CUE

Technical Theatre Review 56

Nov/Dec 1988 £1.75

Cover:

Sir Alec Guinness and Edward Herrmann in *"A Walk in the Woods"* by Lee Blessing. On another page Director Ronald Eyre, Set Designer Robin Don and Lighting Designer Rick Fisher describe the making of this thoughtful little masterpiece at the Comedy Theatre.

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Welcome Aboard!

In our overture and curtain raiser which proclaimed the launching of CUE in 1979 we took as our objective the even-handed discussion of all back stage affairs.

We held no other special briefs than this. Thus CUE quickly became accepted as the independent voice of Technical Theatre. Not only so: Our columns have embraced the wider interests of the technician, the designer, the producer and theatre management by including colourful and entertaining observations from the audience side of the curtain: All in all a recipe for success we trust and a fulfilment of our early promise.

In the first blush of our debut we talked bravely of publishing for generations rather than decades, and we meant it. However, as we enter our 10th year of publication the present managing editor's stewardship comes to an end. But with all who know and appreciate the team spirit which infuses a stage performance or a journal we say – The ship is more than the crew and it's time for a refit and a new skipper.

So welcome aboard Pat MacKay of our U.S. contemporary *Theatre crafts* who has acquired and will continue publication of CUE under its new masthead **CUE INTERNATIONAL.**

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CUE INTERNATIONAL

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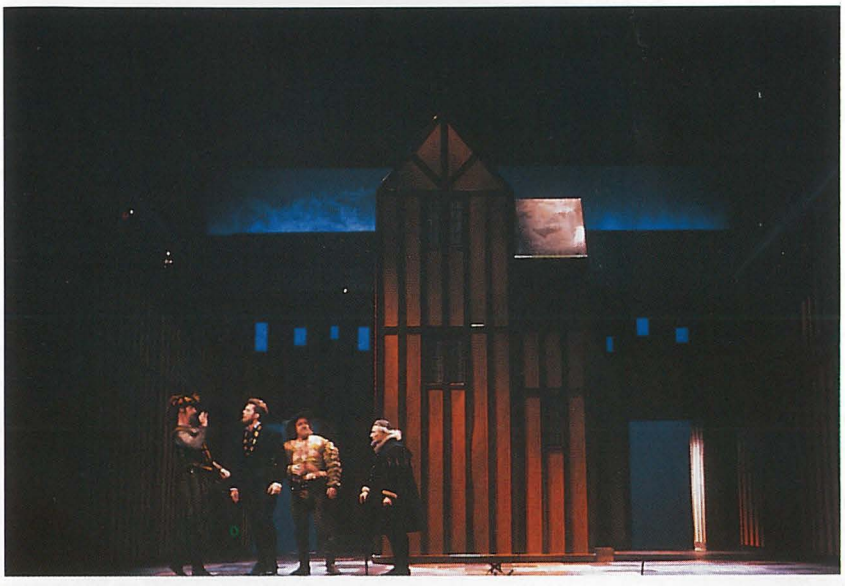
STAGE DESIGN

DAVID FINGLETON

Welcome arrival of the regional opera companies at Covent Garden ☐ An unsatisfactory setting for Butterfly and an alienating front gauze ☐ Minimum staging for *Das Rheingold* holds promise for the rest of the Ring Cycle in 1991 ☐ ENO commissions a new space-age opera saved only by inventive lighting and projections ☐ Costly and expensive staging of a twenty minute political sketch at the Lyttleton ☐ Implausible sets but credible costumes for *Secret Rapture* ☐ Measure for Measure settings from Stratford settle in comfortably at the Barbican.

The positive approach to our regional opera companies that is being taken by the Royal Opera's new regime, under Jeremy Isaacs, at Covent Garden is greatly to be welcomed. Within two weeks this autumn we were able to see at the Royal Opera House first Welsh National Opera's admirable production of Verdi's *Falstaff*, as part of their national tour, and then Scottish Opera's staging of Puccini's *Madam Butterfly*, acquired by the Royal Opera to be added to their permanent repertory. Much good comes of this. Firstly London audiences receive a much better impression of a regional company's work if they can see it in a suitable theatre, such as the Royal Opera House, rather than a makeshift one, like the appalling Dominion; secondly it is of great importance that the excellent operatic work that is done in the regions be seen in London, lest London audiences might otherwise persevere with the belief that they inhabit the cultural centre of the universe. Of course neither a production clearly designed for much smaller stages, like WNO's Falstaff, nor a staging that has to be adapted to another house, like SO's Butterfly, can truly be said to be working under ideal conditions; but at least there was a fair chance to appraise them.

In fact it was *Falstaff* that came across more powerfully at the Garden in Peter Stein's wonderfully lucid production, with sets designed by Lucio Fanti and costumes by Moidele Bickel. Stein of course is the Director of the great Berlin Schaubühne theatre company, and his previous production for the Welsh, of Verdi's Otello in 1986, was of the stuff that legends are made. Falstaff was scarcely less striking. It was set in Falstaff's own period, not Shakespeare's or any other example of producer's 'concept', and was played simply and directly. The sets may have seemed a little understated, especially on Covent Garden's large stage, but they were blessedly simple, workmanlike and undistracting. Falstaff's own quarters were clearly where he actually lived, under the eaves of the Garter Inn, and Ford's fine straightforward house and garden were solidly bourgeois, avoiding the plushly nouveau-riche Jacobethan elaboration that was Glyndebourne's answer last summer. This production also solved the problem of Falstaff's secretion in the laundry basket, and escape from it, more convincingly than in any staging of the opera I have seen. Herne's Oak was stylised and none the worse for that, though the activity around it was distinctly blunted and dwarfed by the size of the stage, and the opera's final scene, where first the oak, and then Falstaff himself, were hoisted into the flies, leaving a bare stage with just dark blue drapes across the cyclorama, was an inspired solution to the marvellous fugal ending of Verdi's great final opera. Ms Bickel's costumes were similarly convincing, with Falstaff himself, played by the distinctly slim Donald Maxwell, coming over as a more credibly fat man than most



Welsh National Opera's production of Verdi's Falstaff *at the Royal Opera House. Producer, Peter Stein. Conductor's, Richard Armstrong and Martin Andre. Set Designer, Lucio Fanti. Costumes by Moidele Bickel. Lighting by Robert Bryan. Photo., Graham Matthews.*

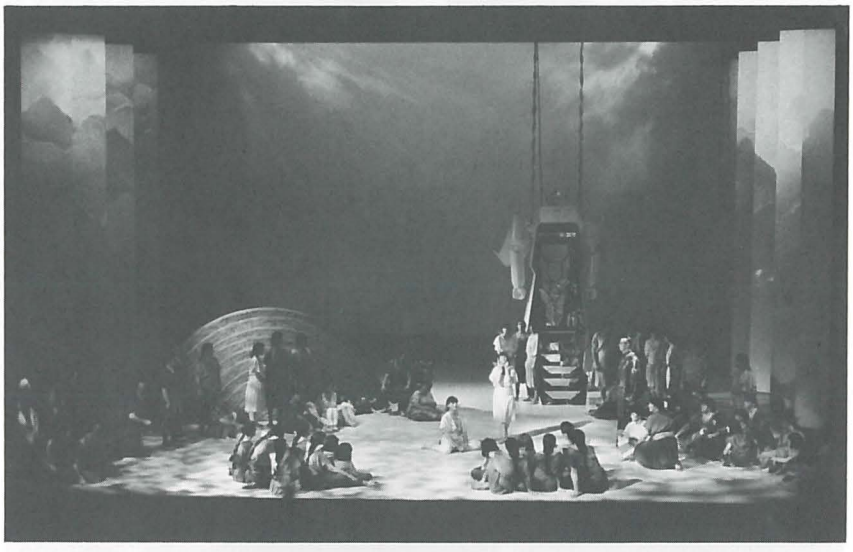
Design for the Nibelungs by Paul Hernon for Das Rheingold *at the Royal Opera House. Conductor, Bernard Haitink. Producer, Yuri Lyubimov. Lighting, Robert Bryan. Photo., Richard H. Smith (Dominic).*

Falstaffs I have previously seen. Robert Bryan's lighting was exemplary, and one's overall response was one of great satisfaction.

