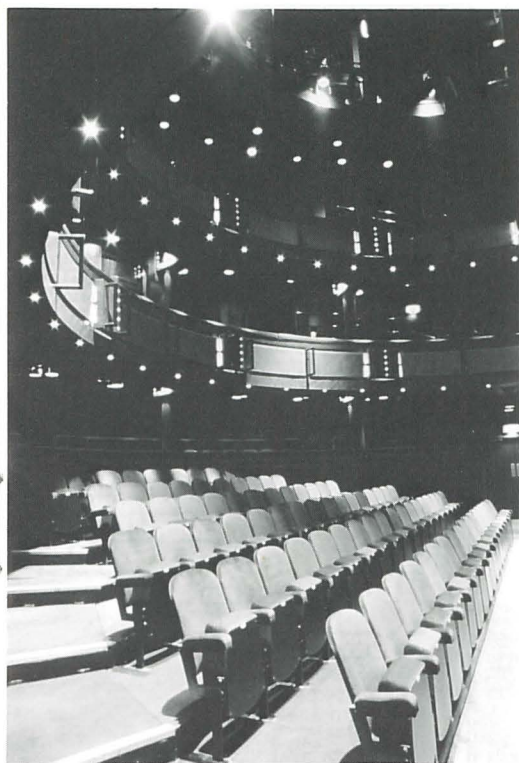
Sightline

Four times a year the Association of British Theatre Technicians publishes its magazine *Sightline*, presenting a lively review of the technical theatre scene written by some of its leading practitioners.

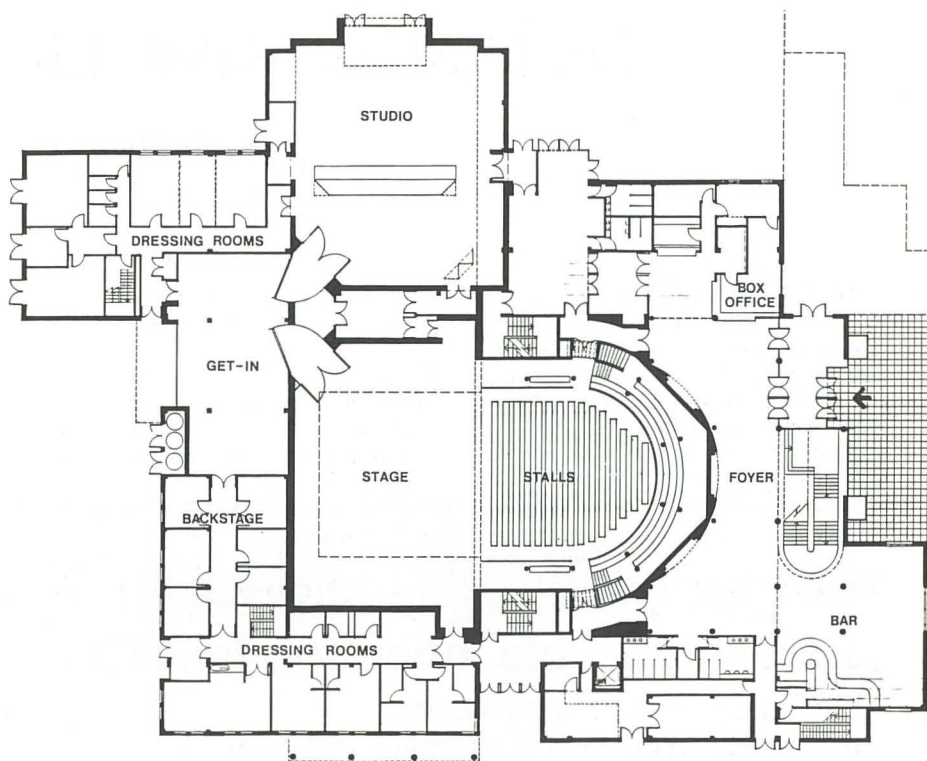
New theatres are regularly reviewed with full specifications and plans. New products and technical innovations are examined in depth. Regular assessments are made of the work of leading designers — recent issues have featured Maria Bjornson, Martin Johns, William Dudley and Ralph Koltai. Other features look at the history of technical theatre and at the routines of work backstage.

If you want to keep in touch with British theatre, as seen from the prompt desk or the lighting box, you need *Sightline*.

Annual Subscription (four issues): £10.00. Single copies: £2.50 (including post and packing). Payment and enquiries to: SIGHTLINE, ABTT, 4 Great Pulteney Street, London W1R 3DF. Tel: 01-434 3901.



Towngate Auditorium, Basildon.



Towngate Theatre, ground floor plan.

benefit from some rethinking, and the joy of air castored units is that they are not part of the building's structure but are loose furnishings which can be slung out and replaced. They bring to theatre architecture a freedom for future adaptation that has been lost since theatre ceased to be a shell for fitting out by carpenters.

Will the auditorium decorations be entrusted to the brush techniques of the scene painter?

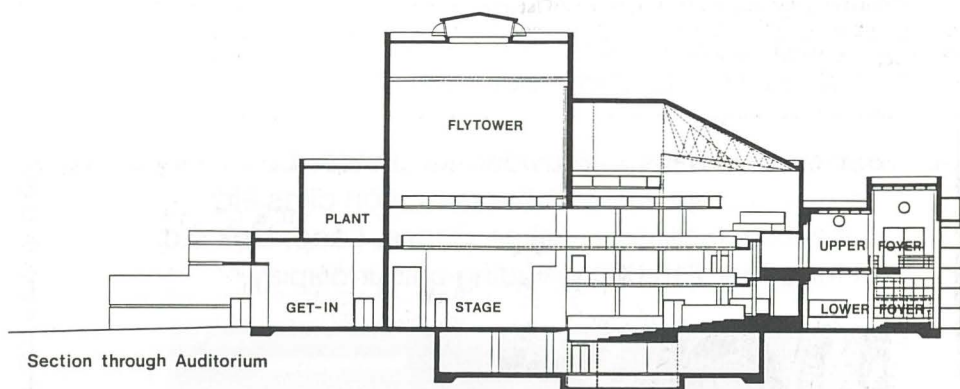
Yes, there is a welcome use of the scenic artist's craft, particularly sponging. A bit tentative perhaps, but the success will hopefully encourage more future boldness.

Will the auditorium lighting combine a welcome brightness with a subtle chiaroscuro? (Perhaps they will commission a sculptor to rediscover the chandelier in 1990 terms?)

Yes, the houselighting is definitely an advance on many recent and not-so-recent theatres. Interesting fittings devised for circle fascias but no chandelier. Well not for lighting, although a loudspeaker cluster of considerable sculptural power makes a chandelier statement, reminding us that in today's theatre the microphone and gramophone stand supreme.

Will the overall decorative approach certainly avoid municipal bland and, if possible, not err on the side of good taste?

Facing up to the directness of this question in relation to the foyers, and perhaps even a little when looking at the exterior, I have to declare



Section through Auditorium



Towngate Theatre Foyer.

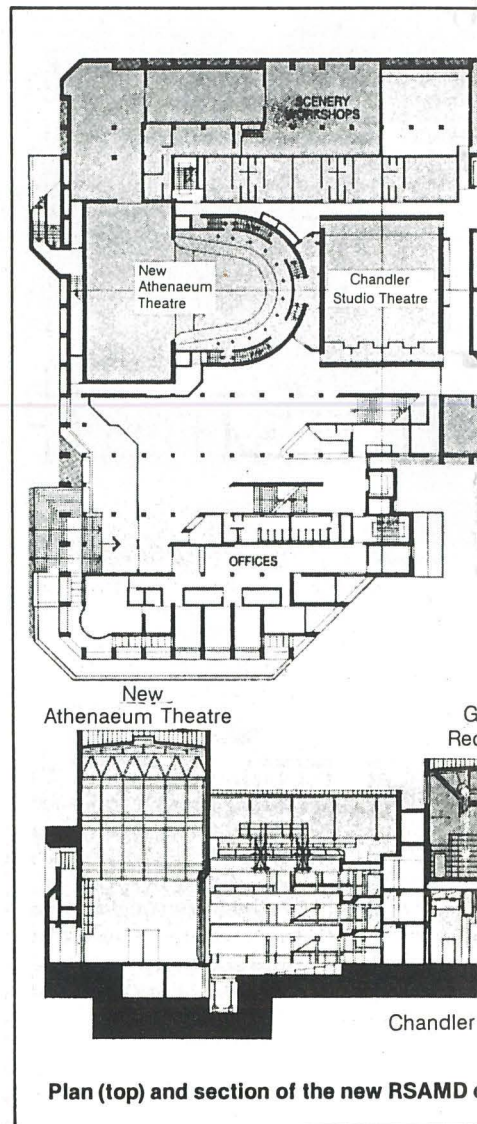
that I find just a touch of blandness, and the balance tipped a little too much towards good taste rather than honest theatrical vulgarity. But I feel confident this will be adjusted. The auditorium, however, certainly avoids totally and errs just a tiny.

These questions do rather focus on some of the trickier areas of building a new theatre. My answers are nit picks. Basildon is a very positive reference for tomorrow's theatre builders.

It is also a challenge. Are we going to pursue, as we (but not most of central Europe) have pursued for the last 150 years, maximum seating capacity? Or are we going to concen-

trate on the quality of audience experience? Another row of seats in Basildon's circles might have brought cheer to arts beauracrats but would have offered little joy for the audience who had to sit in them.

My enthusiasm for the possibilities of air casting is familiar to regular readers of this journal. The castors used at Basildon are a leap ahead of those used at Derngate. Indeed Derngate are about to convert to this new model which is so much more tolerant of floor quality that it will skim over a 2 inch gap. Air-castored seating combined with elevators allows various options at the Towngate, including a stalls floor flattened to stage level.



Plan (top) and section of the new RSAMD

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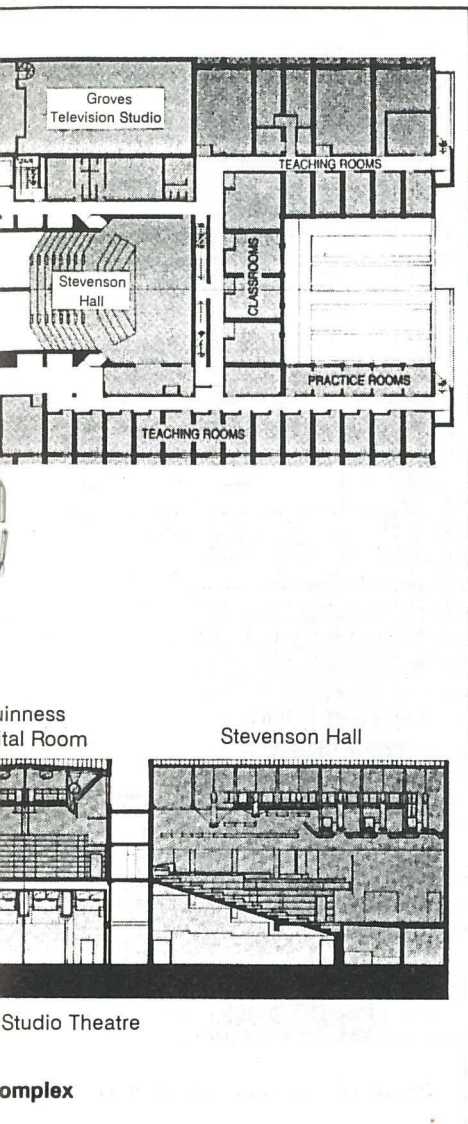
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A ceiling, which can be flown tightly vertical in two sections when not required, cuts off the flytower visually and acoustically for concerts. And in concert mode the three-tiered towers in the proscenium zone can pivot to connect the second circle of the auditorium with a gallery which runs around the stage house, below the ceiling but above the optional acoustic curtaining.

