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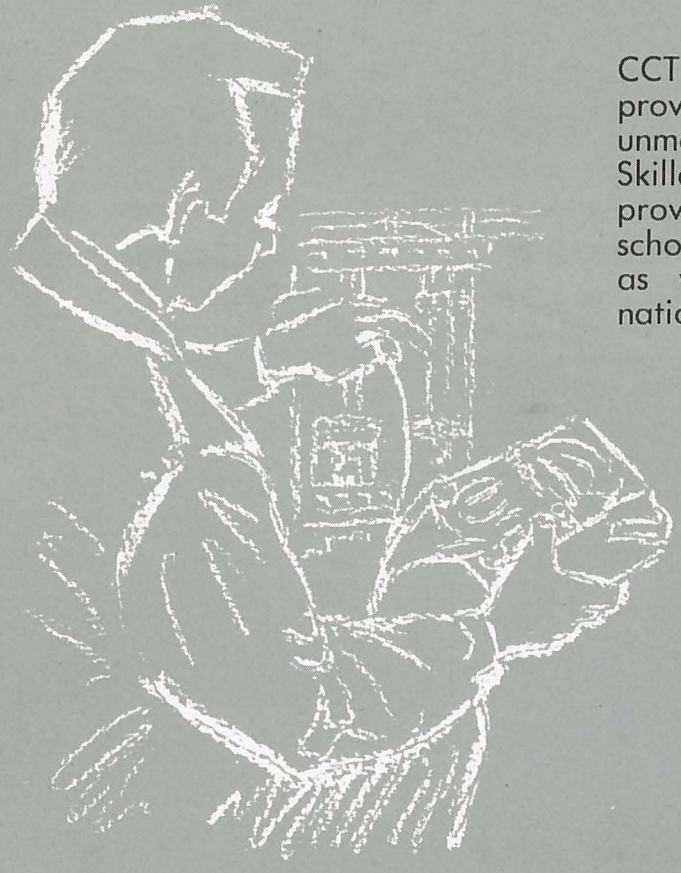

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Cover:
The Brothel *Traviata* designed by Stefanos Lazaridis. When scenic effects are greeted by titters from the audience something has gone sadly wrong.

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# Training Issues Come to a Head

The subject of training is under discussion again – and it is nice to see that for once the technical side of the arts and entertainment industry is leading the way. Thanks to the Arts and Entertainment Technical Training Initiative (AETTI) launched in October 1988, progress is now being made in preparing ourselves for National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), which will be introduced in 1990-91. NVQs will become the universally-recognised means of judging competence, experience and qualifications throughout British industry. The arts will be no exception.

But if the 'technology' side of our industry is currently the most active in setting up ways and means of evaluating skills, there is nevertheless little room for complacency. The need is widely felt in our industry for accepted criteria to be introduced which can define qualifications for jobs, levels of pay and of course, for entry into the industry. For example, how do we define good technical training? Or re-training? Without these points of reference, how can technicians expect their careers to progress logically – or fairly? How do employers know what skills they are hiring? For that matter, how do we propose to keep abreast of the changes in today's high-tech world, especially in the computerised and electronics sectors of our industry?

We shall return to these questions in more detail.

# STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

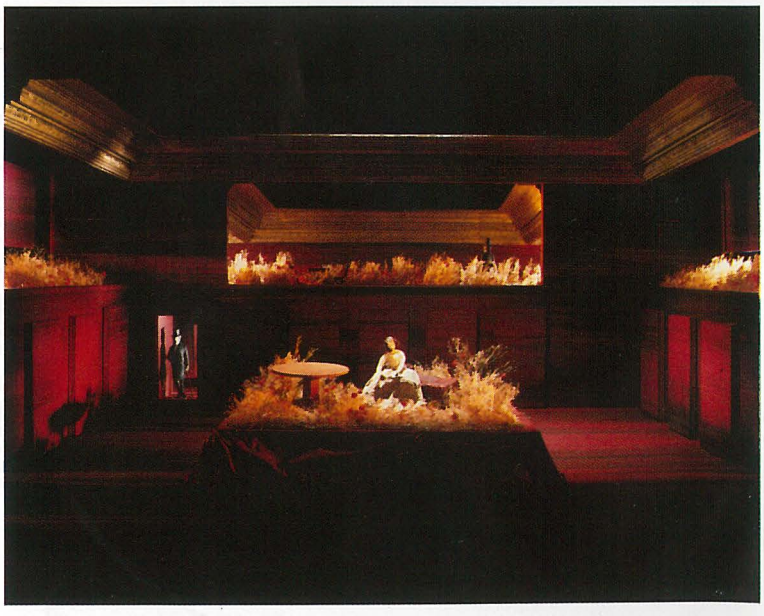
Modish producer's opera spreads to Italy ☐ More of the same at the ENO ☐ Heartwarming enthusiasm for a new Theatre company ☐ Shakespeare doesn't always travel well between Stratford and London.

Producer's and designer's opera really does seem to be threatening to take a stranglehold on the form. Even open-air opera festivals in Italy, where up to now one has expected and found nothing more than honest to goodness spectacle allied to high volume performances of the music, seem to be joining the cult. For after a visit this summer to Puccini's own village of Torre del Lago, where his final opera, *Turandot* was being performed in an impromptu open-air auditorium beside the lake, just 200 metres from the villa that was his home, I moved on to Macerata and its Sferisterio.

Whereas Torre's *Turandot* had been blessedly simple in concept – minimal scenery, stunning costumes and masks, highly dramatic puppets, and the natural effect of the full moon rising over the lake during the Riddle Scene – Macerata's three productions were of a very different style. The Sferisterio was built in this pretty renaissance hill-town during the 19th century to house a ball-game, of the pelota type, called Sfera. There is thus a high back-wall, intended for the game, and also an extremely theatrical open-air auditorium, with a stage 100 metres wide, stalls and two semi-circular tiers of opera-house boxes, topped by a standing galleria. No wonder the current directors of the festival, Marcello Abbado and Giancarlo del Monaco, choose to regard the Sferisterio not as an arena, but as "a theatre without a roof", and it is therefore entirely right for them to attempt full scale operatic productions in it which cut no corners. But this does not mean that they have to plunge neck deep into modish producer's opera as happened with two of the three productions this year. Both Verdi's *Macbeth* and Bizet's *Carmen* were given the 'treatment', greatly to their, and their singers', disadvantage.

*Macbeth*, which was produced by distinguished Italian Shakespearean actor, Giorgio Albertazzi, concentrated on an apparent belief that evil stemmed from sex, and that the Witches were the mainspring of the work. They were thus omni-present as apparently modern floozies in white nighties and henna wigs, forever interfering and distracting. The designer, Attilio Colonello, who was responsible for all three productions, provided an unhelpfully fussy setting, with a stylised and mirror-fronted castle exterior which offered irritating reflections of the conductor, and enclosed a huge, pink, sprung mattress which clearly posed serious problems for Macbeth and his Lady. In the second half of the opera neither the Sleep-Walking scene, nor the advance from Birnam Wood to Dunsinane were effectively achieved, and the staging throughout, as well as irritating by its gimmicks, lacked focus. I did not see the Carmen which was set in New York City in the 1950's, with José as a traffic cop and Escamillo a prize-fighter, but was told that the booing could be heard on the other side of town. The Festival's *Tosca* at least had a conventional staging, but one of such visual ineptitude and with such an inability to use effectively the large stage area, that its dramatic impact was sadly diminished. Let us hope that next year's 25th Anniversary season at Macerata, offering Aida, La Gioconda and Gounod's Faust will demon-

Turandot *at Torre del Lago in an impromptu open-air auditorium was a very different style of production to that seen in Macerata. Photo. Riccardo Bianchi.*



*ENO's* La Traviata. *Set model designed by Stefanos Lazaridis. Director David Pountney. Lighting by Chris Ellis. Photo. Clive Barda.*

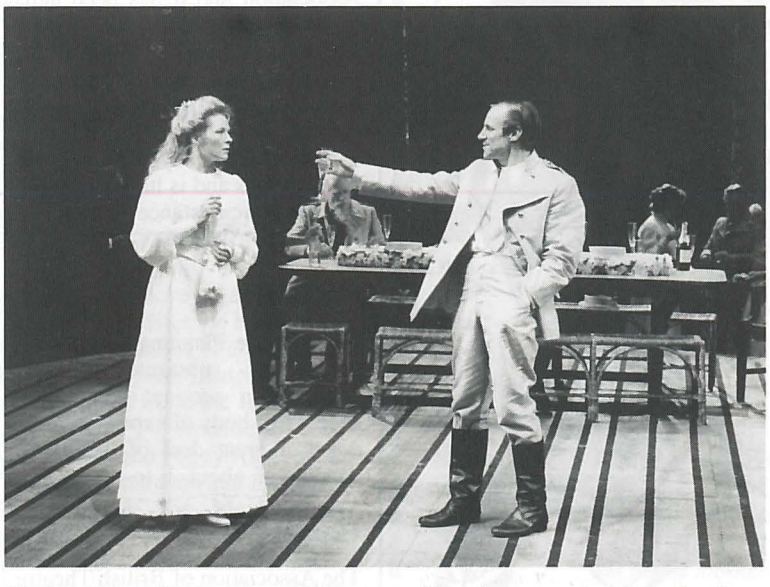
strate a surer directorial and visual grasp and thus make better use of a superb natural setting.

Back in London E.N.O.'s first new production of the season, of Verdi's *La Traviata*, offered more of the same. Directed by David Pountney, who offered a lengthy and tedious essay in the programme concerning health and prostitution in the 19th century, and designed by Stefanos Lazaridis, it presented a brothel Traviata which demonstrated a lack of understanding of the mid-19th century distinction between a demi-mondaine and a prostitute. Violetta's opening scene party was clearly set in a brothel, appropriately crimson and gold, dominated by a lengthy dining table at which the tarts were feeding their clients. Then suddenly panels slid back in the upper walls and a host of leering voyeurs in top hats could be seen leaning out of one, and of tatty tarts from another – just in case we had missed the point, I suppose. Worse was to come. By an ingenious mechanism a subset ascended through the middle of the dining table to form a platform stage, so that Violetta could meet Alfredo in her bed/work room, where they were surrounded by parched ears of corn and drooping poppies. This platform was maintained for the second act to represent Violetta's country retreat, still surrounded by the brothel and gazed upon by various interested parties, and at Flora's party the platform was used to accommodate a drag-act cabaret. Violetta's bedroom in the final act was cornless but by now the voyeurs were waiting outside the door, presumably poised for pickings at her death. Whatever it may have done for Messrs Pountney and Lazaridis, this staging seemed to do all too little for the audience: when, in Traviata of all operas, scenic effects are greeted by titters from the audience, something has gone sadly wrong.