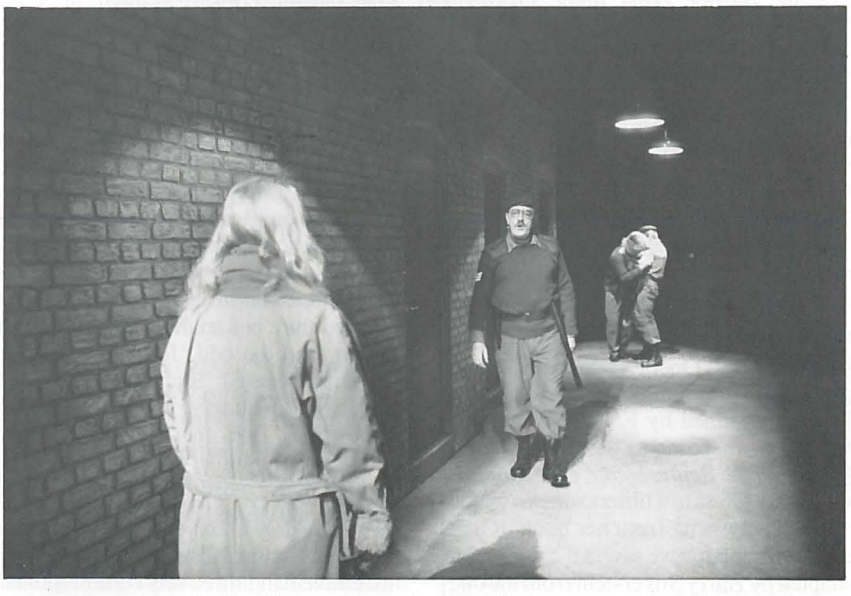
Sadly Puccini's *Madam Butterfly* was a less happy experience. This production was by the distinguished Spanish actress and director, Nuria Espert, working for the first time in the opera house, and her designers were the equally distinguished partnership of Ezio Frigerio and Franca Squarciapino, who were decidedly not. For some reason I could not entirely fathom Ms Espert had decided to set this Butterfly in 1937, just pre-Pearl Harbour, and not in a little house on the hill above Nagasaki, but in a squalid ground-floor apartment in a downtown slum tenement building. Quite why Lieutenant Pinkerton should ever have contemplated taking a 999-year lease on such sordid premises was not something we were asked to consider. To make matters worse the production team had also decided to play the entire proceedings behind a murky and distracting front gauze which served no apparent purpose save to make things look misty and to alienate one further from what was happening on stage. The effect of this was compounded by some truly inept lighting by a team new to me, Bruno Boyer and Alan Campbell, who managed to keep faces in shadow from start to finish and to cast shadows on stage where none should have been. Ezio Frigerio's tenement set, with its galleried staircases and central, lilac-covered entrance, was fine on its own terms, and looked especially fine once that gauze was raised for the curtain calls. Ms Squarciapino's 1930's, predominantly Western, costumes were less satisfactory: the arrival of the Western-clad Butterfly and her chums in Act 1 made a particularly unconvincing impression. This new Madam Butterfly has an early revival at Covent Garden in January: it will be interesting to see whether that dim and distracting gauze remains in place.

Also at the Royal Opera House was the first instalment of the company's new Wagner Ring Circle, planned for completion by 1991 and intended for use wherever the Royal Opera perform while the Opera House itself is closed for renovation after 1993. It is directed by the distinguished Russian director, Yuri Lyubimov, and designed by Paul Hernon, the British designer who worked with him on his previous Royal Opera production of Janecek's *Jenufa*. It was clear from this staging of *Das Rheingold* that they opted for a smaller-scale, lighter-weight Ring concept than is usual, with the stage area heavily reduced by a false proscenium, so as to seem positively intimate: no bad thing. Actual scenery is reduced to a minimum, with a central, hydraulically operated, shiny circular platform with a hole in its middle, that rather resembles a compact disc, and a cyclorama that both receives projections and can also be expanded and contracted with a camera-shutter effect, whose effects proved tiresome when used to display Nibelungs hammering anvils. With Robert Bryan's assured and highly precise lighting, however, the overall effect worked

Puccini's Madama Butterfly *at the Royal Opera house. Conductor, Michael Schonwandt. Producer, Nuria Espert. Set Designs, Ezio Frigerio. Costumes, Franca Squarciapino. Lighting, Alan Campbell. Photo., Zoe Dominic.*



ENO's The Making of the Representative for Planet 8 *by Philip Glass and Doris Lessing. Conductor, Michael Lloyd. Choreography, Clare West. Designers, Eiko Ishioka and Minoru Terada Domberger. Staged by Harry Silverstein. Lighting, David Hersey. Photo., Richard H. Smith (Dominic).*



Michael Taylor's set for Harold Pinter's new play Mountain Language *at the Lyttleton Theatre. Directed by Harold Pinter. Music by Dominic Muldowney. Lighting, Laurence Clayton. Photo., Ivan Kyncl.*

David Hare's The Secret Rapture *a new play at the Lyttleton. Director, Howard Davies. Settings, John Gunter. Costumes, Fotini Dimou. Lighting, Laurence Clayton and Brian Ridley. Photo., Amelia Stein.*

Terry Parson's set and costumes for the revival of Cole Porter's Can-Can *at the Strand Theatre. Director, David Taylor. Choreography, Kenn Oldfield. Lighting, Michael Northen. Photo., Catherine Ashmore.*

well and rarely distracted from the music. The costumes tended to however, with the camp Donner and Froh and panto villain Loge, like Alberich's twee toad, needlessly evoking laughter. But it is hard to judge an entire Ring and its concept merely from seeing its Prologue, and I now await with interest the continuation of what certainly has the elements of a promising and well-considered staging.

English National Opera's latest production at the Coliseum is of Philip Glass's new opera jointly commissioned by ENO and Houston Grand Opera, where it was first seen in July. *The Making of the Representative for Planet 8* was written by Glass to a libretto drawn by the novelist Doris Lessing from her book of that name. The production we saw at the Coliseum was adapted by Harry Silverstein from the one staged in Houston by Minoru Domberger, who, with Eiko Ishioka, had also designed it. As Ms Ishioka is Japanese, and Mr Domberger partly so, it is hardly surprising that this 'space age' work about the invasion of a planet by an Ice Age should have depicted an essentially oriental civilisation. On a relatively empty stage, apart from the odd wig-wam or igloo, and the occasional passing space-ship, we saw people curiously attired in frocks over wrinkled leggings, the women with chopsticks in their hair. Once the Ice Age arrived they put animal skins on top to keep warm, and the odd 'Jaws' type polystyrene iceberg appeared. Had it not been for David Hersey's thrillingly inventive lighting and projections, the opera would have looked every bit as tedious as it sounded in Glass's monotonous music and Lessing's smugly pretentious words.

At the National Theatre a cast of twelve was assembled and three sets commissioned from Michael Taylor for Harold Pinter's staging of his own playlet, *Mountain Language*. Whether, had it not been written by Pinter, this 20-minute political sketch would have received the full, or any other, treatment from the National remains a matter of conjecture. First came a scene outside a prison: bare concrete wall surmounted by barbed wire and arc lights, heavy metal gates, barren landscape, which despite crisp, all-white lighting by Laurence Clayton, felt cardboard and theatrical, rather than genuinely grim; likewise the visiting room inside the prison, and the murkily lit, brick-walled corridor outside it. Nor were the sets helped by the stiff and stereo-typed costumes that looked as though they came from the NT's wardrobe, rather than the characters'. For 20 minutes of decidedly sub-standard Pinter, it all seemed rather a costly and pointless exercise. This took place in the National's Lyttelton Theatre, where David Hare's latest, and full-length, play, *Secret Rapture*, may also be seen. Not that this is better designed by John Gunter, who appeared to have been working on one of his rare off days. His uneasy blend of naturalism and stylisation offered sets of a very stiff couple of country house interiors with implausible windows and doorways, a garden with a huge and highly artificial tree, and a London office/apartment that made architectural nonsense. Against these Fontini Dimou had designed some entirely credible and effective contemporary costumes whose realism made the settings before which they were worn seem even less tenable.

Happier design was found in the Royal Shakespeare Company's transfer from Stratford of Nicholas Hytner's production of *Measure for Measure*, set by designer Mark Thompson in a slightly indeterminate 20th century period in Vienna – the Schoenberg era if Jeremy Sam's ugly, synthesised music was anything to go by. Thompson's set relied fundamentally on two massive pillars, centre stage, which revolved to change the scene from the Duke's court, above, to the sordid realities of urban and prison life, below. Mark Henderson's lighting added skilful support and costumes were effectively stylised. One happy fact to be observed in this absorbing production was that it *is* possible to create an intelligent and imaginative design that will transfer from the stage at Stratford to the Barbican's hexagon without losing its life force.