There is no auditorium ceiling as such although the service and the lighting bridges make a satisfactory visual termination. Good lighting angles from up there, and the possibility to rig lights virtually anywhere in the auditorium: hang them on the many short scaffolding bar verticals incorporated in the decorative scheme of the fascias and feed them from the circuitry concealed under the leaners. There are a lot of Strand Cantatas and the board is a 180 Channel Midilite from Eurolite.

The board in the Studio is also a Eurolite — a 60-channel Microlite II. It is difficult for me to get excited about this Studio when there is a real theatre sharing the same foyers and back-stage facilities. But that is because I am at heart a bit of an old emotional theatric tat. When I count ten and look objectively at the Studio, I can see that it is a space that will function well.



New Athenaeum Theatre, Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama.

RSAMD GLASGOW

The theatre in the new building which houses Glasgow's **Royal Scottish Academy of Music and Drama** is also a real theatre in the Italianate (or courtyard) style. This is no rediscovery but a continuation of a theatre form whose strength the RSAMD are aware of from many years in their old building.

Like Basildon, it is successful in form and function. However the Glasgow decorators have taken a risk and exercised the right to occasional failure that is the prerogative of every artist. There is a wild confusion of styles between the sumptuous brass rail hung drapery of the stall circle, the barren fascias of the upper circles and the quasi-laminate finish of the proscenium arch. But none of this permanent: it can be easily corrected at the theatre's first refurbishment.

It has a well equipped stage, almost as big as Basildon. Indeed the two theatres are basically similar in most vital dimensions. This similarity does not extend to the ancilliary spaces which are tailored to the function of each building. As a teaching facility, producing its own plays and operas, RSAMD needs and has good scenic workshop facilities, prop stores and wardrobe.

The main theatre is just one of the performance spaces which include a studio theatre (an infinitely adaptable black box with a bias towards end staging), a concert hall, recital room and television studio. This will ensure a wide range of experience of differing performance conditions for the drama, opera and music performing students.

Similarly the students on stage management courses will benefit from coping with the different technologies of the alternative stages, while the mix of lighting controls (a Galaxy, a Gemini, and two M24s) will provide varied hands-on experience. A combination of various equipment inherited from the old theatre plus a batch of new gear, particularly rich in Silhouettes, will ensure familiarity with most of the lights likely to be found by the

students when they hit the real world. And all performance areas are well equipped with audio rigs, based on Soundcraft 200B mixers.

Both Basildon and Glasgow's new theatres use a form that is well tested by time but embraces the latest technology. Their human scale is equally supportive of performers and audience. They acknowledge that a performance is a special occasion. They are real theatres.

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| | Basildon | RSAMD |
|---------------------------|----------|-------|
| Stage Depth | 12.4m | 11m |
| Pros opening [max] | 13.5m | 12.3m |
| Pros opening [min] | 9.5m | 9.1m |
| Flying sets | 38 | 30 |
| Capacity | 500-550 | 400 + |

New Towngate Theatre

Architects RENTON HOWARD WOOD LEVIN PARTNERSHIP (RHWL)

Project Architect Murray Armes

Architects Gary Reading Felix Sussman

Assistants Nick Farnell Moriam Alafia

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Colour Consultant Clare Ferraby

Quantity Surveyors WIDELL & TROLLOPE

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“The Directory of Historic American Theatres”

REVIEW BY IAIN MACKINTOSH

Historic theatres, both in Britain and America, look as if they may well be in the growth industry of the 90s, just as steam trains were in Britain in the 70s. The cast is roughly the same: the occasional scholar; the local historian; the dedicated amateur; the obsessive engineer/technician and, most important of all, the punter who is prepared to pay to see the exhibit, either static or for a ride/show. Add Tourist Boards, PRO and a TV documentary or two, and presto! — a heritage industry is born.

It was not ever so with historic theatres. The earliest motives for their restoration were economic. It was once widely thought that to save an old theatre might be cheaper than to build a new one. This led to a spate of cut price renovations with troublesome plasterwork cut away for this or that technical requirement, and almost always incongruous cinema seating. Later came the picturesque saloon bar restorations which “improved” the theatre. This usually means spray-on cream paint and brass simply everywhere in the foyer and Wilton substituted for sawdust in pit and gallery. Such overlit tarting up allows higher prices to be charged throughout the house. These restorations also give the playgoer a totally erroneous concept of 19th century elegance. As an antidote to the shortlived modernist movement in theatre architecture the results admittedly had their attraction.

Now at last we’ve matured and there’s a growing movement to do it right which means to restore, rather than merely to renovate, to respect not only the rhythms of an attractive auditorium, but also ingeniously engineered stages complete with understage as well as overstage scenic devices as well as marvelously inventive front of house arrangements. These allow the young and less than materially successful theatregoers to do their own thing in the gallery bar, dressed as they like, without having to run the gauntlet of the gin and tonic belt in the dress circle (and vice versa for those who regard playing in blue jeans as not quite *comme-il-faut*).

Invaluable research

There is now much healthy philosophising and theorising by planners, architects, designers, managers and architects alike. But none of them can get it right without research. Thus those who get their hands dirty actually restoring theatres will surely throw their sweaty nightcaps in the air at the publication of “THE DIRECTORY OF HISTORIC AMERICAN THEATRES” by Greenwood Press on behalf of The League of Historic American Theatres — a work inspired by the late Gene Chesley, orchestrated by Brooks McNamara, Chair of the League’s Commit-

tee, and John B. Heil, creator of the “historic American theatre database”, and edited by John W. Frick and Carlton Ward — roughly the same number as the core Committee of the “CURTAINS !!!” group.

The book is hardbound, 240mm × 160mm, composed by computer on its 350 pages. It costs £32.50 in UK and \$45.00 in USA. It covers the whole of the United States of America with separate alphabetical entries for each state and spans the period 1778–1915, the earliest entry being the Long Room at McCrady’s Tavern, Charleston, South Carolina, which is one of those eighteenth century fragments which are, for some extraordinary reason, always turning up in Kendal.

1915 is a departure for the League. The late Gene Chesley had originally chosen 1910. He was curious when we met some seven years ago and quizzed me on why we of “CURTAINS !!!” had chosen what seemed to him to be the arbitrary date of 1914 until I reminded him that Europe had a spot of bother in 1914, the significance of which took a year or two to cross the Atlantic. (The first world war was a boom for theatre building in America).

Within their chosen date span, the “DIRECTORY” claims to be comprehensive with 886 entries, 102 of which are theatres previously unreported, but sighted for the first time by some intrepid researcher during the course of compiling this directory. Add to this over 300 further theatres reported but not documented and you begin to see the magnitude of the task. Finally, there are notes like this: “According to a 1981 survey by West Illinois College of Fine Arts and Illinois Fine Arts Council, more than 60 undocumented opera houses still exist throughout the state”. This is over and above, presumably, the 24 entries in the main section for Illinois and 11 in the “reported but not documented” section.

Opera houses and movie theatres

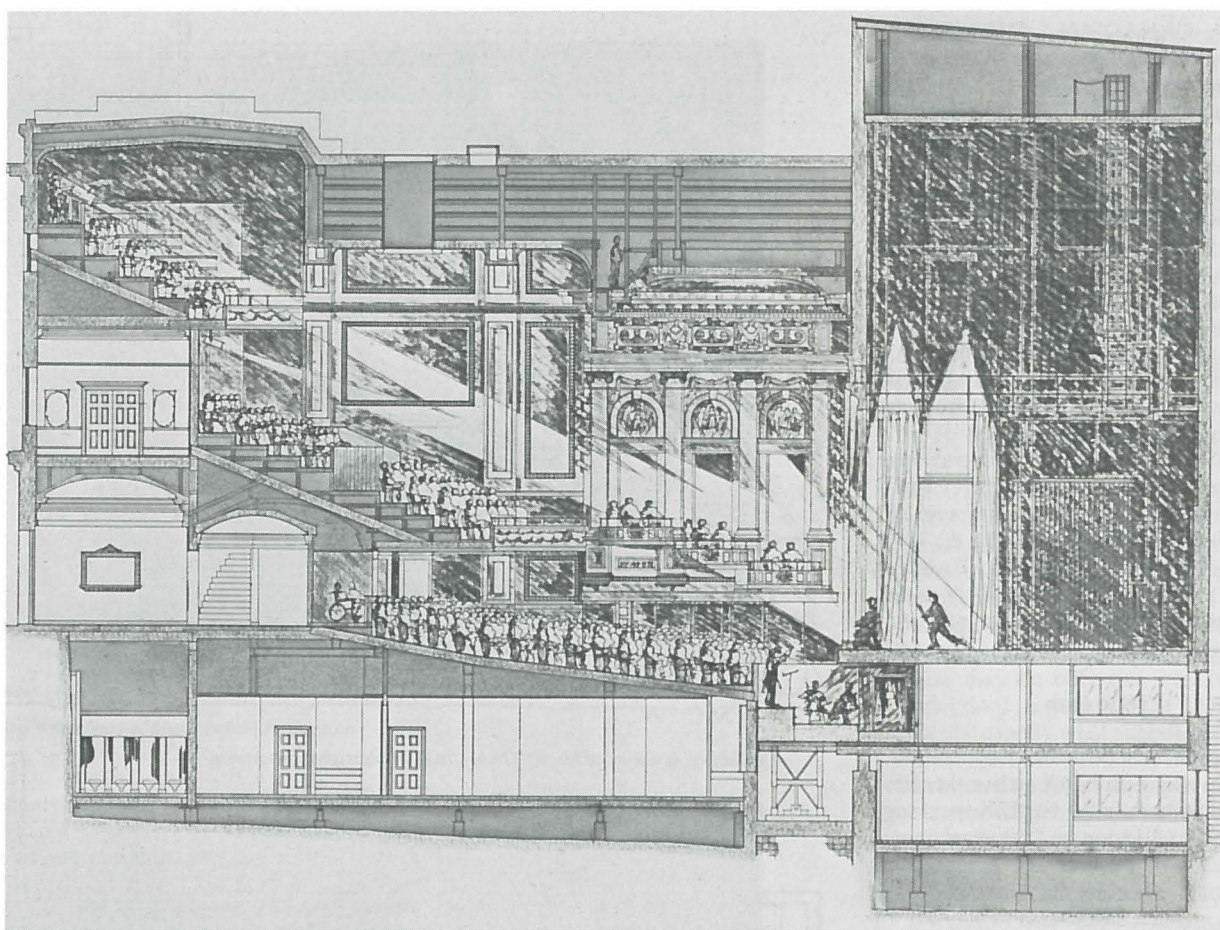
Opera houses! Immediately one thinks of U-shaped balconies, boxes for the Mayor and for Diamond Lil, and the chance that Lily Langtry or Sarah Bernhardt passed this way during some mining boom. Alas no. Generally the term “opera house” was used simply because “theatre” or “playhouse” suggested the presence of “actresses” and carried connotations of immorality. The American small town opera house was often what we in Britain would call a town hall. Most had a flat floor and a raised stage behind a modest proscenium. True, there are enchanting jewel boxes like the restored Wheeler Opera House, Aspen, Colorado (1889) and the Goodspeed

Opera House, East Haddam, Connecticut (1887) or the magnificent unrestored Sterling Opera House in Derby, also in Connecticut (1889), but these are rare.