What has gone happily right however is the establishment of a truly exciting new theatre company in this country, the Renaissance, founded in April of last year by one of our brightest young actors, Kenneth Branagh, and David Parfitt. It receives no public funding and must therefore operate on a financial tightrope. At present it remains solvent, and with productions as satisfying and successful as its current three, of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *As You Like It*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, it looks likely to remain so. Indeed to see men hopefully waving banknotes outside the Phoenix Theatre on a wet Monday evening for a seat at *Much Ado* was a heart-warming sight. The company has arrived at the Phoenix after a nationwide tour, which also took in Elsinore, and this fact, together with the necessity for low budgets, means that their staging is far simpler and more modest than we are accustomed to see in Shakespearean productions by our two major subsidised companies. More modest maybe, but certainly not less stimulating or intelligent. Both *As You Like It* and *Much Ado*, which I saw, and *Hamlet*, which I did not, were designed by Jenny Tiramani, and both comedies had a single, simple set which showed great flexibility and ease of function. *As You Like It* offered a simple panelled screen whose centre slid open to reveal a small but concentrated and highly evocative Forest of Arden, enhanced by a leaf-strewn carpet in front of it. Much Ado had an arrangement of white canvas with an open panel in its upper reaches to provide a secondary playing area. Both sets were skilfully and precisely lit by Brian Harris, and Ms Tiramani's Edwardian costumes for *As You Like It*, and Napoleonic Empire ones for *Much Ado* were both witty and attractive without distracting from the matter in hand. Indeed it would be hard to distract from ensemble performances of Shakespeare as well directed – by Geraldine McEwan and Judi Dench – and well acted and spoken as these: truly Renaissance is a company that gives considerable theatrical pleasure.

Alongside Renaissance it so happens that both the National and Royal Shakespeare companies have been offering new

*Renaissance Theatre Company's* Much Ado About Nothing *at the Phoenix Theatre. Designer Jenny Tiramani. Lighting: Brian Harris. Directed by Geraldine McEwan and Judi Dench.*



*Chekhov's* Three Sisters *at the Barbican directed by John Barton. Designer, Timothy O'Brien. Costumes, Louise Belson, Lighting, Robert Bryan. Photographer, Donald Cooper.*

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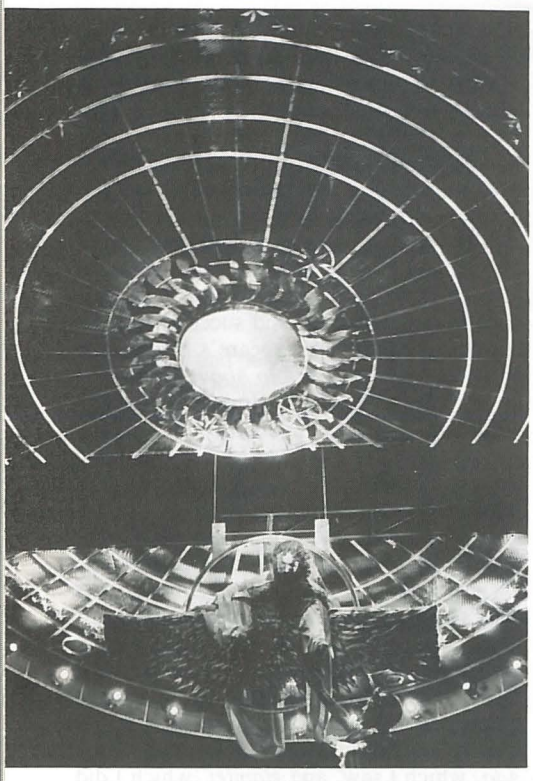

*National Theatre production of* Cymbeline *at the Cottesloe. Designer, Alison Chitty. Lighting, Gerry Jenkinson. Director, Peter Hall. Photographer, John Haynes.*

Shakespeare productions at their London theatres. At the National's largest Olivier auditorium Peter Hall's staging of the three late plays, *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* can currently be seen, having started life at the smaller Cottesloe in the spring and come to the Olivier via Tbilisi and Tokyo. So far I have seen only *Cymbeline*, which seems to have travelled well. Again the basic setting by Alison Chitty is relatively simple: a large, open stage with central ramp projecting into the stalls to permit entries and exits through the central aisle, backed by a sky-painted screen with central sliding panel. Above the set is suspended a large wrought metal disc, embellished with astrological signs and tilted at an angle. Centre stage the Olivier's revolve, working rather precariously, tips and turns to shift the scene to primitive Milford Haven. Costumes ranged from ancient British, to Roman, to Jacobean, yet somehow managed to maintain a dramatic unity, and Miss Chitty and the Props department had certainly gone to town on blood and dismemebered bodies. If at times it seemed rather more a pageant than a play, that perhaps is what Shakespeare intended.

I was less happy with the RSC's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by Jonathan Miller, which came to the Barbican Theatre from Stratford. Stefanos Lazaridis' highly operatic setting of Italianate impressionist painted flats may well have fitted the Stratford stage admirably, but in London its general effect was overcrowded, with much masking and preventing of one from seeing fully up-stage unless one's seat was right in the centre. Martin Chitty's costumes looked drab for Verona, and the general effect was dull. Much better was the RSC's staging of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, intended for the Barbican, and given a fine set by Timothy O'Brien. His raised podium, with matching canopy, offered a convincing blend of naturalism and stylisation, and it was a good idea to extend the first act out of the house into the land beyond. Louise Belson's understated costumes looked as though they actually belonged to their wearers and had been lived in for years, and Robert Bryan's lighting was, as usual, skilful and effective. It is a pity that there has to be such a visual contrast between RSC productions designed for the Barbican and those that move there from Stratford, but certainly the hexagonal shape of the Barbican stage cannot help.


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# TECHNICAL ADVICE ON THEATRE DESIGN

**The Theatres Trust** has become increasingly concerned by the building of new theatre spaces and even new theatres without specialist technical advice for the architects and builders. This advice is no longer available from the Arts Council of Great Britain but it can still be provided by the Theatre Planning Committee of the Association of British Theatre Technicians, an expert body of national stature. Although very low, indeed virtually nominal, fees are involved. Surprisingly and unhappily little use has been made of the facility in recent years. In an attempt to help, the Trust has consulted with the Arts Council and the Association and it has been agreed that all new enquiries will be notified to the Association and that the availability of this specialist advice will be known as widely as possible. Both the Trust and the Council believe that independent expert examination is essential for any theatre project seeking public funds and is highly desirable in every practical circumstance, whether or not public funds are involved.

**NOTE**

The Theatre Planning Committee is not, of course, a substitute for a complete consultation service, but it does provide access to a body of expert opinion which can cover a great deal of useful ground in a session of about 1 to 1½ hours duration.

**Contact:**

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# Are we Finding the Right Solutions to our Touring Needs?

TONY FIELD

Touring productions and their receiving theatres are increasingly beset with all manner of problems – financial, technical and artistic. In the first of a two-part series on the subject we look at how this state of affairs evolved, and at the issues involved.

Touring has always been a difficult problem, even a vexed question, for both the independent and the subsidised sectors. Before the 1939-45 war there was really no subsidised sector as we know it now. A few theatres in the regions (then the provinces) were supported by civic authorities but the whole touring circuit was dominated by the Moss Empire, Stoll Theatres and Howard & Wyndham managements. All the major tours were undertaken by the London producers opening shows on pre-London tours (no previews then) or touring tried London successes. If one excludes the acts touring to the variety houses, it was perfectly possible to see every London success (plays and musicals) if one lived in a town housing "No.1 tours" – Manchester, Liverpool, Birmingham, Bristol, Oxford, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Aberdeen, Newcastle, Leeds and Sheffield.

Even after the initial black-out of theatres in 1939, when touring resumed I was able to see at the Opera House and Palace Theatre in Manchester every major London success and I certainly did not feel I was deprived living in the provinces. My programmes from those days indicate that by going to the theatre once or twice a week I could later look down the London theatre classified and mark off having seen every show (except the Windmill!).

***With the demise of so many touring theatres the ancillary industries also disappeared***

What need did we have even to visit London when in Manchester we had Emlyn Williams in "Night Must Fall", C.B. Cochran's "Big Top" with Beatrice Lillie, Alfred Lunt and Lynn Fontaine in "There Shall Be No Night", "Arsenic & Old Lace", John Gielgud and Peggy Ashcroft in "Hamlet", Ralph Richardson and Laurence Olivier in "Arms & the Man", Ivor Novello in "The Dancing Years", Robert Morley in "The First Gentlemen", Laurence Olivier in "Richard III", Ralph Richardson in "Peer Gynt", Robert Donat in "The Cure for Love", Noel Coward's "Sigh No More", John Clements and Kay Hammond in "The Kingmaker", Edith Evans, John Gielgud and Peter Ustinov in "Crime & Punishment", Vivien Leigh in "The Skin of Our Teeth", "Oklahoma!" and "Annie Get Your Gun".

With the end of the war came the slow climb in touring expenses. The Arts Council had grown out of C.E.M.A. and encouraged the housing or re-housing of the large regional repertory companies. Certainly there was comparatively little money made available for touring and these small amounts were given to subsidise touring companies such as Prospect Productions. Throughout the 1950's, the 1960's and the early 1970's no central or local government funds were made available to stop the wholesale closure of the large regional touring theatres. Instead, Jennie Lee, the first Minister for the Arts, responded to the Housing the Arts Reports with financial assistance towards the building of repertory theatres in such towns as Coventry, Birmingham, Guildford, Bromley, Farnham, Leatherhead, Bolton, Chester, Colchester, Derby, Exeter, Ipswich, Leeds, Leicester and Nottingham.

Indeed, it was only when the Arts Council recognised that there would suddenly be no theatres to which they could tour the Royal Ballet, the English National Opera, the Royal Opera, the Festival Ballet and other major opera and dance companies that they responded to the demand to save the few remaining large theatres that could house these companies. Further, the Arts Council was made to realise that opera and dance could only occupy these theatres for a comparatively few weeks each year and that something should be done to encourage product to fill the other weeks. Indeed, even today, there is only a small amount of subsidy available to encourage large-scale drama to tour. And today, of course, the cost of touring has made such ventures almost prohibitive for commercial managers (who now like to be known as "independent"), that is if you can persuade artists to tour at all with the possible conse-


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quential losses of radio, television and film work which is more readily available if you are already working in the Home Counties.

The other problem of touring is the fact that with the demise of so many touring theatres the ancillary industries have also disappeared – the theatrical digs, the electricians, carpenters, managers, front-of-house and back-stage staff which made the touring venues friendly, lively and well-run. In Manchester there was not only the Opera House and Palace; but Hulme Hippodrome, Queen's Park Hippodrome, Manchester Hippodrome and many smaller venues ensured there was an "avenue of promotion" for such talents.

***There can be no overall plans for the creative arts . . . it is impossible to plan what is going to be fashionable tomorrow.***

In the United States the very same consequences of a reduction in touring venues led to the few remaining houses not only being devoid of technical talent but often devoid of properly equipped facilities. This led to the "bus & truck" phenomenon whereby a producer would not only tour the artists, sets and costumes but the entire lighting & sound rigs so that a complete production of a show like "Cats" could hit town and occupy any large barn of a building (or even a tent) without having to rely on there being local equipment and experienced labour.