At the Strand Theatre Cole Porter's *Can-Can* in a curiously under-directed, under-acted, and under-sung revival is rescued by the dancing and the sets. These are designed by Terry Parsons in highly attractive art nouveau style, and he makes astute use of trucks to move us from nightclub to leading lady's bedroom, to the little square with its café outside. Costumes are similarly attractive and their colours, like the interior decor, looks absolutely right.

Touring is Suffering from Piecemeal Approaches to its Problems

TONY FIELD

In the second of our two-part series on the problems facing touring in Britain, we look at the different reasons for success or failure on the touring circuit - and the different levels at which the major stumbling blocks are found.

In my first article on touring I posed some questions and criticised some institutions. It is only fair that I attempt in this follow-up to be more positive and creative about this difficult area of the arts and entertainment world.

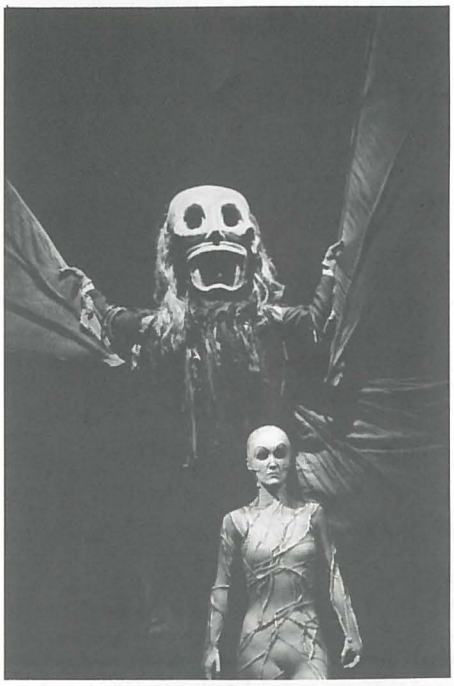
Firstly, touring is a national responsibility and cannot satisfactorily be handled piecemeal. It is bad enough that in our small island regionalisation, which could be a positive force, so often divides us. I am continually appalled that a Regional Arts Association can arrange an event in direct conflict with a major national tour booked by the Arts Council.

An example of this was when, some years ago at Oxford where there had not been any ballet for quite some time, the Arts Council booked the Royal Ballet into the New Theatre only to find at the last minute that Ballet Rambert were playing that week at the Playhouse. I suggested the only solution was to call the whole event a "Festival of Dance" and, in the end, everyone benefitted.

Another aspect of this problem was when I tackled the Director of North-West Arts about some empty seats at Hallé Concerts only to be told, "That is subsidised direct by the Arts Council and is not our problem." I suggested that all events in his region were his problem and he should not rest until seats at all events were sold. To play at his game I even suggested that since the Hallé was provided in his region by way of Arts Council subsidy he was looking a gift horse in the mouth not to exploit that asset to the utmost and ensure that every seat was filled . . . and similarly with every drama, opera, dance and musical production in the region, whoever the promoter.

Only a Council totally insensitive to artistic crativity could ignore Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company, Anthony Quayle's Compass Company and Michael Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company in favour of a new project, Upstart Productions.

My last article ended with a criticism of the present Arts Council (the composition of the Council, the panels and the staff) as lacking the talent and vision to plan for 2001. Since I wrote those words, the Council's three-year plan 1988/89 to 1990/91 has been published and it does not give me any comfort in thinking I was wrong.



Compass Theatre's The Tempest *directed by Anthony Quayle. photo: John Haynes.*

Anthony Quayle's Compass Company's production of The Government Inspector. *Photo: John Haynes.*

The whole emphasis in this publication is on financial parameters, incentive funding, resources from the private sector, performance measurements, sponsorship, trading and merchandising. There is little reference in the document to the artistic product, talent or creativity except for the sentence "It is uncertain whether credible measures can be devised to monitor creative standards". Only a Council totally insensitive to artistic creativity could, in its touring programme, ignore Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company, Anthony Quayle's Compass Company and Michael Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company in favour of a new project, Upstart Productions (a most appropriate title!), to which £150,000 is pledged.

There is obviously a question-mark over the future of the Theatre Investment Fund, set up in 1976 at the instigation of Lord Goodman and myself, with £100,000 from the Arts Council (in two annual instalments of £50,000) and £150,000 raised from private sources. This Fund has eked out its resources over 12 years by investing in (and not subsidising) talent – not only the talent of actors, directors, designers, playwrights and composers but also by fostering a new breed of producers. The emphasis has also been on touring commercial productions and its future should be very much aligned to touring major productions prior to and following their London seasons.

Another important aspect of touring is advance publicity and marketing. The ideal position is for a theatre taking in touring product to have a first-class team capable of promoting a varied programme. Talking to Stephen Robinson at the Alexandra Theatre in Birmingham he was obviously proud of the hard work his staff put into the successful

Catherine Cookson's The Fifteen Streets *at the Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham.*

promotion recently of a programme varying from Catherine Cookson's "The Fifteen Streets" to Le Grand Ballet de Tahiti and from "To Kill A Mockingbird" to Sunday night jazz concerts, the Peking Acrobats and "Snow White". He was, however, anxious to stress how dependent they are on the incoming companies having an experienced press officer visiting them early enough with the promotional material to go into their four-month programme leaflets and to market the productions adequately throughout the region over that length of time.

The other side of this coin is the statement by Nathan Joseph about the recent Freeshooter Production's 17 week tour of "Godspell": "It is significant that at those theatres where the show did best they maintain a full and efficient maketing and press department, whereas at those where the show did badly such departments were apparently lacking."

Courtney Pine in Sunday Night Jazz Concert at the Alexandra Theatre, Birmingham.
Photo: Peter Ashworth.

No doubt someone at the Arts Council can find the memos I wrote in the 1950's and 1960's urging that attention should be given to this area of audience-promotion. They are probably in my out-tray immediately below my suggestions to establish a "rolling triennium" for grant-aid (this phrase will be written on my heart like "Calais"), to hive-off the Wigmore Hall and the Hayward Gallery, to establish the South Bank as a true arts centre, to launch the art exhibition programme as an independent venture, to subsidise jazz, photography and film-making and other Council papers I submitted many of which were rejected at the time.

Let us hope that Regional Arts Associations might take up the problem of local papers sending an off-duty crime reporter to a concert or theatre production for "500 words by 10pm".

Touring would also be greatly assisted by an improvement in the standards of theatre, music and art criticism, particularly in local papers. The city university has taken this problem by the scruff of the neck and established its first course in Arts criticism under John Elsom. Let us hope that Regional Arts Associations might take up the problem of local papers sending an off-duty crime reporter to a concert or theatre production for "500 words by 10 pm."

This attention to the whole perception of the artistic scene in a region also extends to radio and television and we should all be giving ceaseless attention to the poor coverage we receive from the media. We know that more people attend the theatre each week than go to football matches. But every hour the news report is followed by ". . . and now sport", when we hear about the women's bob-sleigh team in Finland and the Men's marbles championship in Tasmania. For example, the BBC1 news on Saturday, 5th November gave 2½ minutes at 9.30 p.m. to the soccer game at Wimbledon attended by 6,000 people – little more than go to the Saturday matinee and evening performance of "42nd Street". Only once in a decade might we hear an arts report considered newsworthy such as "'Phantom of the Opera' has opened to an $11 million advance in New York". Otherwise the arts and entertainment are relegated to a late Sunday-night ghetto-ised programme. It is high time we came out fighting!

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

THE ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS IN BRITAIN

This major report by the Policy Studies Institute is reviewed by RUTH GARNAULT

At last, people involved in the arts have a body of evidence at their fingertips with which to squash moans that arts funding is a luxury. The Policy Studies Institute's *ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS IN BRITAIN* is the culmination of three years' study. The research covered three case studies in Merseyside, Glasgow and Ipswich and looks mostly at "museums and galleries, theatres and concerts", yet does not ignore the wider application of the term "arts" to television, video, music, photography and other related areas.