The second floor town hall theatre (equals UK first floor), which was usually situated over municipal offices or the fire station, is only one sort of non-theatre the American historian must contend with. The second is the movie theatre. 1915 is just beyond the cusp when the movie theatre becomes identifiable as something different. The authors have run into problems of definition of “What is a theatre?” by excluding one of New York’s greatest theatres from the beginning of the century, the Regent in Harlem, now the Corinthian First Baptist Church (see “Cue” 8, page 17), simply because this building, which is undoubtedly a theatre architecturally, opened with a film, “THE LAST DAYS OF POMPEII”, in 1913. I would claim this to be a theatre because of its architectural character, not merely because it has and had a fly tower. (The physical presence of a fly tower is not enough to qualify the building as a live theatre if its form suggests it was built as a movie palace).

Frick and Ward hope “that later editions of the DIRECTORY will be able to include legitimate and vaudeville theatres erected since 1915, as well as those created solely for motion picture exhibition since the turn of the century”. When they finally do this, they will have the advantage of comparable studies on the American movie theatre. The Preservation Press of the National Trust for Historic Preservation, 1785 Massachusetts Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20036, published the pocket sized “GREAT AMERICAN MOVIE THEATRES” by David Naylor (1987), a book which incidentally claims the Regent in Harlem as “the first full size theatre built exclusively for viewing motion pictures”, thus emphasising the difficulty. The League will also have to make a concordat with the Theatre Historical Society, America’s other historical pressure group which, despite its title, is wedded to the movie palace in preference to the live theatre. At the THS annual conclave, always held at the hottest time of year (see “Cue” 8 again) an army of Bermuda shorted, Nikon slung enthusiasts, who would kill for plasterwork, convene to wonder at Moorish Rapp and Rapp, atmospheric Ebersson and endlessly urbane Lamb. But it is largely to the credit of the THS that the huge movie palaces of many an American city, seating well over 2000 have been pressed back to serve as performing arts centres. (However, such born again houses are not always as successful as their sponsors hope since with sightlines calculated for the silver screen rather than the downstage edge of the stage, they can overwhelm today’s actors, with both sheer size as well as over florid plasterwork).

Mention that America has two societies for the succour of historic theatres raises the point that Britain has none. True, Britain has a statutory body, the Theatres Trust, of which I am honoured to be a member, appointed, as are all Trustees, by the Minister of Arts. This Trust is presided over by Sir David Crouch, whose Private Member’s Bill created the



Academy of Music Theatre, Liberty University, Lynchburg. Artists impression — long section

Trust, as Chairman, and has Laurence Harbottle as Vice-Chairman and John Earl as Director. The Trust's task is awesome, "the better protection of theatres for the benefit of the nation", but its resources are slender as a result of being starved of funds by the Department of Libraries and Arts. Hence the "Friends" of the Trust is not yet organized into a self-sustaining society, as are the two American bodies which have both individual and managerial or professional members. We in Britain have some way to go to match the Americans' enthusiasm.

Definitions and classification

The definition of the authors of the American DIRECTORY of "What is a theatre?" is broader than that of "CURTAINS !!!". It is "any building which had as one of its central functions the housing of live performances including drama, musical comedy, concerts, vaudeville, magic shows, burlesque, minstrel shows, lectures, medium shows, opera, Chautauquas, circuses or similar events". Compare this with the "CURTAINS !!!" definition which allowed two classes of theatre. First there were the entries printed in Roman type which was for buildings "generally known as theatres or grand variety theatres" which had "the attributes of the conventional theatre appropriate to the age in which they were built e.g. proscenium arch, fly tower, raked stalls plus one or more balconies". The second category, printed in Italic type, was more heterogeneous and included "19th century music halls, private

theatres used by professionals, hippodromes, circus theatres, pier theatres, Kursaals and other significant flat floor theatres or halls". The League of Historic American Theatres, in contrast, has trawled deeper and landed a larger and less manageable catch, from Carnegie Hall to the smallest flat floor 'opera house'.

The Directory also avoids any qualitative assessments. "CURTAINS !!!", being a self-appointed pressure group and answerable to nobody other than their likeminded umbrella, SAVE BRITAIN'S HERITAGE, was able to create a star system of its own. ***was for "a very fine theatre or musical, etc. of the highest theatrical quality". **, as in the Michelin Guide, was for theatres which "vaut le detour" and * for "a theatre or music hall of some interest and quality". There was the additional classification of *F for those theatres for which a fine facade survived but nothing else. The League of Historic American Theatres felt that such a rating system might offend houseproud members if they failed to make *** or **. Classification in a country as large as America was impractical at this stage as it would have implied a likeminded inspectorate who had inspected every theatre.

80 photographs are included in the book, nearly half of which are interiors. These reveal some delightful surprises: a well preserved Centro Asturiano of 1914 in Tampa, Florida, so like a British music hall; the Brown Grand Theatre of 1907 at Concordia, Kansas, with its intact drop curtain depicting Napoleon at Austerlitz; Mississippi's only surviving

historic theatre, the Grand Opera at Meridian, 1890, with three tiers and boards trod by Sarah Bernhardt, Helen Hayes and Norma Shearer; the magnificent Grand Opera, Galveston, Texas, of 1894 and, of course, "my" Academy of Music at Lynchburg, Virginia, of 1905, rebuilt in 1911 ("my" in that a client of Theatre Projects, one Dr. Jerry Fallwell, is intending to restore it for the use of his Liberty University). But all this is but a taster. Take the book in your pocket when next visiting the States and you too could stumble on something truly magnificent if you can manage to avoid the much touted 'Paramount' of Middletown, U.S.A., which always has but a smidgen of plasterwork round the proscenium and usually "the best acoustics in the state".

A grand design

To be invited to review the DIRECTORY, having edited "CURTAINS !!!", is inevitably an opportunity to speculate on what might be the next step in the identification, research and ultimately the saving and bringing back to life of the best of *all* the historic theatres of the English speaking world. "CURTAINS !!!" has sold out its 5,000 copies and the only known stock is left at The Theatres Trust (10 St. Martin's Court, St. Martin's Lane, London WC2N 4AJ). The Canadian equivalent of "CURTAINS !!!" and of the American "DIRECTORY" was never printed, although it exists as a bound essay with excellent illustrations by Robert Hunter under the title "THEATRE ARCHITECTURE IN CANADA — THE STUDY

PRE-1920 CANADIAN THEATRES". (This is presumably obtainable by bona fide scholars on request from The Historic Sites and Monuments Board of Canada at Environment Canada Parks, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 1G2). In Australia I doubt if the monumental two volume work by Ross Thorne, "THEATRE BUILDING IN AUSTRALIA TO 1905" is still available as it was published in 1971 in a limited edition of only 500 copies. The League itself are already talking about a second edition of the "DIRECTORY". Now, therefore, is the moment for agreement on a common database and an agreed editorial policy of how to separate the wheat from the chaff without losing the latter.

First, the database. The League was modelled on one which Gene Cresley and I were discussing some seven years ago and which he defined in his foreword to the 1979 National list of American Historic Theatres. There are many problems. I will try to list some of them and suggest some approaches.

Date span

The intention must be to take it up to 1940, the year in which probably no live theatres opened anywhere in the English speaking world. 1940 will soon be "50 years ago" and hence will provide the perspective needed for any historic stocktaking.

Classification

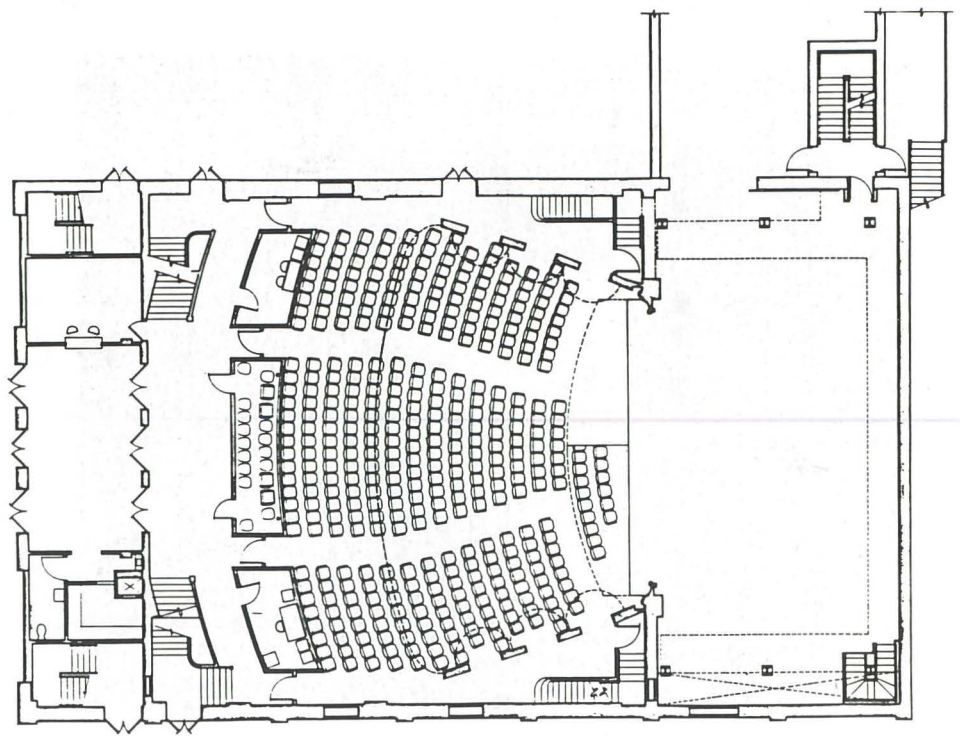
If a narrow enough description of a real theatre can be given, each country can then adopt its own appropriate secondary categories. The pre-1940 theatre probably has a proscenium arch, a separated stage, raked seating, one or more balconies and a record of being used for live performance by professional players over a substantial part of its life. In a less narrowly defined second category each country could add its flat floor upper storey opera houses, its circus theatres, its Kursaals, its Chautauquas, its movie palaces with fly towers, etc. etc.