The needs of the British regions remain difficult to assess and can vary from one region to another. Certainly one can accept the advantages of there being a local drama company as much as a local orchestra, a local opera and a local dance company. Audiences like to become associated with local talent and the fact that creative and performing artists live in a region helps to enrich the whole quality of education in that region – not only with orchestral musicians, for example, providing the teaching of music locally but the whole raising of standards by artists becoming part of a community.

The Arts Council once attempted a grid system for repertory theatres since it seemed a woeful waste for every repertory company to be producing last year's west-end Ayckbourn success with 35 lots of scenery, 35 lots of costumes, 35 periods of rehearsal each for a two or three week run. However, one could not persuade the Bristol audiences to go to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre Company any more than Birmingham audiences would want to see the Bristol Old Vic Company. Hence Prospect Productions, the Actors Company, Compass and the Renaissance Players have titles which are not associated with a particular town.

However, the other side of the coin is the local demand to see touring product. So that even with Manchester's present rich diet of the superb Royal Exchange Company and Hallé Orchestra, the Contact Company and the Northern Dance Company, there has still been proved a need not only to re-open the Palace but also the Opera House. Let us hope that this example is now followed by the Lyceum Theatre in Sheffield re-opening

*Kenneth Branagh's highly-acclaimed Renaissance Theatre Company has proved the demand, once again, for first-rate touring theatre – without much help from the arts council, however. Tom Hoskins and James Larkin in the Renaissance production of* As you like it, *at the Phoenix Theatre. Costumes by Jenny Tiramani. Photograph, Sophie Yanner.*

to complement the excellent work being done by Clare Venables at the Crucible.

So what of the future? One of the few theories the Arts Council has proved in nearly fifty years is that there can be no overall plans for the creative arts . . . it is impossible to plan what is going to be fashionable tomorrow. Who would ever have expected the Opera House to be revitalised in Manchester as well as the Palace just when it seemed that the Empire in Liverpool was likely to follow the Royal Court's closure? Who would expect a second (Everyman) drama company in Liverpool to come into being as well as the Playhouse, whilst Carlisle remains without any theatre at all? Who would expect the amazing creativity of Alan Ayckbourn to be centred on Scarborough or Benjamin Britten to have fostered those buildings in Aldeburgh any more than one would have decided to create an artists' colony in St. Ives?

These things happen and unfortunately the Arts Council can but follow. Although it follows so slowly that it is almost too late when the funds finally arrive. For the creativity has often moved on. The sadness is that the Arts Council should be planning for 2001 now but no longer has the talent (on the Council, the panels or staff) to do so.

*Anthony Field, CBE, is a chartered accountant, theatre producer and Director of Theatre Projects Consultants Ltd. He spent 27 years as Finance Director of the Arts Council of Great Britain, which he left in 1984.*


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# AUTOLYCUS

## Oz invests in 12 West End theatres

So, control of Stoll Moss Theatres has changed for the second time in just two months. Behind the new owners, Charmead, an Australia-based investment group, is one of the world's most agressive and successful businessmen, Robert Holmes à Court, whose business empire now includes an astonishing proportion of acquisitions, of which Stoll Moss is but a tiny part. Charmead is said to have paid more than £25 million for the 12 London theatres plus a package that includes Bermans and Nathans, the theatrical costumiers.

Stoll Moss have suffered two spectacular West End flops to write off this year, *Winnie* and *Ziegfeld*, yet Charmead was not alone in wanting to buy the organisation. Indeed, had there been the choice, things might have been different. Louis Benjamin, Stoll Moss' chief executive recently said: "If it had been an open thing that these theatres were for sale, I would have gone for a management buy-out". Other interested parties included Lord Grade and his brother, Lord Delfont.

The theatres involved are: the Apollo, Cambridge, Theatre Royal Drury Lane, Duchess, Garrick, Globe, Her Majesty's, Lyric, Palladium, Queen's, Royalty, and Victoria Palace. This is still by far the largest grouping of West End theatres: the next largest is Maybox, with the Albery, Criterion, Donmar Warehouse, Piccadilly, Whitehall and Wyndhams.

Despite such a substantial chunk of theatres going to Australian ownership, the West End is still predominantly British, with most owners controlling one or two theatres each. Notable exceptions are the Adelphi and Aldwych (owned by the Nederlander Group, American); and the Old Vic (owned by Ed Mirvish, Canadian).

## New designers' award draws attention to London fringe

Let's leave behind the world of Australian investors and West End theatres becoming speculative acquisitions in some foreign property portfolio, and take a look at something new on the London fringe. It is launched this year as an additional category in the Charrington London Fringe Awards, which is administered by PTN, the Pub Theatre Network (168-170 Battersea Park Road, London SW11 4ND. Tel: 01-622 4553).

There are other new categories as well, including one for 'most outstanding poster design'. But it's early days to talk about the poster awards, I am told. On the other hand, there have been no shortage of nominations for the production design awards: some 20 are now on the shortlist alone. The 30-strong panel of judges, all drawn from the fringe, include designers Christina Stephenson, Penny Fitt and Anne Howarth. PTN, for those not familiar with the London scene, number such well-known haunts as the King's Head, Islington, the Man in the Moon, Chelsea, and the Orange Tree, Richmond, among their membership.

What does the winning theatre designer get, I ventured to ask Jessica Dromgoole of PTN? Apart from public recognition, personal satisfaction and so forth. "There is TV coverage of the awards ceremony itself", she replied, "and a plaque will be put up in the theatre concerned to commemorate the winning production and its designer". There may be more to it than that, she confided, but the details are still being finalised.

Anyone interested in the poster award - or who would like to discuss becoming a sponsor of one of the new categories can contact Mademoiselle Dromgoole at the above number. She'd love to hear form you avid Cue readers.

Her observations about fringe design were interesting. Unlike designs for larger theatres, especially in a pros arch setting, London's fringe designs tap into one's imagination more, drawing us into the imaginary world of the play with greater urgency. "The fringe designs usually build the audience into the design itself, "she told Autolycus recently," and in small theatres, where acting spaces are more fluid than in a conventional theatre, design can involve the audience itself", she added. "Not only for reasons of cost but also in creative terms, almost all fringe designs are non-representational; and they are human-sized, not larger than life. They are never brighter, never larger than the actors".

All in all, I hope the new award scheme will help win fringe design work the credit and credibility it deserves. I've asked for pictures of the winning production to be sent to us as soon as it has been chosen.

## Bohemian love takes to the big screen

Aficionados of Puccini's musical portrait of love and life Bohemian style in nineteenth century Paris, will be glad to hear that this best-known of operas has been filmed. Directed by Luigi Comencini, *La Bohème* is produced by Daniel Toscan du Plantier, whose earlier efforts, *Don Giovanni* and *Carmen* were critically acclaimed. It features the voices of José Carreras Barbara Hendricks, two of my favourite singers, although newcomer Luca Canonici takes Carreras' lead acting role since the great tenor became unwell on the third day of shooting.

The movie takes its bow at the Barbican's Cinema 1 on 26 December – where the newly


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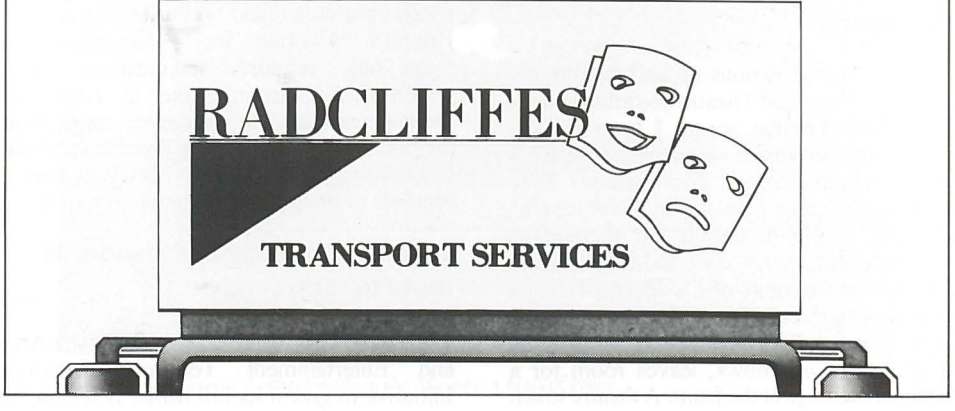

upgraded Dolby sound equipment will be put through its paces in style. It's the first UK film premiere for the Barbican Centre.

## The theatre – a huge, bubbling molten family

The *Sunday Times Magazine* talked to Terry Hands, Director of the RSC, a few weeks ago, in their 'A Day in the Life of ' section. It afforded some interesting insights into Hands' lifestyle but in particular, some succinct thoughts about the theatre, which for my money are worth repeating.

"Most of my friends are in the theatre, " he told the reporter. "I entertain very rarely. I don't think I have had a purely social evening for as long as I can remember. I recharge my batteries by working in different places, doing plays and operas in France and Vienna. But the theatre itself is highly gregarious, very nourishing. A huge, bubbling molten family. You can see its regenerative nature all around you," he explained. "Look at Peggy Ashcroft, in her eighties, yet she's like a woman in her fifties".

How true. Does this apply equally to all areas of the theatre world, like architects, engineers, theatre consultants and stage carpenters? Comments please, to Autolycus, or letters to the Editor

## Incentive funding assumes human form

Further to Cue's article in the last issue on the Arts Council's new incentive funding scheme, written by its project manager Dawn Austwick of Peat Marwick McLintock, I can now tell you who will be running the scheme. Howard Webber, its Director, starts in October 1988, joining the Council form the Home Office where he was a senior budget manager. Alice Ackrill, the Administrator, began in September. She was a management consultant with Strategic Planning Associates. They will be allocating a budget of £12.5 million over the next three years.

The director will set objectives, priorities and take overall responsibility for the scheme, and the administrator will handle day-to-day matters, offer advice to prospective applicants and organise business planning seminars, which form part of the overall scheme.

## It's those little things that matter

It is good to see various initiatives from the Society of West End Theatre becoming part of the regular London scene. I have noticed increasing numbers of people using SWET's theatre tokens scheme, for instance. They work on the same principle as book tokens, allowing people to choose for themselves which show they want to see and on what date. Tokens come in units of £1, £5 and £10 and their presentation wallet, which comes with a copy of the London Theatre Guide with details of all West End shows, leaves room for a personal message at the front. A theatre token is a more fun, more social present than a book token, which has slight bookworm overtones about it. As a result, they are used as presents by theatregoers and people in the theatre industry and even as incentives to reward employees in business.

Another encouragement to visit London theatres is the joint SWET-British Rail collaboration to promote rail travel to the West End. The regularly updated 'Spotlight Your Late Train Home from the Theatre' leaflet, with details of last train times, is widely distributed throughout tourist and travel information points, like stations, theatres and concert halls.