The report looks in depth at what seems to be every aspect of the economics of the arts. It profiles the market and economic structure of the arts, explores the effect of the spending of arts customers and the affect of this on other industries, especially on tourism. The report analyses the arts' role in job creation and urban renewal, attracting new business, creating an improved environment.

The findings are remarkable. For example, "the sector has a turnover of £10 billion amounting to 2.5 per cent of all spending on goods and services. This is comparable to other major industries, such as vehicles and energy." "The arts were placed fourth among the top invisible export earners, below banking, shipping and travel, but above civil aviation and insurance."

Most importantly, the report gives a detailed section on the potential of the arts. This includes market development, partnership with local bodies, developing the complementary relationship between the arts and tourism. The information in the report should help in forging these links.

The overall impression of the report is of a buoyant arts industry with enormous, though unrecognised, potential. It calls on the government to take a limited but vital role in developing the arts and points out the basic need for public finance to ensure experimentation and innovation are continued.

The report is readable and conclusions are clearly and simply stated. It is well laid out and segmented so that the reader can look up a specific point, and is full of tables showing the exact background to the facts.

One wonders exactly who the report is now aimed at. Is it the government, showing that monies spent on "subsidy" bring an enormous return? Or at local councils to convince them to use the arts in their re-development schemes? Certainly it should be a handbook for all those directly involved in the arts and fighting for recognition and income from many sources.

ECONOMIC IMPORTANCE OF THE ARTS IN BRITAIN by John Myerscough.
Published by PSI. Hardback £19.95
Three regional studies available seperately as paperbacks £5.95.
A summary, THE WORK OF ART to be published shortly, paperback £4,95.

WAITING

Attica Thoughts of a Waiting Reid

A considerable part of any theatreperson's working life is devoted to waiting. Dramatists wait for scripts to be performed. Producers wait for stars and managers wait for funds. Actors wait to be cast and then called. Technicians wait for cues. Lighting designers wait for the stage to be ready for focussing.

Early November found me waiting in Athens. Not excessively worried by the absence of the computer with a hundred programmes for a thousand 25 watt bulbs, the last delayed kilometre of neon or the harness of fibre optics detained in customs. These items count as peripherals when awaiting such fundamentals as the lighting board and the follow spots.
So I found myself with some think time. A need to stay close to the stage made it impossible for me to take the tourist trail to two sites that I have been long trying to schedule into my travels — Epidaurus and Delphi. But there are many theatric stimuli in Athens city centre, including the ancient theatres in the lee of the Acropolis and a Theatre museum devoted to subsequent performances. And so I penned these idle thoughts of an idle fellow in the unlikely hope that waiting might add weight to my thinking. (And in the knowledge that the Editor was waiting for some words from me in order that his readers may not have to wait for their Cue.)

THEATRES FOR HEARERS

When Richard Cumberland declared the Lane and the Garden to be *henceforward theatres for spectators rather than playhouses for hearers*, his concern arose from their enlarged dimensions. Would he have welcomed today's loudspeaker theatres? After all, the loudspeaker has returned our bigger theatres to a place for hearing actors more clearly than seeing them. No, I think he would have remained concerned with the effect of scale upon audience observation of *moving brow and penetrating eye* with the result that *the distant auditor might chance to catch the text but would not see the comment that was wont so exquisitely to elucidate the poet's meaning, and impress it on the hearer's heart?*

He would doubtless have been pleasured by our rediscovery of smaller theatre forms where (and I tamper with the tense because we have achieved a return to what Cumberland thought to be past) *as the passions shift and are by turns reflected from the mirror of expressive countenance, nothing is lost.* And might he not have welcomed the fine nuances of expressive countenance made visible by the cameras of film and video?

But only for intimate drama. How about our theatres of spectacle where voice is amplified to a degree that it no longer seems to be associated with body? It appears to be mime, even when it is not.

Composers for today's music theatre assume an electronic interface between actor and audience. This is not just a matter of the quality of the sound or of its total volume, but of an internal balance achieved in the mixing rather than in the writing. The overall volume of sound is related to the expectation of an ear conditioned by today's amplification to a level which cannot be ignored.

But what are our today ears to make of the natural sound in any but the most intimate of our drama theatres? Last month brought two interesting operatic experiences. Much of *Carmen* from the upper circle of the London Coliseum sounded very undernourished, while *Magic Flute* at Bury St Edmunds was often overloud to the point of discomfort. This was not simply a matter of theatre size.

Electronic factors culminating in the Sony Walkman have influenced our expectations of Bizet's orchestral attack, while vocal techniques and modern instruments can make Mozart too big for the little eighteenth century Bury Royal. On the other hand a summer Festival performance proved that the original instruments which can sound so marvellous on record but disappointing in the concert hall give just the right sound volume in Bury

Theatre. Its forthcoming restoration will offer our best chance yet to hear the sound of eighteenth century British theatre: but can we match the innocence of a Georgian ear?

Over the past theatric decade visual concern has moved from sightline to more intangible matters of contact. Aural concern now seems to be moving away from simplistic measurements of reverberation towards a subjective consideration of the degree of closeness of contact.

Recordings are an indispensable part of my life and I tend to retreat from the opera house to the gramophone. but this retreat is for visual rather than musical reasons: I always prefer the risk of a live performance to a recording compiled from editing perfect takes. Nevertheless I feel an increasing need to escape from the appallingly insensitive treatment with which many current earless directors increasingly seek to 'interpret' the great works. But as a hopeful traveller and confirmed theatric masochist, I do keep opening my eyes to see what is happening on stage and am occasionally rewarded with marvellous moments when the action is related to what the band are playing and the singers are singing.

Non-operatic music theatre, on the other hand, has become something to be seen rather than heard. Reinforcement usually takes the sound to a level at which my ears can no longer discern musical intervals while the rythmn, transmitted via building vibration, is frequently controlled by a pre-recorded click track rather than by the actors responding to their audience.

Mankind's next evolutionary step must surely be to develop an iris in the ear. Followed by zoom eyesight. Perhaps theatre audiences will sponsor research by a genetic engineering team. Then, henceforward, our theatres could be for both spectators and hearers.

MUSEUMS OF THEATRE

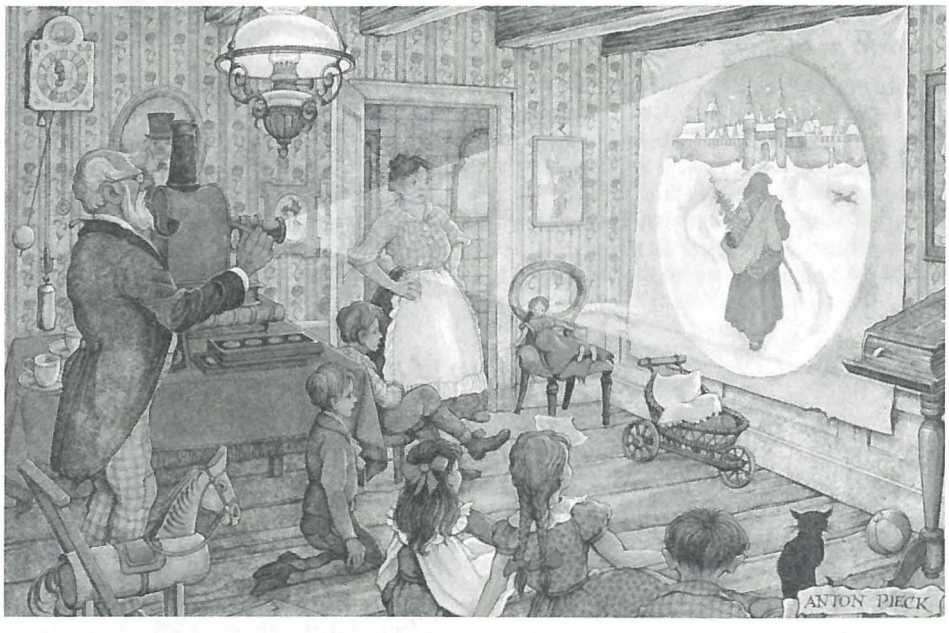
I did some of my waiting in the Athens Theatre Museum (for a previous visit, see Theatric Tourist in CUE 17). It is a quiet contemplative place alive with the ambience of the simple ephemera which can be the only tangible remains of great moments of performance. I found myself wondering why the atmosphere of this simple museum was more comfortable than that of the V & A Theatre Museum in Covent Garden.