Alterations subsequent to construction

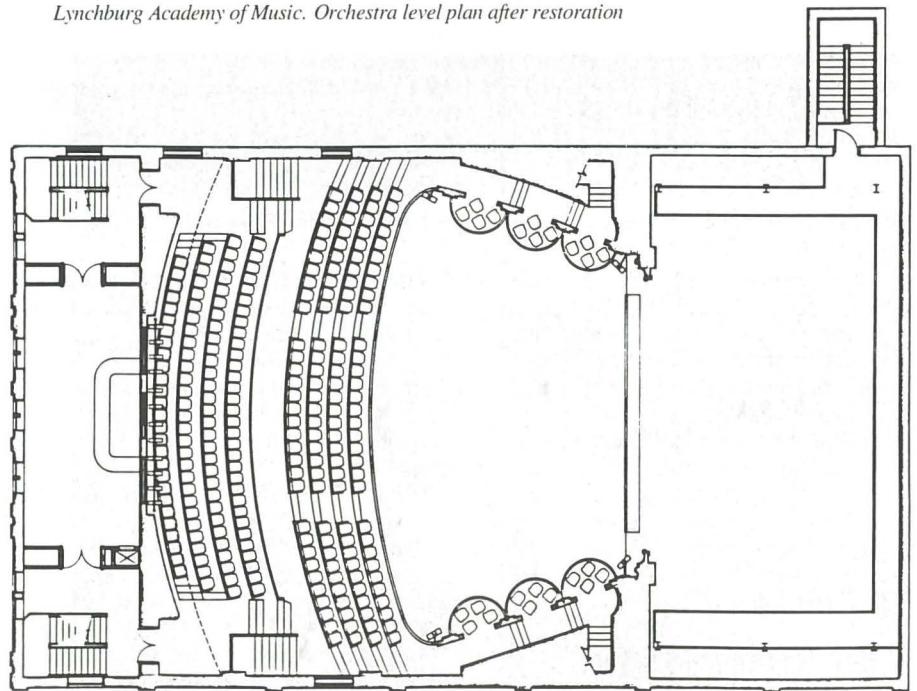
This is the greatest fault in the American database. Travel to Poughkeepsie, N.Y., as I did (see "Cue" 10) and the Bardavon Theatre of 1869 (a Yankee dactyl, forget Stratford or cosmetics) will turn out to be a second rate movie palace of 1923 with sub-Adam, sub-Lamb decoration. Not a word of this in either Poughkeepsie's fundraising leaflets or the DIRECTORY (p. 193). Both fail to point out that two walls of the fly tower are all that remains of the 1869 theatre. What is needed, therefore, is a clear entry of date and architect for both internal remodelling and external reconstruction especially when the reconstruction is as complete as at Poughkeepsie.

Seat count and size

The American DIRECTORY makes use of



Lynchburg Academy of Music. Orchestra level plan after restoration



First balcony plan after restoration

Julius Cahn's official Theatre Guides published between 1819 and 1914 which are the American equivalent of our early Stage Guides. An asterisk is used when the information comes from this source. "CURTAINS !!!", on the other hand, tried to standardise seat count to modern spacing standards, both for restored theatres and possible candidates for restoration. Perhaps we need both the original capacity and the new capacity so that comparisons of size can be made in the reader's mind.

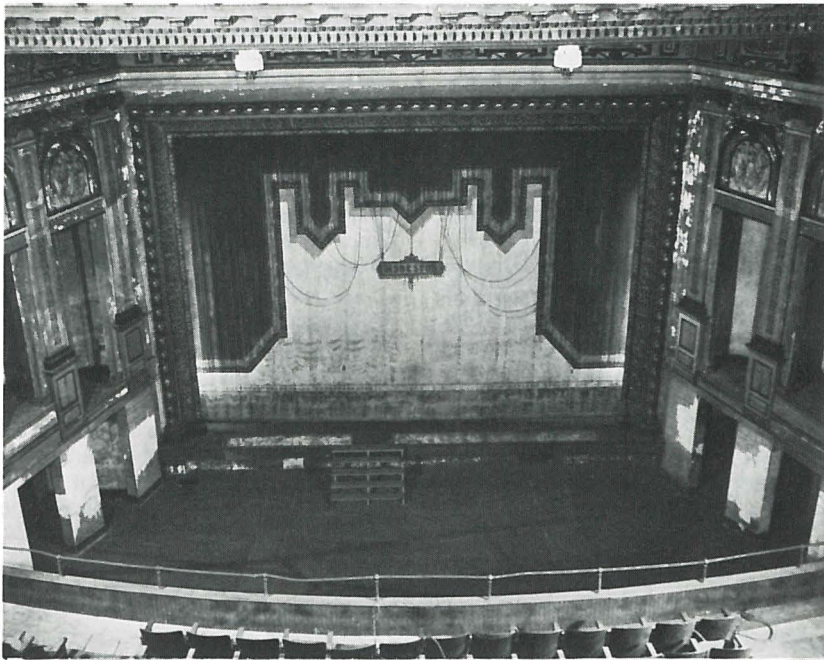
Architectural character

There is not way of avoiding architectural

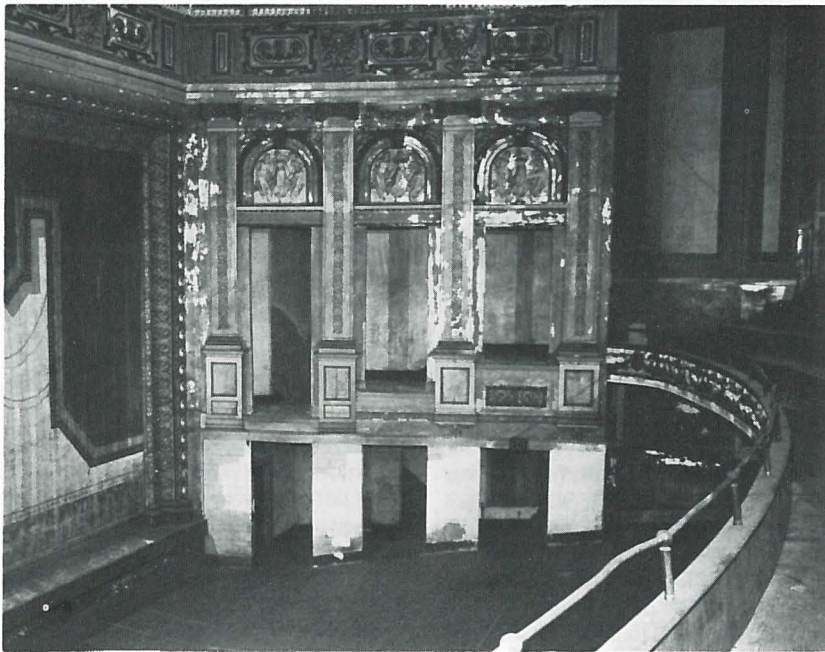
technical terms, especially in turn of the century decorated interiors. Thus there will be no alternative but to educate those who write entries in the use of terms and perhaps provide the reader with a glossary. In this game you have to learn to tell a frieze from a dado, a Corinthian pilaster from a cupola. In addition, any attempt also to exclude value judgements on a style of the theatre will fail. Value judgements involve enthusiasm and enthusiasm is what the subject is all about.

Classification of intrinsic worth

With "CURTAINS !!!" the three stars chose themselves as did the zero rated



Lynchburg's Academy of Music before restoration



Theatre Newcastle's two restorations of the stage area has brought to the fore the question of stage machinery. How many Americans know the importance of the understage machinery at New York's New Amsterdam Theatre (itself one of the world's great theatres) which would have made it as ideal for "THE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA" as was Her Majesty's in London? In remote American theatres there are more grooves extant than Richard Leacroft ever dreamed of. Hence a special classification of authentic stages seems needed.

Restoration or renovation

The DIRECTORY OF HISTORIC AMERICAN THEATRES implies that "restoration" is a state to which all theatres should aspire and that once reached, or even considered, all is fine and dandy. However, some of us in Britain begin to feel that improvements to the auditorium and front of house may be only one step better than demolition. A new DIRECTORY might describe exactly what alterations have been included in a restoration by describing how the restoration differs from the original. The next generation might, after all, want to put it all back.

So, publishers come forward. The proposal is for a series of handleable guide books of the best pre-1940 theatres of the English speaking world, supported by computer generated lists and descriptions of every fragment for library use, all analysed, all to a standard format. Gene Chesley would have approved. First America, Canada and Britain, and then Australia and India. This generation could be the one that took stock and restored theatre architecture to its rightful place as the greatest secular celebration of the community of man. For now, buy the League of Historic American Theatres DIRECTORY and clamour for a second edition of "CURTAINS !!!".

entries. One or two stars are more difficult to distinguish, but if inspectors' assessments are accompanied by photographs of the interior from more than one angle, then an editorial assessment of the auditorium's intrinsic worth should certainly be attempted. Whether a separate assessment should be made of the facade or the public areas, or even of the degree of success of the facade or the public areas, or even of the degree of success of the renovation, is another matter. It would certainly be controversial.

Photographic archive

There once was a book published on the

theatres of New York which contained not a single interior photograph, but an exterior of everything. The DIRECTORY is an improvement on this, but not all that much in that there are only 16 interior photographs in the whole book. Any future guidebook would be incomplete without a photograph of the interiors of all the major entries. Ideally, for major theatres, there should be a picture of the theatre interior as it is today and a drawing, engraving or photograph of how it once was in order that comparisons can be made.

Stage archaeology

The now well known saga of the Tyne

Time to share our theatres' resources — and their managements' workloads

Much is talked about the shortage of 'product', or at least of good 'product', in British theatre today. Does this stem from a shortage of cash, or of talent, or something else?

Cue went to listen to our major reps, touring theatre companies and receiving theatres debating the issue recently, and found that there is a need to share resources of all kinds, especially productions. These could be London fringe successes or joint-venture productions in the regions.

But more fundamentally, management structures need to be reviewed in order to cope with growing workloads and increasingly complex responsibilities. ANTHONY McCALL reports.

When you crack a joke at your host's expense, you're bound to get laughs. At the Arts Council's second conference for the theatre profession in late May, Gillian Hanna of Monstrous Regiment theatre company began her talk with this endearing inside view of life as one of the Council's clients.

"Working for the Arts Council is like being a mushroom", she began. "You spend your life in the dark. Then every once in a while the door is opened and someone throws a bucket of shit over you!" Judging by the laughs she got, she must have struck a responsive chord.

However, despite a few such lighthearted moments, the day got down to discussing a number of important issues. Chief among these were the need to release the job of artistic director from its present financial and administrative burdens, which grow more onerous and endless every day; and the growing advantages of co-productions, to all kinds of theatre management.

Sir Brian Rix, who chaired the day, sounded like one of those actors who ends up on the wrong Hollywood set be mistake. Having learned his lines from another script, he had no considered views or information to offer; only ad libs about his life in the commercial theatre — which wasn't the subject under discussion. Delegates got the distinct impression that Sir Brian did not have his finger on the pulse.