I gather there are moves afoot to extend some of these London schemes into the regions in future. If they become as successful as the London initiatives they could prove a boon to the wider theatre industry. As a footnote, Penny Owens, SWET's marketing officer, tells me that their theatre tokens scheme was voted the best motivational scheme of the year no less by the magazine *Incentive Today* at their annual exhibition, Incentive 88.

Never say I don't keep you up with the news that matters.

## Maggie's view of art – a yuppie toy?

Remember our great leader, Margaret Thatcher, wooing Baron Thyssen's art collection earlier this summer with a colossal sum of at least £100m plus a site and perhaps a building with staff and maintenance thrown in? All this enthusiasm for a major new art collection when existing ones struggle to survive regular, deliberate cutbacks (especially in acquisitions). Then when the good baron took his art elsewhere, every tuppenny ha'penny arts commentator offered free advice as to where those sums could best be spent on the arts, rather than disappearing back into the Treasury's great maw.

But I liked the following view of Sir Michael Levey, on the Prime Minister's volte-face. "Not even the yuppiest child would treat its toys thus", he said, "on catching sight of potential new ones in a shop window. And the nation's museums and galleries are not playthings for the whims and competitive games indulged in by politicians."

Levey then stated that the "loadsamoney" waved at Thyssen should be distributed to the needy museums and galleries throughout Britain. "Anything less", he concluded, "can only reinforce the analogy of a government behaving like a group of incompetent and lazy gardeners, neglecting the flower beds they are employed to cultivate but dashing into the streets to try to grab a bouquet of orchids from a passing barrow".

## Technical training and standards move to centre stage

The AETTI as people refer to it, or the Arts and Entertainment Technical Training Initiative to give it its full name, is no longer just a good idea. It is now a fully-fledged pressure group and central information point for all manner of technicians throughout the live entertainment and film industries.

Membership is made up of unions, employers, industry bodies (like the ABTT), institutes and trade associations. A list of 20 in all. In short, all parties involved in technical training, re-training and technical standards. Starting in October 1988, AETTI is embarking on a survey of the entire industry from rock to opera, with a brief to identify the exact occupations of all technicians and those who work with technology. The survey will cover venues of all kinds, manufacturers and the different branches of the film industry including video.

Alan Stevenson, AETTI's Secretary (tel: 061-626 0632 at home or 624 5214 ext 2010), and Graham Walne, the Chairman (tel:01-628 1247), told me there is full co-operation now with industry standards bodies too, like the Sound and Communications Industries Federation; the British Kinematograph, Sound and Television Society; and the Association of Professional Recording Studios – to name a few. With luck the survey will be written up and ready for discussion at the end of January 1989.

Last April's conference at RADA seems a long time ago now. The AETTI shared a platform with the Arts Council, Manpower Services Commission and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications, marking the first time that so many organisations representing our industry had foregathered to discuss training issues. Graham Walne's concern, apparently shared by many in the business, for the "parlous" state of technician training and the "rapidly deteriorating technical standards" (I quote his conference remarks), has now become the catalyst for improving the situation and eventually for the introduction of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)in 1990/91.


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# RACE AMERICA

## The Making Of A Film For The National Museum Of Racing, Saratoga Springs, N.Y.

DAVID COLLISON

RACE AMERICA is an eighteen minute film spectacular on the subject of horse racing across America. It has been produced by DAVID COLLISON and STEPHANY MARKS of Theatre Projects Consultants Inc. for the National Museum of Racing in Saragota Springs, New York State. The film is intended for screening once an hour in their Hall of Fame. The film was directed by KEITH CHEETHAM; with director of photography TERRY HOPKINS.

The American National Museum of Racing in Saratoga Springs, New York State, has been completely redesigned and refurbished under the supervision of Cleveland Design and Tempus, both London based companies, and it reopened to the public on the 14th July 1988.

I had worked with the all British design team on several occasions, including the Domesday Exhibition in Winchester in 1986, and when designer Ivor Heal invited me to the first meeting on this project I knew that it was to discuss the provision of sound effects throughout the museum. There was also a theatrical tableau with life-size figures depicting scenes from the hey-dey of Saratoga as a famous spa town during the late 1800's. The three settings in this tableau were to be the interior of a spa, a hotel reception and a hotel balcony. A six minute sound and light sequence cycling from day to night was devised for the hotel scenes. And the spa, in addition to the theatrical lighting, incorporated an audio-visual display set into a stained glass window employing eighty archive photographs.

### RACE AMERICA

However, one thing led to another and, as the project evolved over the ensuing weeks, the idea arose of providing some form of audio-visual or multi-vision experience in the somewhat barren sixty foot square Hall of Fame. The primary function of this room heretofore was to display the brass plates awarded to a selected number of trainers, jockeys or, indeed, horses, at the annual Hall of Fame induction ceremony. The idea now was to retain this function but to display the placques in a more interesting environment which would also house a number of interractive video consoles at which visitors could view archive material which had been transferred to laser disc. And, to make fuller use of the room, the designers wished to incorporate a 12 to 15 minute visual montage/spectacular on the subject of American thoroughbred horse racing in all its aspects. At this point I contacted an old friend, Stephany Marks, who is a very experienced BBC television producer; and having just returned from two years in the USA filming a documentary series on architecture, she had some very useful contacts and, more importantly, was available to act as Executive Producer for the project.

Film, Video or Slides?

After discounting a multi-slide projection presentation on the grounds that a) it had already been done in the Churchill Downs Racing Museum in Louisville, Kentucky, and b) the beauty of horses is in their "movement", we investigated the possibilities of video.

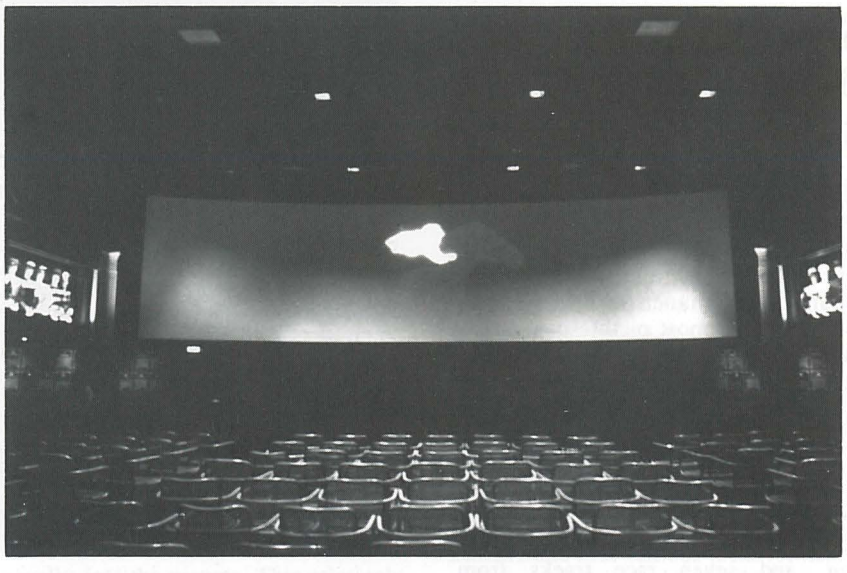
The designers did not wish to use any form of video wall because of the chequerboard effect spoiling the graceful lines of a thoroughbred in motion. We therefore considered the use of large screen video projection utilising a number of linked projectors sourced from a laser disc system.

This eventually had to be discounted both on the grounds of maintenance costs (the replacement price of light valves and projector lamps is very high) and the fact that retaining a colour and brightness match between a number of video projectors over a long period is not currently a viable proposition. Therefore, in the interests of being able to produce the best quality image with maximum reliability at a reasonable cost, we opted for traditional movie film. There was never any doubt that we were going to shoot the original material on 35mm film as there is, as yet, no alternative for colour, depth and image quality.

The Picture Format

The screen was sited over the platform at one end of the Hall of Fame and, for aesthetic reasons, had to be above the head height of people taking part in the presentation ceremonies. This meant, because of the relatively low ceiling, the screen could only be ten foot tall. Therefore, in order to produce an image with maximum impact, we decreed that the screen must be forty foot wide! This 4 × 1 ratio is, of course, completely non-standard (Cinemascope is approximately 2.5 × 1) and it consequently raised a whole set of new problems. Nothing like trying to do it the hard way!

Despite the fact that several experts advised, nay, *urged*, the use of multi-cameras and multi-projectors as the only method of producing a clean, bright and overall undistorted picture of the required size, Sidney Samuelson, Chairman of Samuelsons Plc, ran some tests for us and came up with the solution. Thus the film was shot with 35mm Panavision cameras adapted for "Super 35", which means that you gain some additional picture width by shooting over the edge area which is normally reserved for the optical sound track but which, in our case, we would not be using. (more of this later). Then, in order to get as much picture on to each frame as possible, the cameras were fitted with anamorphic lenses which squeeze the image in the ratio 2:1; and, of course, a complementary anamorphic lens had to be fitted to the projector to unsqueeze the picture and thus make it wider.



*Showing the unique 4:1 screen ratio in the Museum's Hall of Fame.*

All of this gave us the maximum width we could possibly achieve on a 35mm film frame. But still the picture was far too tall for our "letter box" screen. What to do? The obvious answer – but only after one had thought of it – was to blank off the top and bottom of the frame and only show the centre portion. So, following some extremely careful calculations, the camera view finders were marked to indicate the centre third (approximately) of the frame, which was the only part the customers were going to be allowed to see.

Lining up shots with this thin strip in the view finder, where close-ups are inevitably a long way off, made life extremely difficult for Director of Photography, Terry Hopkins. It was not made any easier when Director Keith Cheetham, consulting his storyboard, would announce that he was only interested in a small portion of this thin strip as the shot was going to end up as an optical effect with several different pictures running on the screen at the same time. For the whole concept of the film was to produce a collage of images and sounds, without a formal commentary, providing a kaleidoscopic impression of all aspects of American thoroughbred racing both on and off the track. Thus, the completed film is virtually eighteen minutes of optical effects.

Because of this, the director had *his* major headaches during the editing stage; to give you an example: because there was no editing machine available with an anamorphic lens which could show Super 35 he was always looking at a squeezed picture with a (sometimes critical) strip down one side of the frame missing. Furthermore, there was no way of experimenting with or previewing the split-screen and multi-image effects, so he had to wait until the optical house had completed the laborious and expensive task from his instructions before knowing whether or not it was going to work. Fortunately, he got it right, and it did! In fact, the impact of some of the visual effects even impressed *him!*

**On Location**

The shooting of the film, now titled RACE AMERICA,was undertaken during two and a half action packed weeks in April/May 1987 and another two and a half weeks of equally thrill-packed action during July/August of that year. It was necessary to be around in the Spring to film a foaling sequence, and we had to be at the Saratoga track during the Summer for what must be one of America's most picturesque racing seasons, preceded by the yearling sales where untried young thoroughbreds are often sold for in excess of two million dollars.