The V & A are said to be worried because their theatre museum is not awash with tourists and so they have been advertising for a manager to promote its attractions. The museum presumably aims at serving both general and specialist interests. It admits to having fewer generalist visitors than hoped, and its reception by most theatre professionals has been somewhat mixed. I have always assumed that its research facilities are only for very grand academics. (Indeed as I write these words I realise that, although I am currently hunting for illustrations for my fourth theatre book, it has never occurred to me until this very moment that the research facilities of the Museum might possibly be available to a hack such as I.)
The Museum says it has a negligible promotion budget. That is presumably why CUE is not sent press releases about the changing exhibitions. Although we have not exactly lavished sycophantic praise, we believe that we have been positive in our support and constructive in our criticism.

I suspect that the museum's problem is essentially that of the basic theatre mystique by which success rarely has any logical basis. Certainly the whole entrance level is a logic-based idea that does not really work. And every visit to the picture gallery reinforces my initial impression of brewer's cod victoriana. But there is no logical reason at all why the underground labyrinth journey through theatric time should be failing to enchant: I certainly like it, although I am sure my liking would transform to love if the presentation was just a little bit more frayed, even tacky.

I cannot believe that using the museum's funny shaped theatre as a performance venue is in any way appropriate. Could it not be developed as the place where all the theatre societies and associations meet? This would bring in a small rental, enhance the bar takings and enliven the sacred catacombs from time to time with the noisy flow of theatric chat. Theatreland has lots of theatres but needs a meeting point.

What the Theatre Museum must not do is to follow the new *Museum of the Moving Image (MOMI)* with a marketing shriek of *Me Too!* MOMI have hit their target brilliantly and provided an excursion through the movies from before film to after it. This trip through the history of screened and boxed entertainment uses theme park techniques to tell the story and involve the visitor. The exhibition is brimfull of creative thinking in presentation: after a visit to MOMI standard museum attendants will never seem the same again. But I do not believe that the MOMI approach would be appropriate for the fragile nature inherent in the ephemera of such a low-tech entertainment as theatre. Let us hope that some latter day Richard Cumberland will not have to declare *henceforward theme parks for tourists rather than museums for theatric nuts.*



While writing these thoughts, Cue's Theatric Tourist was also waiting to be delivered of his first grandchild. Grandpa Reid feels that this is an appropriate moment to thank Cue readers for their support throughout the fifty instalments of his travels. Henceforward these tales of crumbling theatres and barely accessible collections of the dusty ephemera of yesterday's performances will be focussed only towards boring his expanding family.

Peep Behind the Curtains

JOHN EARL

Iain Mackintosh's recent review of the *Directory of Historic American Theatres* stimulated thoughts which, as a *Curtains!!!* Committee alumnus (that really was a great school) I am ready to share.

The vital point made by Mackintosh was that, given the number of gazetteers and catalogues of historic theatres now in print, in view or worth campaigning for, there is an immediate need for some agreement on terminology, database structure/content and editorial policy regarding qualitative assessments.

This must be right, but I would distinguish from the outset between rules for a database and rules for publication. The *Curtains!!!* survey did not have the benefit of a computer and had to make endless use of what John Middlebrook calls 'the poor man's word-processor' - pen, sharp knife and paste brush. If we had had the use of even the simplest WP the book would have appeared earlier, the effort would have been less crippling and the literals fewer in number. But if we had been able to create a fully computerized database, the book would not necessarily have been better.

This is not to argue against taking such a step – in fact, preparation of the second edition must *start* with a database created from our bulging files. Just one of the disadvantages of a paper system, especially when some of the papers are as informally organised as mine, is that of having to comb through sheaves of notes to rebut – in one case on three separate occasions – an apparently authoritative 'correction' which proved to be based on an unreliable secondary source. The quality of the information used in a work like *Curtains!!!* is bound to be variable, but where it is based on original research it must be protected from corruption. Any database I have a hand in designing must contain a free text provision for CBNFs (commonly believed non-facts).

But a good filing and retrieval system is not the same thing as a good book. If I have a criticism of the American *Directory* (and the sheer scale of the task commands respect rather than carping), it is that they have delivered the filing cabinet.

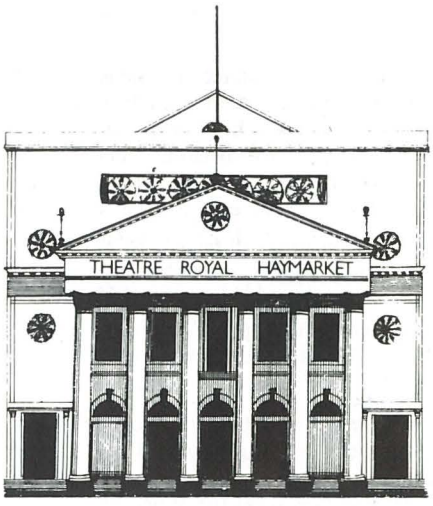
Curtains!!! with all its faults, is not just a modestly scholarly catalogue, it is a handy guide to a finite resource. A guide has practical day-to-day uses and the number of annotated copies of *Curtains!!!* I see in ragged condition suggests that it has been fulfilling a genuine need. Its use is certainly not limited to historians and theatre freaks.

Even without the grading system and occasional personal mutterings ('A reopened Theatre Royal would inject life into the city centre, where it is at present lacking'; 'The boxes seem as though they were designed with the object of distracting attention away from the stage'; 'The Mecca Bingo house style has led to an unfortunate interior decoration'; 'Outstandingly important. It could and should be restored to more appropriate use') the reader can to some extent judge by the length of an entry how the compilers rated a theatre.

There are clearly risks in letting opinion ramble among the facts (I was against it, at first) but I would suggest that the existence of a very comprehensvie 'hard-facts-only' database, with print-outs available for scholars, will deal with that risk without spoiling a readable pocket-sized book.

And that 'pocket-sized' brings me to my only worry, other than time and money, regarding the second edition. Apart from making good a few inadvertent omissions, it will clearly need to cover more ground than the first edition. I would agree with 1940 as a sensible cut-off date. This will have the great advantage of drawing attention to some theatres of real quality which appeared in the little building boom of 1924-32, hardly any of which were considered in the mid 1970s statutory listing drive. At that time they were too easily dismissed as unsatisfactory hybrids, lacking in true theatre atmosphere and not to be compared with the juicy jollies of the Matcham era.

But a 1940 cut-off will also force us to look at super cinemas with live theatre potential – and here I enter a resrvaton against the Mackintosh suggestion that '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'. I must, in any case, plug the view of the Theatres Trust (which we both serve in different ways) that, if a building has a properly equipped stage and a record of even occasional live performance use, then it is a theatre within the meaning of



the Environment Secretary's General Development order, even if its main business was the showing of films. But at the level of personal experience I can also remember very clearly that, in the 1930s I was as likely to see a good stage show (albeit short) at the Woolwich Granada as at the Woolwich Empire or Hippodrome. Many of the supers, in fact, were not only equipped with but made very regular use of their stages.

As a child in a non-architectural family, the two most thrilling experiences of buildings that I can now recall were looking up into the enormous void of the St Paul's dome and walking for the first time into Komisarjevsky's brand new, astounding, riotously ornamented, brilliantly coloured (you wouldn't know it now) Woolwich Granada. It was to be many more years before I discovered architectural history, the Orders, Paris Opera and a frame of reference which extended beyond Woolwich Free Ferry. This child's first theatre was, by a short head, a Granada.

The Southampton Mayflower, the Apollo Victoria and others have shown that such buildings cannot be disregarded as theatre resources. So how are we to acommodate the best of the Granadas, Gaumonts, Rialtos and Astorias into our handy pocket guide? Iain is now going to suggest a solution. I feel it in my creaking bones.

AUTOLYCUS

Pssst! Wanna sponsor a quango?

Those of you with a good memory will recall that the Arts Council chairman-elect, Peter Palumbo, will take over from Lord Rees-Mogg next April. The multi-millionaire property developer is best known for his 20-year struggle to demolish eight listed Victorian buildings next to the Mansion House in the City, where he wishes to erect a modern building.

Between now and next April, Palumbo is spending his time calling on arts organisations around the country, "to listen and learn". He has served on various arts committees in his time, and is a noted private patron of the arts – though he has often sought to keep a low profile.

Anyway, I learn that property development will give way to sponsorship development, when he goes to 105 Piccadilly. This is apparently top of his list of priorities.