The title of the one-day conference, held at Birmingham Rep, was: "Vision and Direction". It was organised by Ian Brown, Arts Council Drama Director. He invited all subsidised theatres, theatre companies and regional arts authorities to send their artistic director, administrator or a board member. The aim was to look at: "imaginative attitudes in programming theatre, both building-based and touring, as we enter the 1990's". He went on. "The focus of the day will be on the release of the energies, talent and potential which now exist in our theatre". By and large, that aim was fulfilled, and the exchanges that took place, though occasionally heated, were constructive. The day provided a useful platform to air the news and views from around the

country; a number of grouses, the occasional praise, and above all several suggestions. All points were noted by drama department staff who were dotted around the auditorium that formed the conference hall. The main points are outlined below.

The National Theatre's director designate, Richard Eyre was first to take the stage. "We used to talk about audiences", he said, "now we talk about the marketplace. If you look at West Germany, enviable though it may be to have state subvention at such a high level, it has bred an arrogance and complacency towards the audience. This is not the ideal model," he suggested.

"We are now in a period of pluralist funding", he went on. (This phrase was to recur many times during the day). "Naturally the NT is in a ridiculously privileged position, although even we have our headaches. But if we don't all concern ourselves with the small theatres" (how will they get incentive funding, for instance, find sponsorship or get into merchandising?), "then we will be entering a 'feudal period' of the big ones surviving and the others dying". "The famous phrase 'the right to fail' now sounds a little sanctimonious and self-indulgent", he felt.

"But we must also have the right to our R&D (research and development — he borrowed the term from industry, with a touch of irony, one felt). These eventually produce commercial successes — and I stress this point over and over again to get the point through."

When he was working as artistic director of the Nottingham Playhouse 10 years ago, he once agonised with Ken Campbell over the appropriate content of the forthcoming season there. Suddenly Campbell looked up and said: "Oh I see, you're after brochure theatre". Eyre had inadvertently become over-concerned with other commitments — like keeping audiences happy and other non-creative considerations. (Campbell's retort raised many chuckles). Richard Eyre went on to quote Voltaire: "Whoever fails to support his theatre, fails to support his country", and

then offered his own three-point test for choosing the most creative work for staging.

1. Ask: can this play be done in another theatre? Or can it be done in the West End? We must ask this kind of question, he reminded, because that is what subsidy is about — putting on works that are *different*."
2. Do not get drawn into 'critics' theatre'. They are forever urging that someone dig up masterpieces of Belgian theatre, or whatever. But we must keep in mind how to present the classics for today's genera-

'Is it realistic that the person who is artistic director should also be expected to be in touch with the complexities of modern funding? Likewise, can one person administering a small company have the time to chase down all the worthwhile opportunities?'

tion, not just for the critics who go to the theatre every night of their lives."

3. "We have to be theatrical. Ask: what is it that we can do in a theatre space? What's the 'theatreness' of the piece, which can't be done on TV or in another creative form. We must find new ways; re-invent theatre."

Clare Venables, Sheffield Crucible's artistic director, pointed to a change of spirit in the last 20 years. The former "liberal consensus" had been replaced by the radical right. We've had to learn to "box clever", she said. "We have to resist indoctrination by today's values, just like a hostage has to learn to resist taking on the values and views of his captors while he is kept prisoner, holding on fiercely to his inner values". Referring to Arts Minister Richard Luce's description of those who believe in only state subvention as being "dinosaurs" and a dying breed, she called this "a lot of old tosh". This was "Pure double-speak", she said. This government was like the playground bully who takes the ball away, she added. The only defence was to keep producing more and more balls until bully tires of taking them away. Confrontation was pointless, since the bully would win every time.

Pluralist funding raised its head again with John Ashford, director of The Place theatre, London. Unlike Venables, he welcomed this development, since it encouraged greater diversity and especially unusual and often foreign productions, he thought. Citing the kinds of work not seen in this country (and not given due funding, he felt), was Asian, black, Chinese, and children's theatre, international

co-productions, small-scale opera, dance, mime and circus and variety work, to name but some of the major kinds. Commercial and institutional sponsors both overseas and in the UK were willing, however, to support these art forms, in his experience. To illustrate the insularity and narrowness of our thinking, he reminded the conference that there was not a theatre in this country which could put on Peter Brook's "Mahabharata", which was formerly performed in Glasgow's cavernous former Transport Museum recently.

He then moved his attention to the needs of today's theatre building — or company. "Is it realistic", he asked, "that the person who is artistic director should also be expected to be aware of and in touch with the complexities of modern funding? I think not. Likewise, can one person who is administering a small company have the time to chase down all the worthwhile opportunities that present themselves?"

Tony Clark, who has helped break new ground with Manchester's Contact Theatre in the past four years of his artistic directorship, offered a few insights into their success. Their early thinking had been how to play safe, and avoid taking risks with their programme. In short, it had been pretty woolly thinking, he said. This soon gave way to "passion, daring and experimentation" he added. Actors from all cultures had become involved with Contact, working together and exploring the nature of Britain's "heterogenous society". This had worked very successfully with audiences, he reported. In the search for new forms of expression, the company would continue to try to "break the rules". This was what made them different, distinctive.

Today's cautious, don't-rock-the-boat atmosphere, as epitomised by the Alan Strachan affair at Greenwich Theatre, was like 1930's Germany, according to Philip Hedley, director of the Theatre Royal, Stratford East, speaking in question time. "For your own sake, they say, do not put on anything that is too controversial on the subject of homosexuality", Hedley said.

Adding grist to the mill concerning the current obsession with commercialism and sponsorship, Richard Eyre related this anecdote, from the floor: Joseph Papp, the legendary New York producer had told him how he had spent two hours in the company of the Arts Council Secretary General, "Luke Hitler" (spoken in Papp's Eli Wallach-like voice). "He spent one hour and 55 minutes talking about sponsorship and merchandising, and five minutes about art!" exclaimed Papp, "What is going on in your country?"

Next it was Neil Wallace's turn on stage, festivals director at Glasgow. Obviously agreeing with John Ashford's internationalist outlook, he referred to "the chronic insularity of our theatre in this country". He laid into the traditional-minded, mainstream theatre, which was, he said, uniquely out-of-touch with other forms and approaches adopted beyond our shores. Our drama-based writing theatre was fine, but what of the exciting new forms of theatre using mime, dance and numerous other more dynamic and visually exciting forms? For us, they did not even exist. And we avoid collaborating with

foreign directors and performers, he said.

Quoting Sir Thomas Beecham's epigram: "Why engage all those second-rate foreign conductors when there are so many third-rate British ones!" he urged theatre managers to get out and travel, to see what is going on elsewhere, and to be excited and surprised by what there is to see. He offered contacts and addresses to anyone who was interested.

Lastly, he said, the repertory and receiving network of theatres had "enormous potential" for taking in medium-scale touring productions of foreign companies, who could often get foreign sponsors to put up costs and guarantees. We should put pressure on the funding bodies to encourage these exchange deals, he said.

Alby James, artistic director of Temba Theatre Company, spoke eloquently about the

'Five companies formed an umbrella group that represented the majority of touring theatre in the region. This gave them all clout and raised their profile, by providing a common voice on policies and funding'.

"dynamic relationship" between performers and their audiences — as opposed to other art forms. But he echoed Neil Wallace's sentiments that the most *exciting* and dynamic things to be seen in this country were at the Glasgow and Edinburgh festivals, where foreign companies performed. It was also patronising and narrow, he said, to look only for "exotic" shows when shopping in Europe or further afield for things to stage here in the UK. The underlying premise there was worrying, he felt.

And why were revivals seen as such a corner-stone, he asked. "The theatre is not a museum or an old curiosity shop. So what is *new* about our present work?" And why were we so rigid also in our ideas on casting, where black people are only expected (or allowed) to play black parts? "There is not enough sense of sharing and exchanging of experiences," he said. The view was supported by a number of others, who called for a deeper, more personal look at the complex, and therefore interesting nature of today's multi-racial society. Racial stereotypes, like social stereotypes, were so old hat. There was so much that was new and interesting around us — but not in the theatre. Why were we so dull, so unaware of the world around us? "Maybe adventurousness is something we need to talk about a lot more in this country", he suggested.

Andrew Welch, general manager of the Theatre Royal, Plymouth, brought the topic of co-productions squarely on to the agenda. They had arranged lots of co-productions with the regional companies in the south west, to their own advantage as well as that of the touring companies. Indeed, a consortium had been formed to allow the theatre to have more control over the kind of productions mounted

for it — and to have more of them. Using their own resources, the Theatre Royal used to manage some 12 weeks of their own productions; using the consortium and pooling resources, they now run 36 weeks a year with productions which they have at least some hand in staging. "We have now started our own co-production company, which will go out on the road with its own productions at the end of this year", he announced.

From Penzance to Taunton, people travelled for up to two hours to see a show. It therefore seemed to make sense to build up these audiences with the touring companies of the region. "The more opportunities audiences get to go to the theatre, in all its forms, the more they will want to come back again", he said. It was thus also a useful marketing exercise. The five distinct companies in the consortium formed an umbrella group that brought in £40,000 per annum, none of which was possible before. In addition, the press, regional and local authorities and others took more notice of this grouping, because they now represented the majority of touring theatre in the region. This gave them all clout and raised their profile, by providing a common voice on policies and funding. Such ingenuity might seem tricky to the funding bodies, but it looked pretty good from where the theatre companies were sitting.

Co-productions between small touring companies and larger receiving theatres had benefits for both parties, explained Gillian Hanna and Carin Mistry of Monstrous Regiment and Joint Stock theatre companies, respectively. But there were usually problems as well. The touring company tended to get subsumed into the larger receiving theatre with its bigger staff, resources and levels of equipment.

Touring theatres were flexible, receiving theatres usually weren't. And each theatre was different: different personalities, approaches, technical arrangements and artistic direction. So not much was learned, in practice, that could be used at the next theatre to mutual benefit. Each time was the first time, virtually. However, the advantages did outweigh the drawbacks, they both felt, notwithstanding those hassles.

Bath Theatre Royal's director, Stephen Barry was the conference's only representative from commercial theatre. Like Plymouth, they had formed their own production company, in response to the shortage of "good" touring shows. Some shows were of excellent quality, and other touring production were . . . well, poor, to be frank. So they floated a company of their own and raised £150,000. With showbusiness shareholders like BBC's Marmaduke Hussey and Ringo Starr, they had created a first-class vehicle for touring shows, which had now developed an enviable degree of expertise. It was like the recently announced Upstart company (sometimes known as False Start, he added lightheartedly), but on a smaller scale. If any theatres were interested in discussing funding for touring a show, they would be interested to talk, he said. For example, one that had been successful in rep. And they might be able to help with sponsorship, too.

Comments from the floor asked, for example, why London fringe successes were rarely, if ever, seen outside the capital. This seemed a ridiculous waste of resources, especially when new work was at a premium in the regions. Others noted with regret that no commercial managements had been invited to take part in the day's discussions, apart from TMA president, Rupert Rhymes. This was an unfortunate oversight, in retrospect.