At the end of the first shoot we had visited a major stud and breeding farm, a training centre, a horse park where we filmed steeple chasing, and seven race tracks from California to New York's Long Island, to Kentucky (where we were lucky enough to catch the spectacular Kentucky Derby). We had almost enough documentary-type material, including two days of helicopter shooting, but lacked the close-up action shots of horses and jockeys in the starting gate and of the race itself which would add the necessary drama and excitement.

It had become almost too apparent sometimes that one could not expect to get a camera – yet alone helicopters and crane vehicles – anywhere near these highly strung and powerful beasts. And even if it were feasible, there are so many dollars tied up in that horse flesh that the owners and trainers would never take the risk. We therefore turned to Hollywood and sought the assistance of Corky Randall, one of the most experienced horse trainers for films.

Following Corky's advice, we hired some stables and a training track in California plus a starting gate, a six man starting gate crew, eighteen horses (necessary because they tire quickly and are then prone to breaking their legs. . .*expensive*!), six jockeys, three grooms, and all the necessary silks, saddles and blankets, etc. Most importantly, we had two marvellous wranglers, Beth Strickland and Dixie Hart. Dixie was a "real cowboy" who looked an extremely fit forty. We discovered that not only was he sixty but he still competed in rodeos.

Two special camera vehicles were hired for the four day shoot with crews chosen for their previous experience with horses. There was the four-wheeled buggy, called an ATV, hired from the Clint Eastwood studios which is only slightly wider than a motorbike and has the cameraman sitting behind and slightly above the driver with the camera suspended from a shock mount. The ATV was able to race down the track behind a group of horses at full gallop and, with the camera at jockey height, move right through the pack. It was a dangerous shot, not previously attempted by Corky or the crew, but it worked beautifully.

The other vehicle, the LOUMA crane, despite its dead weight, is a highly flexible piece of equipment consisting of a long counterweighted boom arm mounted on a specially modified flatbed truck. The camera is attached to the end of the boom and is remotely operated – focus, tilt, pan, from a console at the back of the truck using video-assist monitors. Spectacular shots were obtained by swinging the camera right into the middle of the pack for close-ups of horses and riders from every conceivable angle. We did one run with the camera held right in front of a horse's face as it galloped at forty miles an hour, and another run with the camera travelling only a few inches from the ground immediately behind the flying hooves of the pack.

Having obtained the "special" shots, we moved our party of thirteen (director, production manager and two assistants, three camera crew, two lighting crew, one sound engineer and two producers – also acting as drivers, labourers, caterers, you name it) to Saratoga. A few days later we ended the shoot on a high note when Keith Cheetham decided that he simply *had* to have a shot of the camera actually coming round the track and approaching the home stretch *with a full crowd in the grandstand*! Following some delicate negotiations with the track officials, everyone entered into the spirit of the thing and we were allowed to put a camera car on the track fifteen minutes before the start of the first race. Thus the surprised racing public were informed over the public address system that when they saw a car with a film crew aboard racing round the track they were to pretend that it was a horse . . . that it was winning . . . and that they had backed it! "When you see that convertible I want everyone to stand up . . . and shout", exhorted the announcer.
*And they did!*

The Sound

Being a theatre sound consultant and having spent many years as a sound designer for


*A working model of the Tote Board measures 19 ft × 10 ft.*

*Theatrical tableau with life size figures depicting Saratoga's Spa Town in the 19th century.*

theatre shows, exhibitions and multi-media events, I was determined that the Audio should be as exciting as the Visual. The original concept was to use an eight-track tape machine running in sync with the film dedicating three tracks for screen loudspeakers (left,centre,right), three tracks for surround loudspeakers (auditorium left, right and rear), one track for bass enhancements of hooves, etc., and the remaining track for synchronising time code. This is, in effect, what we ended up with but somewhere along the way I persuaded my co-producer and director that, to drive home that "you are there" feeling of RACE AMERICA, we should incorporate "Ambisonic" sound.

In the extremely hectic weeks of location shooting we were not able to record with soundfield microphones, so the "Ambisonic" spatial effects had to be created in the studio. This was, perhaps, yet another example of trying to do everything the hard way. For, having achieved a 24-track master tape with all the music and effects laid down in sync., the "Ambisonic" spatial mix-down to 8-track actually took well over 100 hours (!) during which period the director was at no time able to hear or gauge what the final result would be.

As a sound designer I found this very frustrating, and as a producer I was in a constant state of panic as the studio costs relentlessly soared to more than five times the budget. But, at the end of the day, what matters is what the audience (and, of course, the client!) hear and how they react.

With the Tascam tape deck, DBX noise reduction, Yamaha equalisers, and seven BGW 200W per channel power amplifiers driving eleven Electrovoice full range loudspeaker systems and two sub-woofers, the sound quality *had* to be superb. And it is true to say that wherever you stand in the room you will perceive a different perspective but one which is perfectly valid and, moreover, without any loudspeaker source being apparent.

Lighting Effects

In order to make life a little more complicated for ourselves, we decided to add some live lighting effects to the screening of our film; so the computer which is part of the system which synchronises the film and the tape and performs various other control functions, also operates a dimming system.

Each presentation starts with a two minute pre-announcement during which time the film and tape get themselves into frame-lock; then the interractive video consoles in the Hall receive a warning before being muted for the duration of the film; as the projected logo on the screen and houselights begin to fade, motorized blinds are dramatically lowered in front of the high level glass-fronted cases containing a colourful display of jockeys' silks (this is to prevent unwanted reflections from the screen). During the ensuing darkness the sound of an enormous

*Another tableau incorporates an audio visual display set into a stained glass window employing 80 archive photographs.*

horse van travels through the auditorium and comes to a halt at the screen. This sound is accompanied by the sweep of headlights from a theatrical spotlight with a "Pancan" head housing a motorized mirror.

As soon as the vehicle has stopped we hear the sound of bolts being drawn and, as from inside the van, the tailgate opens in the middle of the screen and the silhouette of a horse walks into the picture. This relatively small central image then cuts dramatically to a forty foot wide shot of horses galloping towards the camera . . . and the film begins.

Later, during scenes of early morning stables and lush Kentucky grasslands, theatrical spotlights with colours and gobos are used on the audience and around the room to enhance the atmosphere and complement the images on the screen.

## THE TOTE BOARD

A very prominent feature at the centre of the museum is the paramutuel board; better known in the UK as the tote board. This is a working model of the real thing. It was constructed by Electrosonic Limited in London and transported by air in six sections for assembly on site. Ivor Heal, the British designer for the museum project, conceived the layout of the front panel which called for a quantity of 192 digits, each consisting of a 6 × 4 matrix of 24 lamps; hence, some 9,216 separate circuits had to be wired and programmed.

Having obtained the computer print-out of two actual races from the Paramutuel room at Aqueduct race track in New York, I was able to devise a script. We opted for two separate three minute sequences each building up to and including a simulated race. Thus, via handheld earphones, the visitor can see and hear how this complicated giant calculator works; how the odds are constantly changing before every race as the bets are placed on each horse; and how the pool totals, from which the final pay-outs are calculated, are similarly updated; how during the race the order of the first four horses and the timings of the front runner are displayed for the quarter mile, half, three quarters, mile, and finish; and then how the pay-outs for Win, Place and Show bets are displayed for the first three horses; and finally, the "Official" sign is switched on and, in a real situation, the lucky ones would go and collect their winnings.

## DIGITAL SOUND STORES

The two three-minute commentaries for the tote board are recorded on digital sound stores (no moving parts and, hopefully, no maintenance) which run in sync with the computer which drives the tote board display. Another sound store, dedicated to six minutes of general atmosphere emanating from ceiling loudspeakers in that area, is so arranged that when the tote board race sequence starts the crowd sound builds to match the commentary.

Sound In The Museum

Other recordings reproduced from sound stores include an exciting atmosphere track for a full-sized starting gate, the day-time/night-time music for the hotel tableau, various sound effects for a stable and a paddock, plus the voices of four notable trainers and four famous jockeys, heard via a series of handheld earphones, talking about their craft.

# Getting to Grips with the New Technologies

PAUL NEED

We face ever more rapid advances in technology, with the lifespan of product cycles becoming correspondingly shorter. One way to stay on top of new developments could be to attend a new 'hands on' style course, aimed at benefitting practitioners and manufacturers alike. An impartial observer went to find out.

Technical training for the theatre has always been a talking point within the profession. The subject of retraining verges on controversy. So when Stagehands, the technical agency based in Cardiff, announced the 'Latest Technology Familiarisation Course', held last August, there must have been cries of disapproval from many quarters, including those who believe that the people being retrained should not need to pay for the privilege. The course fee was £250 including lunch and accommodation was extra.

The course was aimed at professional technicians from the entertainment industry and it succeeded in attracting a wide variety of people – from the time-served chief electrician to the "roadie", the sound engineer to the student and the technical manager, even a shop fitter. 25% were on Stagehands' books and 90% had their course fees paid for them by an employer or sponsor. Theatre management obviously have the money to spend on training.

Choosing Birmingham University as the location was a conscious effort by the organisers to stay clear of London, to keep costs down, and still provide easy access and good facilities for paticipants from all over the country. Where else could you find bed and breakfast, and evening meal for £150.00 per week and only a ten minute walk from the conference hall? Certainly not in London.

The aim of the course was to provide professional technicians with hands-on experience of the latest equipment in lighting, sound, A.V. and special effects, which was on the whole reasonably successful. However, a couple of companies displaying their wares rather disappointingly failed to bring their most recently released items.

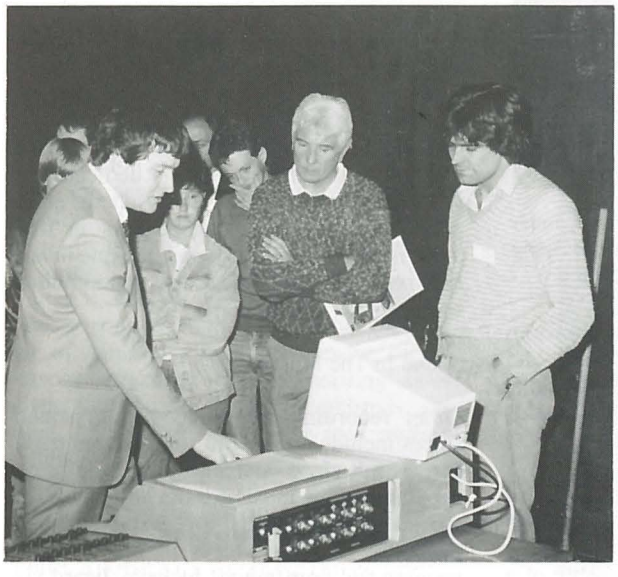
Strand talked at great length about the importance of control equipment and brought the M24, Tempus and the new Action lighting boards along. The new Lightboard M, together with the MLP2, Gemini, and the Galaxy 1, 2 or 3 were frustratingly absent, as were the Parscan, Litescan, Parscroller, Iris scroller or any colour change unit. The session began with an account of the historical development of luminaires and dimmers followed by a lengthy description of their new lantern range. This left barely an hour to actually get to grips with the all-too-few new items that they brought with them.