Nor will the Council itself be spared the drive for more sponsorship. To this end, a specialist firm, Strategic Sponsorship, is conducting an audit of the existing sponsorship efforts, across the whole spectrum of their intra- and extra-mural activities. Having established a new strategy, there are plans to go out into the streets and start selling some of their more high-profile activities in the marketplace. Look out for deals, joint ventures and joint promotions with other bodies and companies emanating from Piccadilly next year.

Dancing in Brum

One of the best ballet theatres in the country, the Birmingham Hippodrome, could become the permanent home of the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet shortly. Its central location and huge stage, which always ensures the company looks its best there, are strong arguments in favour of the idea. Indeed, this handsome theatre has been adopted as the Wells' second home for several years past, and a decision is now imminent as to whether SWRB will accept the invitation to leave London and move operations to Brum.

The Arts Council is in favour of resettling this important company in a regional base and Brum can offer big money, it seems. It is rumoured that the scheme is likely to go ahead.

Too large, too distracting

I read some terrible cant not long ago by that intelligent art critic, Marina Vaizey, of *The Sunday Times*. Writing from Paris, she claimed that that city's monumental new galleries and museums, like the 11-year-old Pompidou Centre and the Musée d'Orsay, opened in 1986, overshadow their exhibits by being too spectacular, too interesting in themselves.

Unhappily, where theatres are concerned, there is all too little thought devoted to how today's new architecture could be made more interesting, entertaining and . . . fun, wherever they are built. Personally, I have never been distracted by either the scale of say, Drury Lane, nor the caryatids in the Paris Opera auditorium. These factors positively *enhance* the whole experience, rather than detracting from it.

I really feel Lady Vaisy is barking up the wrong tree.

Crawling with cats

You probably thought 'Cats' was Cameron Mackintosh's most successful production. It must be making a comfortable living for quite a number of people. But it looks as though 'Les Miserables' (or 'The Glums', as it is more often referred to) is set to beat Mackintosh's own record. Recent press ads for the show have sported the little waif girl from the show with a sash slung from one shoulder, which reads 'Miz World'. When you see how many separate productions are being staged worldwide, you get the joke, since the ad campaign coincided with the most recent Miss World competition.

'Les Miserables' is sold out in 18 cities, including Budapest, Haifa, Osaka, Oslo, Reykjavik, Szeged (where is that?), Tampa and Vienna. It is in preparation in a further 54 cities, no less, among them Ankara, Dallas, East Berlin, Grand Rapids, Lima, Madrid, New Orleans, Paris, Santiago, Stockholm, Syracuse, Toronto and Warsaw. By the way, where on earth are East Lansing, Gdynia, Lodz and St Petersburg? Wherever they are, their curtains will soon be going up on a near-universal hit.

I wonder if 72 simultaneous productions worldwide is a new theatrical record. I haven't yet been able to find out.

Cultural glasnost – of the best kind

A group of young soviet actors are part of an exchange scheme between the Moscow Art Theatre School and the RSC, which got underway this autumn. It is organised by a newly-launched foundation, the International Foundation for Training in the Arts, dedicated to "cultural glasnost", and boasts the support of Vanessa Redgrave, Peter Ustinov and Prunella Scales. Its patron is Dame Peggy Ashcroft and the executive director is the actor Brian Cox, who recently starred as Titus Andronicus in the RSC's London production.

Three weeks spent with the RSC then a spell in Moscow next April, forms the basis of the first exchange. This is cultural cross-fertilisation of the best kind, particularly in the case of drama.

Chichester gets its act together – a new studio theatre

Chichester gets its own Studio Theatre. Photo: Terry Pickering.

At last Chichester is to have its own studio theatre. Lord Olivier proclaimed the Festival Theatre a "miracle theatre" when it opened in 1962, and now 27 years on the project reaches its final conclusion when the new complex opens next spring, with a small auditorium, theatre offices and a restaurant building.

The intervening years have seen both financial and artistic ups and downs, but when the building appeal was launched 1½ years ago, few can have expected the good fortune that awaited their fundraising efforts. In spring 1988, Nissan UK Ltd injected £500,000 into the venture and a substantial donation from Allied Lyons, who will jointly run the restaurant, meant that the basic structure was largely funded before the work was finished.

The building programme is on schedule, we are told, and the fitting out begins this winter: carpets, seats, kitchens, bars and so forth. "Now, at last, Chichester's dubious distinction of being the only major theatre without a permanent bricks-and-mortar studio theatre is an embarrassment of the past", remarks Lord Cudlipp, Vice-Chairman of the Festival Theatre Trust. "We will no longer be obliged to hire premises around the city for weeks of rehearsals for each main theatre production." So they will be getting not only an intimate performance space but also rehearsal and storage facilities. Not to mention more loos, office space, bars and lettable space. In short, "the finest modern entertainment complex in the south of England", according to Lord Cudlipp.

Please give a hand to some great new ideas – from the media!

Two national newspapers have launched new arts initiatives. The less ambitious of the two, the *Sunday Times*, is an "Arts Hotline" (01–741 9999 on Sundays; 01–741 8977 Monday-Saturday), which readers may use to buy tickets "for many of the week's live events, including those advertised in the West End guide" . . . in the *Sunday Times*. They do not guarantee ticket availability, indeed the

listings do not even indicate how booked up an event currently is.

The Independent, which I suspect has a bigger team of researchers compiling its guides, **does** indicate how booked up a show or live event is – and not for the benefit of its advertisers, but for its readers.

It so happens that the other newspaper to launch a major new arts initiative is *The Independent* – again. Hot on the heels of its new Edinburgh Fringe awards of this summer, it announced The Garden Venture on 29 October 1988. Here was a novel piece of arts sponsorship. Here's how it works.'

The Independent and the Royal Opera House joined forces to raise £100,000 through a reader sponsorship scheme. Within a month they were about halfway towards their target. Building blocks of £100 per donation were the most common.

The Garden Venture will enable seven new operas to be commissioned from seven composers new to the art form. Editor Andreas Whittam Smith said: ''We believe we have found a means of facilitating individual sponsorship of new works of art''. This is an innovative and exciting new idea, as he said in his remarks announcing the joint venture.

It is worth noting that the Arts Council and the Friends of Covent Garden lent vital financial support, and that administrative back-up is coming from the Royal Opera House Trust. Without these extra forms of support, such a detailed venture would not have got off the ground. But in the end, it is innovative thinking that pulls together the resources available to launch new ventures. All credit to *The Independent* and the Royal Opera House.

There's no business like showbusiness – or, you can do it, if you think you can

It has often been said in this business that cold, rational logic has never been a motivating force for breaking new ground. Rather, it has been shown, by history as much as anything else, that sheer energy, willpower and commitment is what moves things forward. If this was true for the creation of our National Theatre, or of the Royal Ballet (thanks to the vision and often illogical determination of Lord Olivier and Dame Ninette de Valois, respectively), it is equally true of Kenneth Branagh's Renaissance Theatre Company, Anthony Quayle's Compass Theatre Company and Michael Bogdanov's English Shakespeare Company, in the past few years. (See Tony Field's article on touring elsewhere in this issue).

The Business Design Centre into 3,000 seat Dance Theatre

So it is perhaps no surprise to have witnessed the innovative zeal of the Entertainment Corporation's two directors, Peter Brightman and Victoria Charlton, this summer in bringing over the Kirov and the Moscow Classical Ballet companies to London . . . and converting a space tailor-made for their needs. I refer, of course, to Islington's Business Design Centre, a handsome Victorian structure in brick, glass and iron. For the space of three weeks, this became a 3,000-seater dance theatre, with a sprung stage. Nowhere in London is there a theatre of this size and certainly none available for the world's best visiting dance companies. So Brightman and Charlton solved the problem on their own.

The season was highly successful, artistically and financially. Many nights were sell-outs and people were turned away at the box office. London's inability to provide one large lyric theatre as suitable showcase for top dance companies has long been bemoaned. It was enthusiasm that found a solution, in the end, albeit a temporary one. There must be a moral there.

'I haven't done my prep' – said Luce

I was sitting several rows back from where the Arts Minister Richard Luce was giving his speech to launch a new training package his department has put together. This was a couple of weeks ago, during a launch ceremony hosted by the Office of Arts and Libraries at the IBA. Luce referred to the need to embrace the need for marketing in order for the arts to run their business efficiently. You know the sort of thing. (They were launching a new marketing training scheme, using a 50-minute video with a booklet).