Plymouth's co-production with Foco Novo theatre company was a great success, according to the latter. They went to places they hadn't dreamed of going before, they said, and they had been "spoiled, by having access to staff such as stage carpenters! It had all worked very well. "Small companies can offer the new writing that reps' studios cannot afford", summed up Foco Novo's speaker. "So let's get together".

David Forder of the Mercury, Colchester, remarked to everyone's common amusement that he had begun life as an 'artistic director', years ago; then he had changed into a 'producer'; and finally he had become an 'administrator'. Was this progress, he wondered, or just further proof that financial concerns had become more and more important to top theatre management?

As if drawing the conference's different viewpoints together, Richard Eyre pointed to the role that Michael Rudman was going to play at the NT: he would carry out the function of a producer, working alongside him, the artistic director.

By day's end this seemed to be the shape of things to come.

From Mr. John Lloyd

Dear Sir,

I was very pleased to see that in a magazine devoted to the theatre you found space for a lively article on piers, in your last issue.

Piers have been — and still are — the home of many theatres, and they are rich in theatrical history. It is true that piers have suffered badly from fires, storms, impact from vessels and especially from neglect. But I do believe that the decline of the past twenty years is beginning to be reversed. At the time of writing, I can think of quite a number of piers which are being, or are shortly going to be, restored. Apart from Bangor which Mr McCall discusses, I can mention the following where the prospects are good: Shanklin, Ventnor, West Pier at Brighton, Clevedon (cited by Mr McCall), Southend, and there are undoubtedly others.

The quotation from Peter Hepple Editor of *The Stage* is interesting — that "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". The key here is "bring back into fashion". There also have to be some activities with a very wide popular appeal, if the figures are to add up and repairs continuously maintained. But this does not preclude, in certain areas, including more cultural and historical attractions.

A small point of correction: the pier at Nice was unfortunately burnt down many years ago.

In regard to the West Pier at Brighton, the situation has been resolved for the time being. English Heritage and the National Heritage Memorial Fund are together granting the West Pier Trust £700,000 to make the pier safe for 5 years. Meanwhile Merlin International have been invited to make proposals for a development at the root end which it is intended could generate enough income to help bridge the gap between the money needed and the grants likely to be available from official sources. This is a matter for the West Pier Trust; the National Piers Society is not involved in the details of local campaigns.

However, a national pressure group for piers is urgently needed and that is why the National Piers Society was formed. We urge all who care for piers to join and thus strengthen our clout with the powers that be!

Yours faithfully,

John Lloyd, Chairman, National Piers Society
14 Freshfield Place, Brighton BN2 2BN

CORRESPONDENCE

From Professor Anthony Field CBE FCA

Dear Sir,

If the report from *Autolycus* (Cue May/June 1988) correctly reports Anthony Everett's remarks then they are incorrect. The productions of "My Fair Lady" and "Oklahoma!" produced by Leicester Haymarket Theatre, Cameron Mackintosh and Arts Council were not "just to try out London-bound musicals around the major touring theatres". They were conceived as productions for Leicester as part of their annual programme, enhanced with extra funds from Cameron and the Arts Council to provide productions which could then tour to Manchester, Newcastle, Liverpool, Oxford, Birmingham, Bristol and Cardiff so that these venues could have the high-standard product that their refurbished buildings sorely needed. The later, unexpected exploitation of these productions in London surprised and delighted us as they provided a return of funds to the Arts Council.

What appears to be the problem with *Upstart* is that it has been inaugurated "to provide the needs of the regional theatres" (says Anthony Everett) rather than having a base of creativity. This reflects the present Arts Council trend to back projects rather than talent. With all the touring work being done by Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Company, Anthony Quayle's Compass Company and Eric Standidge's Co-Producers the money being put into *Upstart* appears to be a mistake. Joanna Hole (of Co-Producers) recently wrote that "if the Arts Council had given £50,000 to each of the five major touring companies now struggling to make ends meet there would have been more good theatre for more people.

Yours faithfully,

ANTHONY FIELD
152, Cromwell Tower
Barbican, London

From Mr Richard York and Mr Frank Woods

Dear Sir,

We write to thank you on behalf of the Association of British Theatre Technicians and the Association of Consultant Architects for Anthony McCall's extensive and considered report on ARTSBUILD '88. His comments on the day's events are in themselves a useful contribution to the subject and we trust they have been widely read.

There are two specific points that we should like to pick up.

The first is that we have to agree with Mr McCall's judgement that the day seemed somewhat short on the subject of just what types of people visit our arts centres and what facilities and architecture they like. Also, of course, the reasons why those who do not visit arts centres are staying away and what would attract them in the future. Perhaps the omission is in itself an explanation as to why building for the arts is both difficult and not guaranteed to give satisfaction. Possibly the ABTT and the ACA should stimulate another discussion on that issue alone.

The second point is one of disagreement. We do not think the "whole day was based on the premise that arts should be subsidised"; and the main thrust of the contributions of Kim Heyworth, William McKee and Anamaria Wills was the capacity of the Arts to generate real economic substance for the communities they serve — a point amply borne out by the newly published report of the Policy Studies Institute.

The response of those who were present at ARTSBUILD '88 suggest that it served its primary purpose of stimulating renewed interest in how the performing arts are to be housed and we do not doubt that both the ACA and the ABTT will continue to explore this issue amongst many.

Yours faithfully,

Richard York and Frank Woods
Chairman ABTT Chairman ACA

From Harry Nash

Dear Sirs,

I read with interest your *Autolycus* story in the issue May/June 1988.

I must say it was nice to see my name mentioned, and I would certainly be interested in taking further the question of Seminars run in conjunction with the Arts Council — or anyone else who wished to explore the question of opening a dialogue on financial and business matters. Your columnist had a good idea which I look forward to investigating.

Yours faithfully

Harry Nash
Senior Partner (Theatre Clients)

REIDing SHELF

The point that shifts in Peter Brook's **THE SHIFTING POINT** in his point of view. Like most people in theatre, and the life that it mirrors and questions, Brook's work stems from total commitment to a point of view. But unlike so many pundits in both life and theatre, he allows that a viewpoint may shift and indeed should be encouraged to do so.

The book records a theatric journey with the experiments and their discoveries unfolding in a sequence which is almost biographical, except that the interaction between the man and his work is somehow incomplete so that Brook the person remains a shadow. However this is surely deliberate: what he wants to tell us, and what we need to know, is what he has discovered about theatre rather than what he has discovered about himself in the process.

But it is not so much what he has discovered about theatre that is important but what he has helped us, through his work, to discover for ourselves. And this book allows our discovery process to continue because its pages are alive with truths. Many such truths are incompatible, but this is a major stimulation for ongoing search. Perhaps the only unassailable truth is that *For a point of view to be any use at all, one must commit oneself totally to it, one must defend it to the very death. Yet, at the same time, there is an inner voice that murmurs: "don't take it too seriously. Hold on tightly, let it go lightly."*

Brecht's theatre work was based on a point of view that did not appear to shift to any major extent, although perhaps his approach was not quite so consistent as many of his more doctrinaire followers would wish us to believe. So it is interesting that John Fuegi in **BERTOLT BRECHT** should preface his preface with a Peter Brook quotation: *Brecht is the Key figure of our time, and all theatre work today at some point starts or returns to his statements and achievement.*

Fuegi's book, subtitled *Chaos According to Plan*, analyses Brecht the Director, not so much as a theorist whose pronouncements have motivated countless disciples, but as a working professional with a show to get on. So we find him not only solving staging problems

in the rehearsal room but also wheeling and dealing to protect his theatre and promote his career. And it is unique to read in a book on Brecht that the emotional objectivity which he sought from his audience did not entirely extend to his own personal relationships with his actors in rehearsal.

This latest addition to the extensive Brecht bibliography is most welcome and strongly recommended for the way in which it clarifies as a practical man of the theatre someone who, as a 'Key figures of our time', currently stands in danger of becoming idolised as a philosopher with an unimpeachable ideology.

HOW'S THAT FOR TELLING 'EM, FAT LADY? is the second volume of Simon Gray's agony diary of the transformation of his play 'The Common Pursuit' from text to performance. *The Unnatural Pursuit* recorded birth traumas at the Lyric Hammer-smith and the latest instalment reflects the play's remodelling in America west and east. The traumas have something of an American accent this time, but there is enough similarity to confirm that theatric paranoia is international at its core.

As the piece is currently enjoying west end success, there is hopefully more to come. And if it reaches television we can doubtless look forward to an account of playwright's paranoia interacting with a medium where funding is more secure but schedules less flexible. Unless the stress and alcohol, which on the evidence of this diary appear to provide an essential support system for his creativity, choose to exercise their inherent mephistopholean twist.

Meanwhile Gray's diaries capture the stark reality of theatre. The instant alternations between highs and lows, successes and failures, goodies and baddies. The veneer of politeness used equally to mask both venom and compassion, often simultaneously. All problems attributable to the victim of the moment. Theatre holding a mirror up to backstage nature: neither destroying nor exaggerating, just focussing.

A revised edition of the late Richard Leacroft's **THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH PLAYHOUSE** has appeared in both hard and paperback editions. This is good news because Leacroft's two major books (this one nationally and *Theatre and Playhouse* internationally) are essential reading indispensable for anyone wishing an insight into how our theatre buildings developed. Leacroft's objective writing is free from the polemic emotions that affect so many of us (mea culpa) when we write about the theatre forms that we passionately care about. But Leacroft cared too, although he was able to channel his passion into his unique cutaway drawings which not only give a simultaneous impression of both the outside and inside of the theatres, but are the result of painstaking research. Not for Leacroft the hopeful as-

sumptions that many of us are prepared to make. If a detail is in a Leacroft drawing, it is there as a result of deep consideration. This book is, quite simply, indispensable for anyone who cares about theatre architecture.

Parts of Julian Hilton's **PERFORMANCE** may seem surprisingly polemic for an analysis intended for students of theatre studies at degree level. But he has obviously chosen to write in this way in order to stimulate debate about the process of taking a dramatic text from page to stage. His book will serve this aim very well provided that it is read in parallel with daily practical experience of rehearsal and performance. But I would like my students to read Peter Brook before and after.

It is only really painless dentistry, antibiotics and aeroplanes that stop me wishing I was an eighteenth century chap. In my romantic dreams I conveniently gloss over the probability that I would have been mining coal rather than being pleased by the band at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket or taking my leisure in Vauxhall Gardens. So I have muchly enjoyed Mollie Sands detective work for the Society for Theatre Research on **THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PLEASURE GARDENS OF MARYLEBONE**. I read it while listening to original instrument recordings of the top of the 1737-1777 pops and was truly pleased.