CCT, gave a somewhat unprepared talk about their range of equipment and also failed to bring along anything really exciting. It seemed as though both CCT and Strand had misinterpreted the brief from Stagehands as to what exactly should have been covered and demonstrated. Either that or they ignored it. Using salesmen to talk about an equipment range can be a mistake in any form of teaching/training situation since at the end of the day they must be aiming for a sale. In this respect the course sometimes resembled a mini ABTT trade or PLASA Light and Sound show.

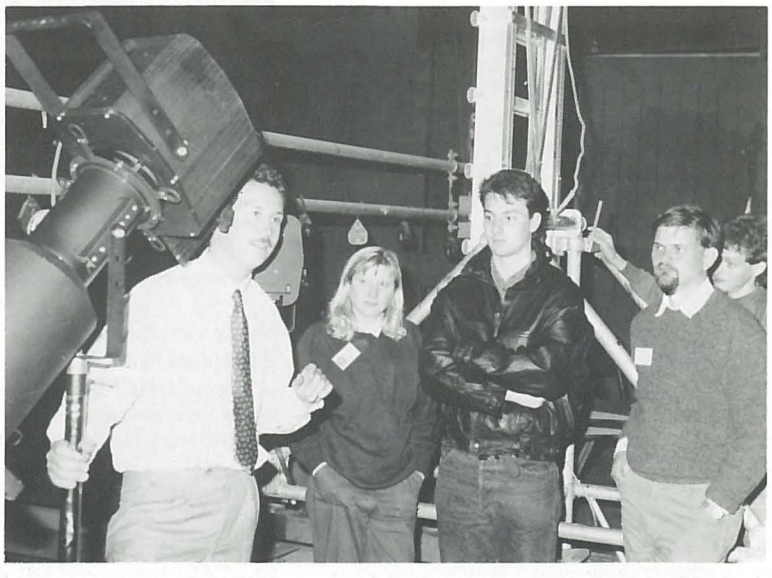
Other demonstrations included a very informative lecture-type presentation given by Keith Flounder of Laserhire. He covered the principles of how lasers actually work, and how to use them effectively and safely. This was probably one of the best sessions in the first half of the week. A superb balance of magnificent displays, theory and hands-on experience. Many people on the course, some of whom have never even seen a laser, believed this session to be truly exhilarating.

***It succeeded in attracting a wide variety of people – from chief electrician to sound engineer and technical manager.***

Tony Harcourt of Kodak also gave a very detailed and enjoyable talk on projection equipment. The theatre space overflowed with Kodak products enabling everyone to experiment with Carousels, dissolve units and the new Display maker, plus a computer-aided graphics design device used mainly for conferences and teaching purposes. Everyone had fun creating pretty, and sometimes rather rude pictures.



*Eltec – Budget control systems.*



*CCT Lecture demonstration.*

*Practical session with Kodak Computer Aided Display Maker.*

Apart from the practical demonstrations held in the university theatre, evening talks took place in a lecture room. This combination of lectures, practical sessions and discussion groups worked very well indeed, although it did add up to rather a long day, often starting at 10.00 am and ending around 9.00 pm.

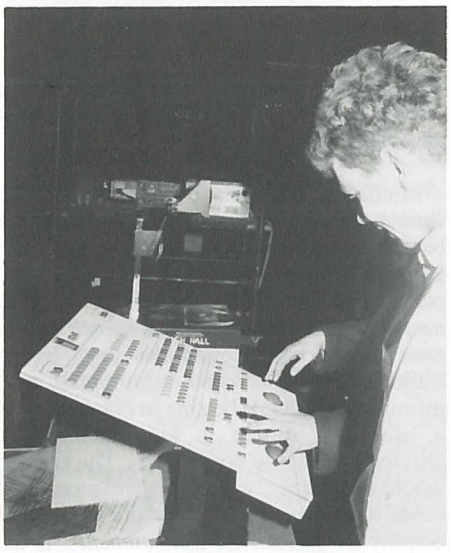
During the first evening session Alan Stevenson of the Arts and Entertainment Technical Training Initiative led a very lively discussion about retraining programmes for theatre technicians. And the possible grading and assessment of technicians proved quite a controversial point with almost all of the course participants. On another evening, Ian Connor of Thorn EMI gave a very interesting talk on theatre lamps, but like Strand, concentrated on their historical development. John Watt, safety officer for the RSC, discussed health and safety practices for the theatre and technicians' awareness of the dangers of working on stage.

***The industry desperately needs more training and re-training courses . . . especially with computer-based equipment getting more advanced.***

Although the evening sessions raised some very valid discussion points, it felt as though Stagehands had used them as a stop-gap in the schedule. The time could have been put to better use. It is all very well being told that technicians need retraining; it is all very well understanding why a lamp blows after 300 hours; and it is all very well being told one must use outriggers on a tallescope; but why on a course of this nature? Surely these subjects belong on a basic training course rather than on one dealing with the latest advances in theatre technology.

The highlight of the week must have been the trip to Lighting and Sound Design of Birmingham. Managing Director Simon Ousten escorted the group through their huge warehouse, which housed various manufacturing units making Parcans, Trussing, colour scrollers, and almost anything used in rock and roll lighting. Later we were transported to the National Exhibition centre to be shown around the stage set for the rock singer Prince. The biggest indoor lighting rig ever, they told us. Participants were then able to spend a whole hour talking with Prince's lighting designer, Roy Bentley, about the difference between theatre and rock lighting.

On the final morning, Patricia Webb, Director of Stagehands held a post-mortem to discuss participants' feelings about the course. The general feeling was that the course was on the whole worthwhile but that future courses should include sessions on sound design, recording and mixing. (Sound was hardly mentioned during the week.) And that lighting designers might be invited to lecture on design work, choice of equipment, etc.



*Hands-on session with the Laser controller.*

Furthermore, the feeling was that it might be more appropriate to invite hire companies to bring equipment from a cross section of manufacturers so that side-by-side comparisons might be made rather than inviting the manufacturers themselves. The possibility was also discussed of working towards a technical presentation to put all the separate items of equipment through their paces at the end of the week.

It was obvious from the discussion that all participants gained something from the course, though the less experienced members gained most both from the lecturer and from working with the more experienced. The technicians likely to gain most from a course of this nature, given the present format, are those who are fairly new to the business. Stagehands might possibly rethink exactly who the course is aimed at.

Stagehands would probably be the first to admit that some mistakes were made during the conception of this new course. It was after-all the very first of its kind and they must be given due credit for attempting such a project.

The industry desperately needs more training and re-training courses to cope with the increasingly frequent changes in equipment design and specification. This is especially so with computer-based equipment getting more advanced, cheaper and therefore becoming more easily accessible to ever more theatres and venues around the country.

Stagehands have plans for a second course in August 1989. Probably at the same venue and possibly costing about the same. Surely £250.00 is not a great deal to pay to keep up with the times.

*Paul Need is a member of the Association of Lighting Designers and has lit shows in theatres as different as London's Royal Court and the Liverpool Playhouse. He has just completed a spell at RADA teaching lighting design and stage electrics.*


LATEST TECHNOLOGY FAMILIARISATION COURSE

**We'd like to say thank-you...**

to all those who supported the first course of its kind in Britain and helped to make it such a success. It proved the need for this type of event where practitioners can explore the possibilities offered by new technology; and manufacturers have the chance to see some practical problems involved in its application. (Special thanks to: Strand Lighting, Laserhire, CCT Lighting, Light & Sound Design, Kodak, Thorn EMI, AETTI and John Watts at the RSC).

**...and see you again next year.**

Stagehands has developed and extended its course for next year. We look forward to more healthy debates and seeing old faces alongside the new at Birmingham next August. So let us fill you in by contacting us at the address below - and why not put forward your ideas, too?

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**STAGEHANDS**

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# Beating the Drum

RICHARD PILBROW

The Building Committee of the National Theatre were charged with the task of preparing the building brief for architect Denys Lasdun. Under the chairmanship of Sir Laurence Olivier and Norman Marshall, it included such luminaries of the theatre as Peter Brook, George Devine, John Dexter, Michael Elliott, Bill Gaskill, Peter Hall, and Tanya Moiseiwitch. Upon the death of George Devine, Sir Laurence invited me to join the committee to represent the ''practical'' aspects of theatre.

The committee continued to meet for months. The centre of debate was the principal theatre, the Olivier. It was already decided that it should be an open stage theatre. The second stage was to be a proscenium. An open stage was thought of as one in which the audience partially surrounded the action that took place in the same 'room'.

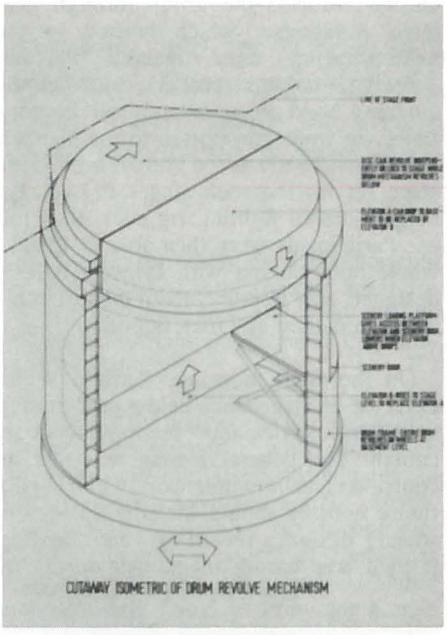
The company was then resident at Chichester, which is a poor copy of the Guthrie-inspired thrust. It is a very flat, spread out, overlarge and unfocussed space. There was a determination to avoid the most glaring faults.

Sir Laurence Olivier felt that the full 'Guthrie' thrust took the audience too far around the sides of the stage. he wished an actor at the 'point of command' (about 15-18 feet from the front row audience) to be able to see everybody within his peripheral vision (about 120 degrees). Thus the basic geometry of the room evolved. A stage set in one corner of a square.

There was intense debate about the role of scenery. Guthrie advocates argued that the open stage was for actors and text alone. At most they might be supported by costume and simple illumination. However, even in those early days of 1964, most directors working on thrust stages were striving to use effect and illusion, despite Guthrie's own antipathy.

Was the Olivier stage to be a stage 'within a room', but forever 'locked' in that room? Or should it be capable of being opened out – to 'a world beyond'. Should it be a platform for actor and the drama without the capability of visual effect? Or should it be a stage like any other that had evolved over hundreds of years; one capable of employing the scenic techniques of its time?

Lasdun's first version of the final model of the Olivier auditorium showed a concrete balcony (extending from the now familiar side boxes) running to the back of the stage, meeting in a right angle and permanently built about 14 feet above the stage. A formidable barrier to illusion. Half the committee praised its purity. Half expressed concern at its rigidity.