Just before the lights were dimmed for a run-through of the video, which incidentally is quite good for beginners unused to the theories and pracitise of marketing, the minister admitted he was no marketing guru himself but nevertheless thought it was a good video. Mid-way through his few words, couched in rather old-school-tie phraseology, he ad libbed. ''I haven't done my prep on this one'', quoth he, meaning, I suppose, that he wasn't sure of his facts. A stunned silence ensued, as his audience of adult arts administrators and marketeers wondered if he hadn't turned up to address the wrong group of people. A group of schoolchildren perhaps? But no, there was no mistake. Luce just has a rather odd, might one say outdated?, mode of self-expression. It was all par for the course.

You must visit the Players' Theatre

Anyone who has not had the good fortune to pay a visit to the Players' Theatre under the arches of London's Charing Cross Station, will not know what they are missing, naturally. Here is a corner of old theatrical England, where Victorian melodramas, pantomines and variety acts perform to pleasantly discerning audiences, many among them from the acting profession, one suspects. Perhaps the most charming panto Autolycus has seen in recent years was performed down under the arches.

While the long awaited development and improvement of their home under Charing Cross Station takes place, the Players' Theatre has relocated to an almost equally delightful little spot, the Duchess Theatre in Catherine Street, Covent Garden. One hundred yards from Drury Lane. Membership subscriptions still cost £30, and while members do not pay to see performances of the ''late joys''as music hall performances are called, guests are charged at £8 each.

Work on Villiers Street redevelopment is scheduled for November 1989, but I strongly recommend readers to tempt themselves to catch at least one fleeting supper entertainment at Catherine Street, in that delightful art deco theatre. The performances bear little resemblance to the mawkish sentimentalism of today's average music hall fare. There is a light, deft touch and a theatrical humour sadly lacking in other quarters.

Preserving the 'ordinary Englishman' and his bingo

There cannot be many people who regard the House of Commons as a bastion of intellectualism. Indeed, if the debates are anything to go by, the place sounds more like a cross between a gentlemen's club and a locker room. But now and then we get to the heart of the matter, for instance in a Commons debate on the arts.

I take as an example the debate, not that long ago, when Terry Dicks, the Tory's champion of the ''ordinary Englishman'', offered these well-thought out insights into our cultural heritage.

The arts, he declared, were not a vital part of Britain's heritage. ''Am I supposed to believe that an overweight Italian singing in his own language is part of my heritage?'' he demanded. ''Am I supposed to believe that a man prancing about in a pair of tights is part of my heritage? Well I don't. And neither do most of the ordinary people in this country''.

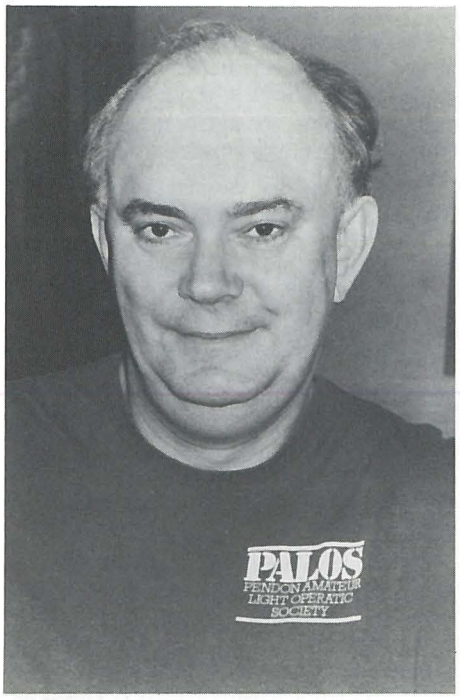
His constituents enjoyed a good game of bingo, he said. ''What about subsidising bingo for ordinary people. It's an art form to them'', he added.

I especially enjoyed his description of the most right-leaning Arts Council in post-war years. ''It is a lefty, trendy organisation that just exists on public funds'', Mr Dicks informed the House. In a friendly riposte to this demolition of the arts on behalf of the ordinary Englishman, Richard Luce, the Arts Minister prefaced his reply by saying that the Arts Council might care to consider preserving Mr Dicks as a ''national institution''.

The Synclavier Hits The West End Stage

JOHN WALTERS

West End theatre-goers are about to be treated to an extensive demonstration of high-resolution sampling, re-synthesis and Direct-to-Disc recording using the NED Synclavier.



Alan Ayckbourn – author and director

'Henceforward . . .' by Alan Ayckbourn is a tragic comedy about a composer set in a bleak, violent Britain of the near-future. Cast for six actors and a life size female robot and employing a single stage set packed with video screens and keyboards, the play cheerfully tackles love, death, creativity, alienation and sex and sampling in two tightly plotted acts.

Jerome Watkins, the composer in the story, has been unable to write any music since Corinna and Geain, his wife and teenage daughter, left him three years before. Although his most successful composition was a baby powder jingle that featured singing babies (sampled from Geain's early gurgles), he's a serious composer who yearns to write his magnum opus, a piece of music about love: "I want to express the feelings of love in an abstract musical form," says the character in the play. "In such a way that anyone who hears it – anyone – no matter what language they speak – no matter what creed or colour – they will recognise it and respond to it." He knows what he wants to write, but until he finds the right sound he doesn't know how. Like an author who uses the lives and loves of others as source material, Watkins records every sound in the house in his mad quest of the ultimate sample. And his compulsion to use the words and sounds of his friends and family drives away those whom he loves.
"He wanted to bring light into the world and in fact, in creating light he was also creating this extraordinary darkness, says Ayckbourn, delighted in the irony.

Paul Todd's eclectic music has accompanied Ayckbourn's award-winning theatrical adventures for well over ten years. He's called upon to write anything from a full-blown musical to pastiche TV themes.

Why did they choose the Synclavier for *Henceforward . . .*?

"I've been working with Paul with simple synthesiser things," says Ayckbourn, and was aware of the sampling things that were going on.

"When Alan first came to me with the idea; a composer with a house that was basically a sampling machine, I thought we'd go for the best" says Todd.
He contacted digital audio consultant Yasmin Hashmi, who was then a sales engineer for Harman. "We had a demo and Alan's eyebrows dusted the corners of the ceiling after about five minutes. It became very, very obvious that this was the baby that we needed to work with," continues Todd. "Yasmin kind of clicked as to who Alan was – she had in fact seen *Woman-in-Mind* the previous night.

Hashmi, an electronics graduate who also writes her own multi-cultural music, was thrilled to get involved in the project. "It was a one-off," she says. "I showed them what they particularly wanted to see and then a few other things, such as re-synthesis, to give them some ideas. Alan obviously had an understanding, he picked it up straight away. But by the end of the demonstration they were saying "Please stop; No more!"

The completed play which has already toured Germany, Poland, Turkey and Egypt as well as the Provincial tour of Britain, called on Todd to write three pieces for the Synclavier: two are based on sounds made by Zoe, the young actress who has a brief liaison with Jerome in act one. One is a pretty tune based on her laugh, the other is a more complex piece derived from the sounds he's recorded in the bedroom the previous night.
"This," says Todd with a smile "rather freaks her out when she hears it. Good fun recording it though!"
The third Synclavier piece is Jerome's final work, a bombastic semi-orchestral magnum opus which uses the word 'Love' as spoken by Corinna. Todd stretched the resources of the Synclavier to the limit, and made some interesting discoveries in the process.

"We didn't type it in – I actually played it in, which leads to the very embarrassing moment where the system throws up all the information about your playing on the screen. It was practically flashing up 'Schmuck, did you really mean that!' which was a little bit unnerving."

"Paul found it quite easy to use" says Hashmi. "He would actually go through the numeric display and spot the duff note or whatever, the note that had too long a duration and just change it."

"In the final piece in the play, which is based on the word 'LOVE', you first hear the sampled sound. Then gradually as the piece goes on that sampled sound fuses into a synthetic sound and then is stretched and strange things are done with it."

"We didn't want it to be exact," says Todd. "We wanted it to be slightly robotic and to get slightly more robotic as it went along – it gives it a very, very other-worldy feel when it comes in."