THE SHIFTING POINT. Forty Years of Theatrical Exploration: 1946-1987. Peter Brook. Methuen. £14.95 (UK)

BERTOLT BRECHT. Chaos, According to Plan. John Fuegi. Cambridge University Press (Directors in Perspective series) (paperback) (UK)

HOW'S THAT FOR TELLING 'EM, FAT LADY? A Short Life in the American Theatre. Simon Gray. Faber and Faber. £5.95. (paperback) (UK)

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ENGLISH PLAYHOUSE. An Illustrated Survey of Theatre Building in England from Mediaeval to Modern Times. Richard Leacroft. Methuen. £25 (UK)

PERFORMANCE. Julian Hilton. Macmillan (New Directions in Theatre Series) £20 (UK). £6.95 (paperback) (UK)

THE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY PLEASURE GARDENS OF MARYLEBONE. Mollie Sands. The Society for Theatre Research. £9.75. (UK)



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The ACT DROPS

DAVID WILMORE

When the Tyne Theatre and Opera House first opened its doors on the 23rd September 1867 the public were admitted to an auditorium of outstanding beauty as depicted by this atmospheric if a little disproportionate engraving by Ralph Hedley. What the illustration doesn't show is the Act Drop which was especially painted for the theatre by Charles Fox.

We have a description of this however taken from the Newcastle Daily Chronicle of the time (September 24, 1867).

"The mouth of the Tyne on a breezy afternoon Tynemouth Lighthouse, Priory and Castle with the bold rocks towering above the famous "Black Middens", stand prominently out on one side, while behind and towards the centre the eye ranges up the harbour and takes in the Collingwood Monument, the High and Low lights, North Shields, South Shields, and the pier on the extreme right. In front a variety of vessels are seen entering and leaving the harbour, including a Dutch schooner outward bound; a steamer going into port; an English brig tacking close in; and small craft, floating wreck, and busy sea-gulls diversify the scene. A rich gilt semi-circular framework surrounds the picture, and at the base the Newcastle arms, with the motto, "Fortiter defendit triumphans", supported at each corner by figures of Old Father Tyne and Neptune. The picture is bold and free in treatment, and the colouring harmonises admirably with the gay appearance of the interior."

Act Drops, as the term suggests, were lowered between acts of a performance or during long

scene-changes. Today very few authentic examples remain which is hardly surprising considering the constantly changing nature of a stage. Thankfully a few have survived, the Royal Theatre, Northampton has an original presently in storage, whilst the Gaiety Theatre, Douglas, Isle of Man still uses its 1900 Act Drop, painted by William Helmsley, almost every day.

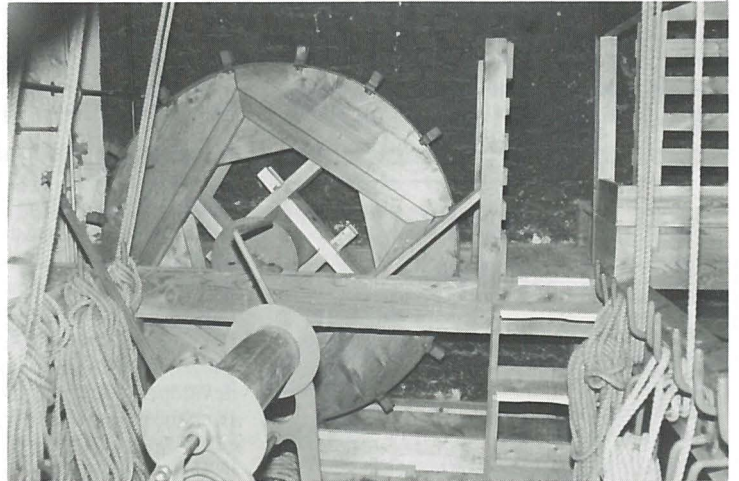
Although the original Act Drop at the Tyne Theatre was replaced around the turn of the century with a safety curtain, the mechanism which had been installed to operate the cloth was still extant prior to the disastrous fire at the theatre on Christmas Day 1985. It consisted of a large timber drum with a short shaft mounted on the stage left upper fly floor tight against the proscenium wall. This has now been restored incorporating all the original metalwork which was salvaged from the burned out fly tower. An endless controlling line passed around the outer rim of the drum between a series of metal v-like forks, it then descended to the stage from where it could be operated. The lines which were attached to the timber frame of the Act Drop canvas ran up to the grid and then down to be wrapped around the timber stakes of the drum. Assistance was provided by a counterweight suspended from a rope attached to the shaft. This meant that there was no mechanical advantage produced to assist the operator, it simply relied upon perfect counterweighting. The obvious drawback to this system is that the controlling line is not actually attached to anything it merely relies upon the friction obtained from running in the v-forks. If the counterweighting was incorrect the results could be disastrous!

This method was almost certainly adopted because it allowed the operator to raise and lower the Act Drop quickly, a conventional drum and shaft would produce a gearing of perhaps 8:1 which would inevitably slow down its movement.

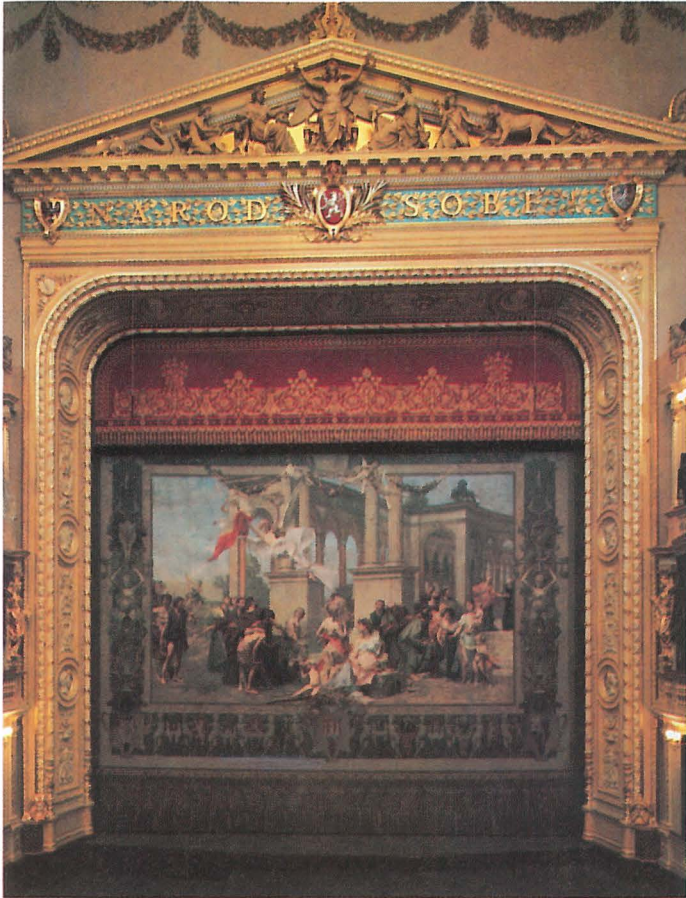
After the fire of 1985 a new safety curtain was installed at the Tyne Theatre which is clad with sheets of steel, functional but economical on aesthetics. It would therefore seem practical to attempt to recreate the original Act Drop and attach it to the safety curtain. With this in mind Heather Higton has spent several months researching the descriptions and contemporary illustrations of the view described by the newspaper and has produced this very stunning design reproduced here. In recent years this kind of Act Drop/Safety Curtain relationship has been utilised to very good effect at such places as the Theatre Royal, Nottingham and the Ashcroft Theatre, Croydon. It must be said that anything is better than staring at a bare sheet of steel! Yet the origins of the Act Drop were not merely based upon decorative screens conceived to hide the frenzied activity of a hundred stage carpenters. They are most definitely in their own right intended to contrast with the three-dimensional architecture of the auditorium. So much has been said in recent years about the so called picture-frame, proscenium theatre, and yet little regard has been paid to the canvas contained within the frame, namely the Act Drop. Whilst the performance was in progress the fantasy of the stage was maintained during scene-changes by the artistry of the Act Drop. Rather than lower the main curtain, a comparatively plain cloth, it was far easier to



Tyne Theatre and Opera House. Drawing by Ralph Hedley C. 1866.



The restored Act Drop wheel at the Tyne Theatre and Opera House, Newcastle-on-Tyne. (Photograph D. Wilmore).



Act Drop National Theatre, Prague. Painted by Vojtech Hynais 1883.

keep the audiences attention by lowering a beautiful cloth full of interest and atmosphere. Not for the first time we would do well to observe our European neighbours who often use their Act Drops on a regular basis. Indeed

in recent years several have been restored, notably at the National Theatre in Prague. So, with this in mind it is hoped that perhaps in years to come some of the rather bland safety curtains up and down the country will become



Act Drop at the Gaiety Theatre, Douglas, Isle of Man (Photograph Island Photographics Ltd.)

embellished with new Act Drops, especially the one at the Tyne Theatre and Opera House Newcastle upon Tyne, originally conceived by Mr Charles Fox over one hundred and twenty years ago.

GAETTEER OF ACT DROPS STILL EXTANT IN BRITAIN

1. Chatsworth House, Private Theatre of the Duke of Devonshire built in 1830, Act Drop possibly later.
2. Marefair Theatre, Northampton (now demolished) Act Drop survives from 1876, painted by W Maugham of the Princes Theatre, London.
3. Normansfield Hospital Amusement Hall, Teddington. 1879, Act Drop 1879/80. Possibly painted J T Bull, scene-painter.
4. Craig-y-nos Castle, Adelina Patti's Private Theatre. 1891, Act Drop painted by Hawes Craven.
5. Royal Theatre, Northampton 1896, Act Drop painted by Ernest Howard.
6. Gaiety Theatre, Douglas, Isle of Man. 1900 painted by William Helmsley.
7. Grand Theatre, Wolverhampton The original Act Drop was painted by William Harford and Walter Johnstone of London. The existing one is a copy painted in later years by John Leonard.



The Charles Fox Act Drop recreated by Heather Higton. From the "Newcastle Daily Chronicle". Description.

Arts and Entertainment in the Woods

By balancing the commercial with the non-commercial, The Hawth aims to balance its books, while building audiences from snooker to ballet. Cue went to investigate.

If you got out a map of south-east England and picked out Crawley new town, lying half way between London and Brighton, you would make an interesting discovery. There, in the heart of commuterland, in the prosperous Home Counties, lies a considerable area poorly-served in terms of first-class lyric theatre, drama and entertainment facilities. Poor in terms of its affluent, culturally educated and high density population.

Crawley therefore serves a hinterland extending towards Brighton, Worthing, Chichester, in the south; Croydon, Leatherhead, Guildford, in the north; East Grinstead in the east; and Horsham in the west. All these towns draw their own theatre audiences and provide Crawley's potential competition though some seem remarkably far away, for the Home Counties.

Until early summer this year, Crawley's multi-purpose leisure centre played host to such legit theatre visits as the RSC, the Royal Exchange Theatre Company and entertainment fare like singers Barbara Dickson and David Essex or comedians Jasper Carrott, Mel Smith and Griff Rhys Jones. Now the

major new centre for arts and entertainment, set in the neighbouring 38-acre woodland known as The Hawth which gives the centre its name, will provide even stiffer competition to the towns in its catchment area. Clearly the audiences will not complain.