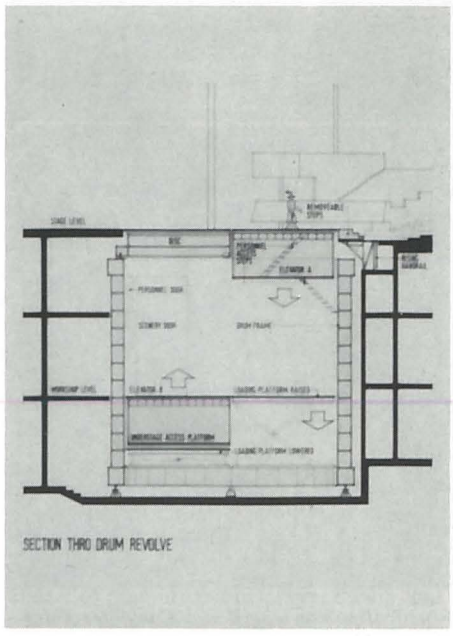
CUTAWAY ISOMETRIC OF DRUM REVOLVE MECHANISM

Michael Elliott spoke most clearly. ''Why should our new National Theatre turn its back on centuries of evolving stagecraft? How do we know that what has been a vital part of theatre for our ancestors will not be needed again. If for a production we need a concrete balcony around the stage **let us build it**. But if we need the impression of infinite space, let us be able to create it''. At a late night dinner in his London flat, Olivier was finally convinced . The Olivier would be a stage ''within the audience'' that *could* be totally confined, or one that could employ a ''*full scenic environment*'' if the play demanded it.

Some months later I was appointed the theatre consultant. The brief for the Olivier was ''A modified thrust stage capable of providing a full scenic environment, **ALSO** capable of operating in repertoire with a twice daily changeover of production.

The solution took months to evolve and years to execute. It led to the world's first thrust stage with cruciform-style rear and side stages (to the limits of the constrained site), a full fly tower overhead and a most unusual understage.

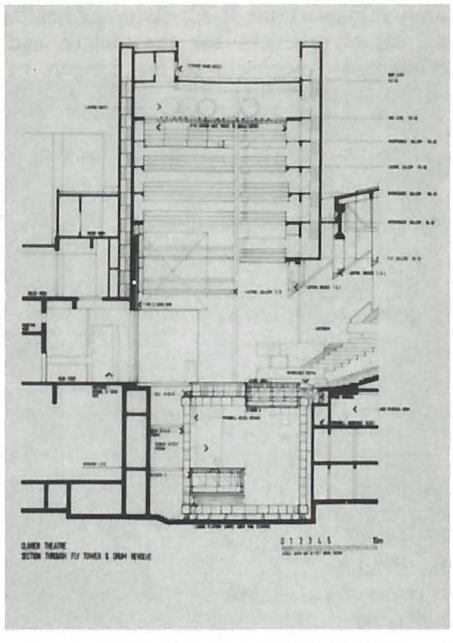
At first, my partner Richard Brett and I, explored traps, modular elevators (perhaps checker-board style), bridges, revolves, and so on. With audience part surrounding the stage, a problem seemed to be that scenery, hanging or rising, **ACROSS** the stage might



SECTION THRO DRUM REVOLVE

not be very useful. Why would scenic elements necessarily be set at right angles to the centre line? Above the stage this led to the design of a point line flying system, that allows scenery of any shape to be hung anywhere at any angle. but below the floor, the question was more complex. Any elevator or trap system set rigidly at right angles seemed too confining.

Richard and I went to Vienna to look at the famous Drum Revolving stage at the Burgtheater. We met with Wagner-Buro, the builders of this amazing piece of theatre technology. It allows the rotation of the scenic environment. It allows a scene to be changed by lowering it into the cellar and replacing it with another from below. This seemed an interesting possibility, particularly if the audience were actually sitting around the stage. But the thrust stage we

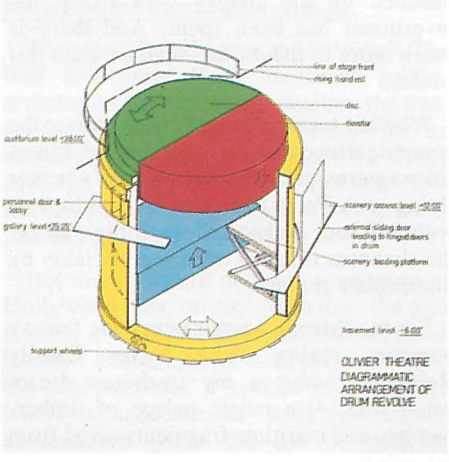


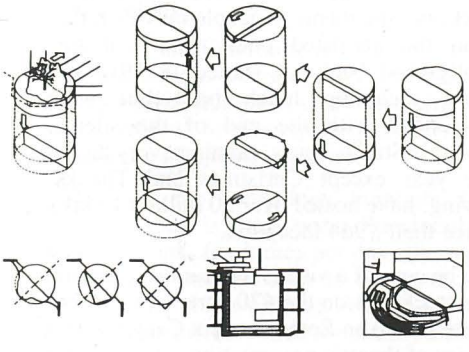
were considering seemed to pose extra problems. On any thrust stage, the floor itself is a major part of the visual environment. A rectangular lift, even in a revolving stage, presented limitations. Only the rectangular elevator that would fit within the circumference would be capable of change. What of the surrounding area?

Finally, late one night in a cafe in Vienna, the ''Theta''drum (as Dick and I began to call it) was drawn on a napkin. A drum containing two **SEMI-CIRCULAR** elevators. Each elevator would stretch to the edge of the thrust and thus allow the removal downward of the whole acting area. On top of the rotating drum was to be a semi-circular disk, capable of being located over either elevator, but capable of independent rotation. Plentiful traps in both elevators and the disk which could be rotated to achieve trapping at any point or at any angle.

So the drum was conceived. It provided:

1. A freight elevator from the scene shops (the Olivier Theatre is on the third floor of the building)
2. A revolving stage.
3. Traps and levels that can be set at any angle to the centre line, quickly, in repertoire.




*Drum Revolve control panel.*

4. The whole thrust stage might be lowered to the orchestra stalls level or below, thus effectively removing the thrust and allowing its replacement with one of another shape or configuration.
5. The freedom to shape the stage floor in plan and section both above and below normal stage level, yet capable of being changed easily in repertoire.
6. A scene changing device. Half the stage (any half, front or back, at any angle) might be lowered to the basement and replaced by another half in the same, or any other position, or at any other angle. Combined with the separately rotating disk (that of course may also carry scenery – which may be tracked off to a rear stage) considerable variety might be achieved.
7. The capability of rotating and vertical movement, in silence, at any speed, under computer control (also capable of integration with the flying system) presented opportunities for dynamic stage movement that might be liberating for the director.

Ironically, when Peter Hall, on his appointment as Director, came to our office and was shown a model of the drum to be, it was this last feature that most excited him.

But **WHEN** *was* the drum to be? The period of the National's completion was a nightmare. Of course construction of all the advanced stage equipment went to the tender and the lowest bids (of course) were accepted. The main construction of the building was endlessly delayed and finally in crisis the company moved into the building with almost nothing finished – indeed in the stage areas some things were hardly started. Lighting and sound were just completed to allow the curtain to rise in 1976. The difficult parts, including the computer controlled flying and the drum revolve continued to be worked on by the contractors after the actors had left the stage every night, for months that stretched into years. Only by 1981 was the power flying operational (it has been working successfully ever since). The Drum was commissioned in 1978. Over the years it has been the backstage workhorse that it was intended to be, lifting freight from workshops to stage, or performing occasional duty as a conventional revolve.

Now at last, that brilliant designer, Bill Dudley has seized the opportunity, and used the drum to its full extent.

For years, the drum has been an invention about which I've been very unsure. I've known that physically the machine worked, but was it right, did it contribute anything to the theatre? Would one as a consultant ever again recommend such a piece of complex equipment? Until ''The Shaugraun'' my growing doubts would have led me to say no. Since those days of the 1960's my interests have moved away from stage devices and toward exploring how best to design auditorium spaces to increase the intensity of audiences' involvement. Now having seen ''The Shaugraun'' work, I am less sure. Maybe it wasn't such a bad idea after all!

Guthrie's contribution to theatre was a great one. His rediscovery of the thrust led the way to most modern open stages. Stages that 'contain' the actors within the audiences' embrace. (Hindsight has made one wonder whether he was mistaken to adopt the single level auditorium inspired by the Greeks; perhaps he should have stayed nearer home with the multilevel, more intimate Elizabethan model). But scenic spectacle? All the Guthrie thrust stage theatres have fought against the limitations of insufficient backstage. But there is little sign that the public tire of spectacle. ''Cats'' and ''Phantom'' alone indicate the public's love of the visual. Is that relevant to ''art'' theatre?

The success of ''The Shaugraun'' is due to the impact of a wonderful play brilliantly performed by actors, who are vibrantly alive and within the same room. Within the very 'grasp' of an excited lively audience. That actors and audience are also contained within a whole world of illusion, within a complete ''scenic environment'' which complements and supports the drama, enfolding the theatre within the magic of its world, seems potent indeed.

# MOVIE THEME PARKS

Francis goes to Hollywood

I am frightened of mice. So I do not mind the sanitisation that Disney has applied to the land where Mickey is the master marketing mouse.

**DISNEYLAND** is a model society. A land where animals graciously extend equal opportunity to we humans who created them as an object of laughter. But to laugh *with* rather than *at*: the success of Disney characters is that we can identify with their predicaments. And if life cannot always offer an ever after happiness, at least there can be survival with a smile. Tears are for relief, never distress: there is no fate too extreme for an animator to reverse.

*Welcome*, says your souvenir guide, *to the happiest place on earth*. I surrender. Who wants to be a sociologist in a **Magic Kingdom**! But then surrender is not difficult, especially after an overnight in the Disneyland Hotel – sixty acres of self-contained resort grouped around a boating lake whose Seaports of the Pacific offer (and I quote) thundering waterfalls, exotic Koi fish ponds, Japanese gardens, famed dancing waters, unusual wares in the international bazaar, cocktails overlooking the marina, country western music and Dreyer's Puppet Theater. Who needs Mozart and Handel? Well I do, so I always tour a walkman. And I played it while watching the 24 hour Disney channel on my room TV.

The easiest exit from Disneyland Hotel is by monorail. And where does that monorail go? Right! To the Magic Kingdom. And it comes back – which is good news for the likes of me who need to press the abort button every few hours and return to partake of G & T lubrication. There is no need to go thirsty at Chateau Mouse, but it is rather awash in wholesome coke.

So there I was, breakfasted on easy over eggs, hash browns and have a nice day, standing in Central Square awaiting the chime of nine to signal the charge up Main Street USA to be early in line for the wonders of Frontierland, Adventureland, Fantasyland and Tomorrowland. The British are supposed to be a nation of queuers but nothing seems to pleasure an American more than the possibility of standing in line. Democracy is standing in line: you just have to stand in line and your turn will come. And Disneyland lines have markers every fifteen minutes of wait time: opportunity not only knocks but it knocks on cue.