The Hawth opened in early May 1988, though the official opening took place two months later, in July. It is bigger, more versatile and better equipped than most other theatres in its catchment area and although it has been discussed in some form for the past

25 years, the end result is attractive and quite ambitious.

Its new facilities allow a more ambitious and fully-fledged programme of events than before, catering for professional companies like the newly-relaunched D'Oyly Carte Opera Company and Northern Ballet Theatre, the Wren Orchestra and the Nayee Kiran festival (11-17 July 1988), the first South Asian celebration of music and dance in Britain. But it is also an outlet for amateur productions from the town and even as far afield as Croydon — for example, Croydon College's end-of-term musical, 'Gulliver', staged by the theatre production and design students.

Visually The Hawth is a child of its time. From the outside it looks like a colourfully-painted Tesco supermarket with a post-



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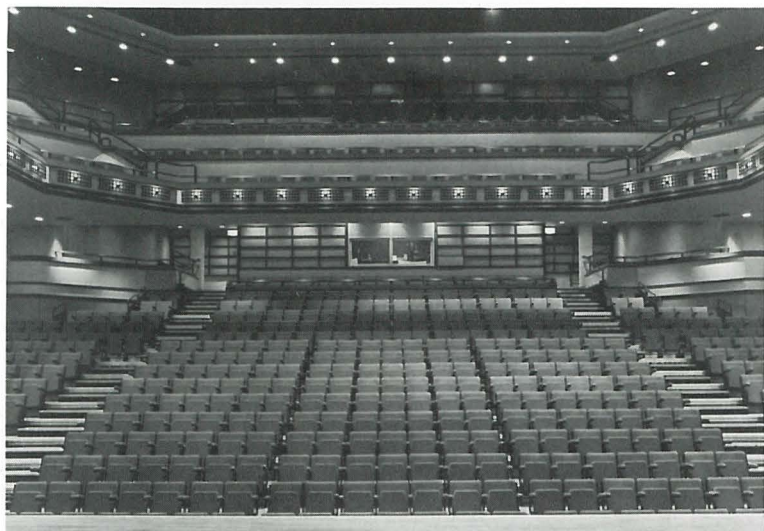
Crawley (0293) 552941

modernist portico entrance that would not look out of place at the Clore Gallery extension at the Tate, designed by James Stirling. It probably has the pleasantest, leafiest most spacious landscaped car park in the country.

The centre is made up of fairly generous open-plan front of house areas on two levels: a restaurant area for up to 50 covers (with soundproofed, moveable walls to cater for varying daytime and evening needs) and its own kitchen, equipped to serve up to 350 covers; a studio theatre (maximum capacity 48); a main auditorium (maximum capacity 850); and ancillary rehearsal room, green room, offices and so forth. The studio doubles as a larger rehearsal space, when necessary.

Lunches are served in the ground floor bar area (which is generous), as is common practice nowadays. Another bar on the first floor serves interval audiences as well. The overall atmosphere of the public spaces is remindful almost of an American country club as much as a showbusiness venue, with its use of red, grey and deep blue and brilliant green seat upholstery. However, The Hawth is hoping to attract conferences and exhibitions as well as regular audiences for music, theatre and cinema-going. So theatricality had to be slightly muted one imagines, not to offend other tastes.

The Hawth did not have the easiest of births, it seems. For the local council, whose baby this is, was politically reluctant to exceed a budget of £5 million for its design, construction and fitting out. Graham Walne, the



theatre consultant to the project, has said that the original in-house designs by the council's own architects had had much to commend them, and lacked nothing in skill or imagination, but suffered an over-restrictive brief. Each design was abandoned, the council varying neither the brief nor the budget, according to Walne, and the project was eventually put out to public tender. The winning tender from Walter Llewellyn builders of Eastbourne — who also built the Congress Theatre in that town — and Norman and Dawbarn of Guildford as design team, specified a basic centre costing £5 million, with additional extras that could be bolted on later. The council and Walne preferred these proposals but insisted that the 'extras' be included in the building from the word go, since they were essential to its successful operation. This pushed the bill up to £6.7 million, but fortunately this was voted through.

Without entering into the details, the project was nevertheless very restrictive, requiring a rigid brief to be drawn up in too short time, from which no deviations were allowed later on. This asked for trouble. The contract specified no over-running on time (ie modifications) and a brief that was too hurriedly put together, could not be altered. It was fixed-cost contract.

Given such behind-the-scenes frustrations before opening day, it is a pleasure to report that the place works, looks practical and is welcoming.

The main auditorium is biased in its design more towards non-theatre than to theatre events (retractable seating, for example, and maple floor throughout to cater for) banquets, exhibitions and snooker events. But this is not serious. The back-up facilities are entirely adequate, such as dressing rooms, which are all on stage level, showers and loos. Access to lighting bars, bridges, flying equipment and control rooms is good, with mostly sensible technical specifications. And if the backstage accommodation is not spacious, it is practical and much of it overlooks the nearby woods.

Technical Specifications

STAGE 13m deep × 21m wide with 4m wing

space on either side. Stage floor semi-sprung maple wood strip. Pros. arch 8m high × 13 m wide. Scene dock 8.5m deep × 7m wide. Fly tower 17.5m high fully counterweighted. Orchestra pit 4m deep × 14m wide with hydraulic lift.

AUDITORIUM LAYOUT Proscenium mode 850 seats or 780 with orchestra pit. In-the-round, 900–1000 seats. Thrust stage, 650. There is an

infra-red hard-of-hearing system installed in the auditorium.

FLYING 49 single and double purchase, 3 motorised bars, wrap-round cyclorama, 6 adjustable hoists in auditorium.

LIGHTING AND SOUND Gemini control 180 ways plus accessories. Soundcraft 200B. Action 24 control and Studiomaster desk in Studio Theatre.

A final word about the computerised box office. Prompt Data Ltd of Hemel Hempstead installed booking system that joins the nearby leisure centre to The Hawth. PDL's 'Theatre-pack' computer programme is specially-adapted software that allows multi-user access, that is, multiple booking points outside the box office, all sharing the central booking information and seating plans. It is one of the first of its kind in this country.

With a broad mixed programme of events aimed at all age groups, many of whom are eligible for special discounts or concessions, the system is said to be complex yet user-friendly, the booking staff in the different locations must be able to use it efficiently, or one could envisage some pretty delays and mistakes taking place. Another visit to Crawley in six months' time would be instructive, to see how it is working out.

MERIDA and ITALICA

FRANCIS REID visits Two Roman Theatres in Spain

The Roman Empire's theatric remains mostly survived its decline and fall only in ground plan form. Preservation has usually been the consequence of burial under earth and rubble of a site which has continued to have poor development potential over the centuries. Prior to reclamation by nature, the more transportable materials were removed for use in the construction of new buildings, and so the verticals have mostly disappeared. Even at Pompei with its rather special instant encapsulation within volcanic ash, the elevations give an indication more of the scale of the theatre's volume than the details of its structure. In some cases however, vertical elements were toppled to lie horizontal under the rubble, not only allowing part restoration but providing evidence for a potential reconstruction of some of the missing pieces.

At MERIDA in the central Spanish province of Badajoz, the remains are particularly complete and the *Teatro Romano* has been under reconstruction since 1910. Virtually all the found items are now in place and, where possible and appropriate, gaps between the repositioned items have been filled. To go much further would involve totally new construction and, although this could be based on an extrapolation of the existing construction and thus ensure a high degree of credibility, it would surely diminish the experience of ancient performances that the genuine structure is now able to share with its visitors.

In previous CUE pages, I have tried to describe my increasing personal awareness, through visits to Verona, Trieste, Fiesole and Pompeii, of the nature of Roman Theatre. In Merida the understanding of Roman Theatre form becomes much deeper . . . and it is the presence of the Scaenae Frons that is the catalyst. However, my first thoughts coming face to face with the Merida stage were not of Rome but of the Renaissance . . . how Palladio had taken the available knowledge of Roman Theatre (a knowledge much more slender than we have now) and by the kind of act of transformation that marks a great artist, created the Vicenza Theatre.

The Merida theatre was completed in 18 BC under Agrippa and remodelled under Hadrian in AD 135. There was a 4th Century restoration under Constantine but thereafter it suffered the usual fate of decay through neglect and plunder for building materials. However since Merida has never since the Romans been subject to much pressure from civic developers, much of the structure slumbered under an accumulation of earth which was nourishing a field of beans when the major excavations began in 1910.

The extent of the Merida Theatre provides a visitor's imagination with major stimulation whether as actor, spectator or stage manager cueing the drop curtain whose post holes remain. Indeed sitting in this auditorium made me realise, for the first time, that Roman drop curtain must have borne the same proportions

to the stage as Brecht's draw curtain. The fun of visiting such sites includes making imagination-assisted entrances, whether marvelling at the sudden revelation of the scaenae frons from the threshold of a vomitorium while jostling to join the other 5,999 spectators, or waiting backstage to stride through an arch with toga swirling. I cannot begin to describe the effect on mind and emotions of meeting up with so complete a stage in situ. Awe and humility are perhaps the main recurrent responses on the mind's boggle cycle.

Merida's Teatro Romano has been in use for festival performances since 1934 and occasionally these have also involved the adjacent *Anfiteatro*. A 1940s Julius Caesar moved the action to the Anfiteatro for the final scenes involving horses and chariots in spectacular battles. Only the lower audience parts of this 14,000 seat amphitheatre remain, together with the subterranean gladiator and animal quarters discovered in 1921. Across town lies the *Hippodromo* whose remnants, although existing in ground plan form only, give a clear indication of the spectator circumference and the central reservation around which the chariots raced on their 1,340ft track. I am no archaeologist whatsoever, but my hunch is that excavation here might just reveal more: where the earth meets the stones just does not seem to read as ground level.

My interest is naturally focused on how the Romans housed their entertainments but Merida has many splendid examples of all kinds of Roman architecture and there is a *Museo Nacional de Arte Romano* housed in a magnificent new building. Exhibits include the original statues which were found during the theatre excavations and have been copied for the scaenae frons.

At **ITALICA** on the outskirts of Sevilla, the *Anfiteatro Romano* is the site of a major festival every summer which includes international companies of all dramatic and music forms but is particularly strong in dance. These festivals have explored various alternative staging forms set within the amphitheatre's space which with one axis of 160m and the other 137m was one of the largest of the Roman Empire. Built to hold 25,000 at a time when Italica's population did not exceed about 8,000 inhabitants, this anfiteatro has always been in the festival class.

Excavations of the anfiteatro commenced in the 18th century but the existence of the *Teatro Romano* is a much more recent find, with excavations only starting in 1971. Surrounding buildings have now been acquired in order to permit further investigation and all the signs are that this could be a very important theatre. The Seville authorities seem eager to exploit its possibilities in a festival context. Already road traffic is diverted to remove noise during amphitheatre performances: when the theatre comes into use they talk of rebuilding the road permanently out of earshot.



Teatro Romano, Merida.



Teatro Romano, Italica



Some parts of the Italica jigsaw awaiting assembly.