I may be an equal opportunist but I have never got properly into the competitive spirit that equality of opportunity is supposed to breed. So, rather than sprint towards the star attractions, I drift into Main Street Cinema. This is a kind of *mouserama* – six screens showing, in piano accompanied monochrome, the real Michael Mouse photographed before he became a merchandising opportunity.

The facade of the **Disneyland Opera House** would beckon any theatric tourist. The show is a computerised 'audio-animatronic' salute to Lincoln but the foyers house a Walt Disney Museum with exhibits of pioneer animation and an audio-visual presentation of current techniques. A reconstruction shows both Mr Disney's offices – the formal and the working. There is fun in another theatre, the **Golden Horseshoe Salon** where Miss Lily and her girls join bartender Sam and his cowboys in a five-times-per-day half hour revue with can-can vigour. They perform with gusto and sincerity.

Sincerity and professionalism are fundamental to Disneyland success. There is no send-up. Reality is heightened with care and consistency. The massive investment in hardware is frequently matched by the artistry with which the investment has been spent. And there is much more to the professionalism than just smiles.

Whether taking a jungle cruise among the computo-crocodiles or viewing the Injuns from a sternwheeler steamboat, and whether flying with Peter Pan over the rooftops or with Michael Jackson through the galaxy, the slickness is saved from superficiality by immaculate timing.

For me there is a point where the fantasy becomes reality. **The Swiss Family Robinson** home is my treehouse dream come true – a magic palace of timber, bamboo and maritime fragments saved from the wreck.

**UNIVERSAL STUDIOS** is also a theme park, but the theme is people movies rather than the animated ones. Tours of this Hollywood back lot started in 1915 (25 cents including lunch box) but were suspended with the end of the silents. Today's Studio Tours, running every day of the year except Christmas and Thanksgiving, have hosted over 50 million visitors since their 1964 inception.

The core of a visit is the tram ride around the stock sets on the 420 acre back lot, but there is also an Entertainment Center with a series of theatric presentations of cinematic themes and opportunities to purchase movie related merchandise. (I did not respond to the invitation to 'be sure to visit our exciting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The tram ride is a voyage around one's picture-going yesterdays and television-watching todays. Its all just a little bit confusing because the streets and buildings have been adapted so many times. It takes only minor set-dressing to convert the New York Street into Los Angeles for 'Earthquake', San Francisco for 'Dirty Harry' or Chicago for 'The Sting'; while Anytown USA provides a more homely location for Doris Day or the Munsters. Six Points is a western town with six converging streets. It dates from the silent days when six films could be shot here at the same time, but every subsequent cowboy from John Wayne to Clint Eastwood has walked tall along the streets of this set where you can change towns by just going around the corner.

Then there is Little Europe, condensing the common market into a few blocks of quaint historical adaptability. King Kong lives nearby, yet not far from the Doomed Glacier Ice Tunnel. On a darkened sound stage, the tour sensation becomes one of riding an elevated train in New York. Through apartment windows can be seen TV newscasts of King Kong's approach. A transformer explodes, sirens scream and a helicopter crashes in flames. But not to worry: although Kong devastates Brooklyn Bridge with a gentle swipe, his twenty nine computerised movements miss us.

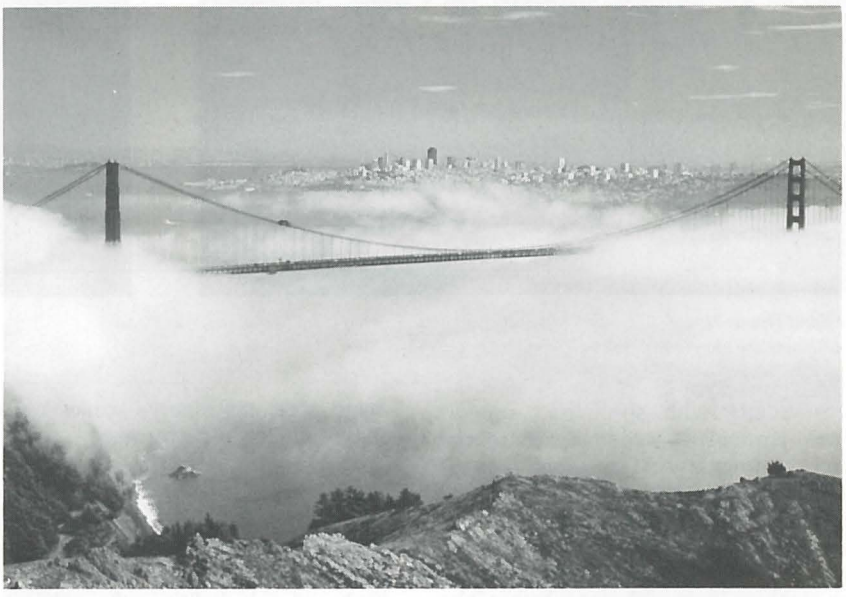
There is a lot of water at Universal. The Red Sea parts (forty thousand gallons draining in three minutes) to allow the tram to negotiate a collapsing bridge for an encounter with Jaws. And beware the sleepy Mexican village which has a dramatic flash flood (twelve thousand gallons of the stuff) just as you happen to pass by.

But these sets are not only a museum of Hollywood past: on any given day, the tour is likely to include a diversion to avoid some location where a shoot is in progress. And the tour includes a special effects stage where a sequence of working exhibits demonstrate (with the aid of selected tourists as actors) such activities as 2010 space-walking and Fred Astaire's dancing on the ceiling.

Back in the Entertainment Center there are presentations where visitors can observe the craft of the stuntman, study upstaging by animal experts or participate (passively) in custard pie missile technology.

However the technology highlight for theatrepersons is the **Conan Spectacular** which mounts, five times per day, the type of spectacle that is easier to compose for film than stage. It is difficult in a live setting to reproduce effects which are usually added optically after the take. But a 4.5 million dollar budget eases the problem. The dragon's flame belching mouth and laser generating eyes are truly wagnerian, and the thrust stage has a magnificent water curtain which, after a bleed through, draws back by cutting the flow from the centre outwards.

*Las Vegas Airport*



*Dry Ice at the Golden Gate*

Again sincerity and professionalism are the keynote, with the presentation on a scale that equates with my generation's expectation of a Hollywood production.

On to **LAS VEGAS** which has to be included in any listing of nominations for the ultimate in theme parks. The Vegas fantasy is Hollywood Movie at its purest. One is aware of a hard reality lurking everywhere. But can it be disentangled? Certainly not by me. Not even in daylight. Not that there is much daylight. Shine from the sun is discouraged indoors lest the gambling cycle gets interrupted, while the truly indigenous outdoor light is the nightly coloured full-up reflected from flash, flicker and chase. Every lamp vibrates except those of Caesar's Palace which sits almost in repose. Caesar's is the one building on The Strip with neither flicker nor chase. A pity perhaps that the toning is so green and so pea. But then that emperor guy, J. Caesar, despite his undoubted global success, does seem to have included more than a touch of decadence in his personal relationships.

One has to use the word decadence in describing Las Vegas: any resort, specially developed in the middle of a desert and devoted to gambling and related pursuits, just has to invite thoughts of Brecht's Mahoganny. But this is sanitised and packaged decadence. And once sanitised and packaged it just isn't really decadent any more.

But it is still fun, still fantasy. It has been called a Disneyland for adults. The airport lounges filled with batteries of one armed bandits. The hotels alive with the clink-clank-clunk of coin – the route from bed to breakfast snakes through a forest of tables and machines so thickly planted that they do not need to be amplified by mirrors. But they are. Just what is the ratio of slot machines to beds?



*Disneyland Opera House*

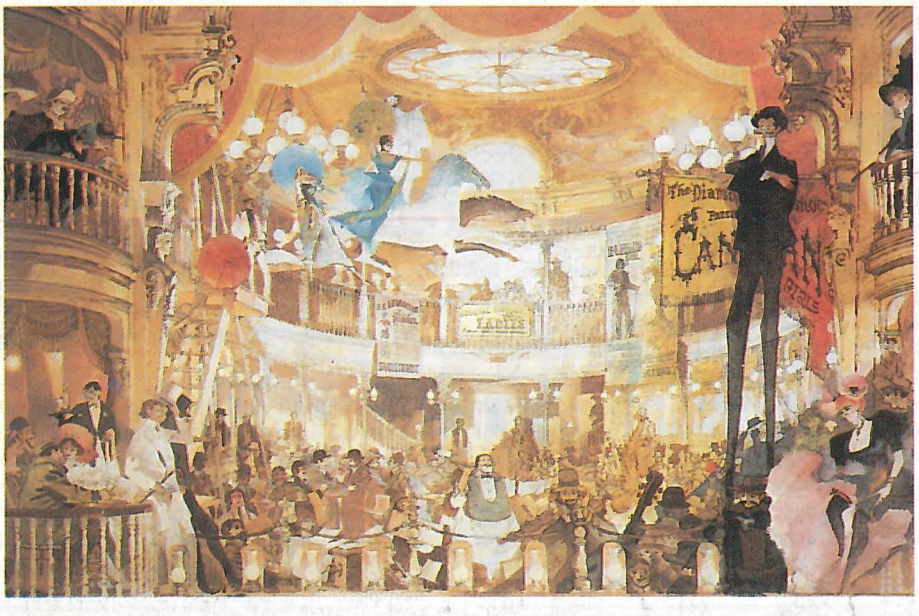
It is a city with specialised support services, particularly wedding parlours and divorce attorneys. And lots and lots of shows. The concentration of theatres (called showrooms) places The Strip ahead of Broadway and the West End in volume terms. And not just in the number of stages but in anything to do with size whether it be stage area, machinery, scenes or, especially, number of performers.

Everything, that is, except the lighting rigs which are distinctly undernourished. There is enough wash from the front: visibility is not a problem. But with only token back and side lighting, the pulchritude is distinctly two dimensional. Why spend all this money on scenery and people, then minimise the investment by flattening the curves? Any kick line deserves at least one parcan per colour per dancer per position. And that is just downlighters for starters.

But, lighting apart, these spectaculars are great fun. Impelled along by their click tracks, they are delivered with a glossy attack which takes the twice-nightly sinking of the Titanic in its stride. By the end of the evening one is totally convinced that ladies descending from the auditorium's ceiling or papering its walls is perfectly natural behaviour.

I fully intended to add the Liberace Museum to my collection but got my openings in a twist. Perhaps it was a subconscious need to have a reason to go back to this crazy theatric city.

**SAN FRANCISCO** is not a theme park and it is not Hollywood. Or is it? Where else can you ride the running board of a clanging cable car to the structured fantasy of Fisherman's Wharf to take a boat under a Golden Gate Bridge smothered in dry ice?



*John de Cuir's backloth design for Disneyland's* Golden Horseshoe Revue



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