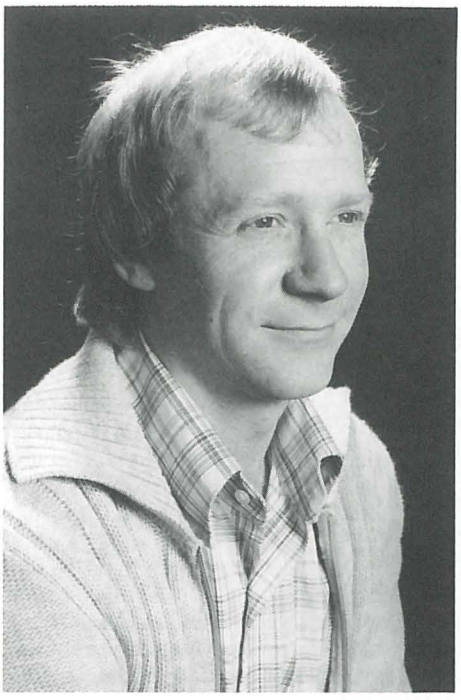
"Re-synthesis is quite an art," says Hashmi, who was helped in this particular case by NED expert Brain Banks.
"You have to section off the sample into frames – each section is analysed by the computer and it comes up with a Fourrier analysis, a description of it – like a fundamental with harmonics – for each frame. If it's done very well it sounds just like the sample. But then you take these frames, you can go in there, you can alter the stuff that's in the frames; alter the harmonics and pitch; put loops in there and do all sorts of wonderful things; it's another way of getting a unique sound that no-one else has.'

Todd was impressed by the ease with which Harman staff solved apparently serious problems.
"That to me was one of the most impressive things. One morning it wouldn't actually power up at all and it looked like three hours of down time. Dave Whittaker came in and just removed the top , pulled out his PCB, banged another in and that was it. It was done in about 15 seconds. It can only be an extraordinary machine that can do that!"

For Hashmi, the experience of programming the music for *Henceforeward* was:-

"Great fun; and eye-opener. I particularly like Paul's music. I learnt about dynamic control; he wanted it to slowly build up and then these other little sections would come in, balancing all those tracks together because we weren't using a desk to do that."

Apart from the actresses' voices, all the sounds used were from the library at Harman UK, and the final piece used all 32 available



Music by Paul Todd

sample voices. Everything was performed and processed by the Synclavier in one pass and recorded live to two-track tape, which is used for the performance in the theatre.

Paul Todd's Synclavier music for *Henceforward. . .* has to be re-recorded to accommodate changes in the cast, or language.
''There's a Swedish production coming up.'' says Todd, wincing at the headache he's given himself. ''Having got the skeleton of the piece of music in the Synclavier itself, foreign productions have a choice; to use the English version; sample their actresses over there and send us the samples and we re do them; or they can hire the entire studio and do the whole thing from scratch.''

So what does Ayckbourn think of technology that allows a composer to produce finished product without any intermediaries? ''I don't know – it's an absolute dream isn't it, to do the whole thing yourself, but I think in the end I'd miss the company. I mean, I think novelists are wonderful people, but I'd never want to write a novel!''

''The Synclavier takes the boring chores out of recording'' says Hashmi. 'We are masters of this machine. It could never replace musicians because if you put rubbish into it, rubbish will come back out!''

And has Paul Todd become a convert?

''It's down to the job'' says Todd. ''I was once asked if I would advocate the use of samples as opposed to real instruments. I can't remember my exact reply but it was something to the effect that – just because somebody's moved the bus-stop doesn't mean you don't catch the same bus.''

Business in the Arts

''Unless your arts organisation is run well, you won't be able to put on any art because you'll go out of business''

Colin Tweedy on Radio 4's Today programme, 19/7/88

As all in the business of managing the arts know, Monday's Guardian is the place to find a job. In the last few years more and more advertisements are seen for posts such as development director, sponsorship manager, general administrator. This proliferation confirms that the arts world has become aware that the administrative side of their operation is as necessary, if not as obviously creatively satisfying, as the artistic.

Yet this throws up its own problem. How can a small arts body afford to pay someone sufficiently qualified in business skills? The answer is that often they cannot; which means that those Guardian advertisements frequently carry not only the low salaries which may deter the experienced but also a less obvious lack of resources for training or for equipment to carry out their business objectives.

This is no criticism of the arts world. Management training is notoriously expensive; and the company that has to budget carefully to pay their actors, or print their posters, or buy petrol for their tour, is forced to put these first in their list of priorities. The time was ripe for business to lend a hand; and ABSA (the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts) together with IBM, addressed this issue with the launch of a new initiative, Business in the Arts, in July of this year.

Business in the Arts is a daring scheme which aims to assist arts management in substantial self improvement by enlisting the practical support of business and its resources. The concept of mutual beneficial partnerships between arts and business has been highly successful in the field of sponsorship. As sponsorship enters its second decade, ABSA recognised that there was more to offer from business to the arts,in the form of training, skills placement and the ability to offer hard-nosed advice. The intention is that business management training courses will be opened to the arts; that business people will be matched and placed with an arts group to fulfill a particular need (for instance on accounting practice or personnel matters); and that arts organisations will become more aware of their business needs and , through awareness, find ways of meeting them.

When the scheme was launched in July it already had the support of eight founding companies who put their money behind helping the arts to become better businesses. These companies (IBM, Marks and Spencer, Arthur Andersen, British Petroleum, National Westminster Bank, ADT, WH Smith, and ICI) feel that if the arts are to flourish, it is vital for the arts organisations to be able to conduct their affairs as successful businesses.

The potential for success is vast. The recent report, Economic Importance of the Arts in Britain by John Myerscough for the Policy Studies Institute, exposed to those who had hitherto not been aware of the fact that the arts are major generators of money, employment, tourism and urban development. Recent initiatives by the Arts Council and Business in the Community have recognised the role that the arts have to play in inner city regeneration. All the more necessary, therefore, to ensure that these employers, exporters and developers that make up the arts management world are building on solid business foundations.

So how does Business in the Arts propose to achieve this? The scheme was launched deliberately early in its development in order that a whispering campaign could transmit its ideas both to the arts world and back from it. It has always been the intention that the scheme should not force advice or assistance on reluctant arts organisations, but rather should tailor the ways in which such advice and assistance is given precisely to suit the needs of the arts world.

To that end a pilot scheme was devised and launched in the West Midlands Arts area on 23rd September 1988. This pilot is to be run as a test case over a period of three months. After that, it will be thoroughly analysed in order to evaluate areas of success and also to spot problems before the scheme is expanded into a nationwide programme. In addition to the pilot a number of placements have been made in other parts of the country; these will serve as a control to the pilot proper, in case there are any aspects of that which are region-specific.

ABSA has been immensely impressed and encouraged by the enthusiasm and interest shown by both business and the arts in the pilot area and also in the form of letters of enquiry received by the office. We are closely aware that this enthusiasm gives an indication that business in the arts is potentially a very big programme; at present, however, we are deliberately following the development as originally envisaged and as outlined above rather than letting the scheme grow too fast. To those regional arts associations, arts organisations and businesses who are waiting for direct involvement we can only say that we want to get it right first time; we would ask them to please stay interested, please come and talk to us and please bear with us as the lessons from the early months of the scheme

are learned and turned to the advantage of its future development.

The commitment of the business community, as shown by its founder supporters and by the wider community, is to ABSA not in doubt. But in case there are areas of the arts world which are dubious about the motivation for this, perhaps it is worth making two points. First, and most importantly, the business world has a high respect for arts groups. As Tony Cleaver, IBM's Chief Executive, said at the scheme's launch, "The quality and excellence of their work is accepted and admired". The partnerships that have been made through business sponsorship have demonstrated the capacity of each side to trust and learn from each other. The business world sees in the arts a legitimate place for investment and in offering the kind of services that Business in the Arts will provide are backing that investment – or, to put it a different way, being business-like! Secondly, there is a growing awareness and activity in the business community of the concept of corporate responsibility. In brief that concept might be summarised by saying that the needs of society in its wider context are a legitimate part of business life. Business relies on people, and people are the better for a thriving arts world. Just as sponsorship can be seen as a more direct investment in the arts, so also corporate responsibility programmes can be seen as an investment in the future of society.

"The future of society" may sound infinitely distanced from the overworked, underpaid arts administrator reading Monday's Guardian. It is ABSA's belief that they are intimately related: Business in the Arts aims to put the highest objectives within reach.

COLIN TWEEDY
Director, ABSA

There's talk of new theatres in King's Cross

The 120-acre site of derelict land in King's Cross, north London, will not only become Britain's most important transport interchange of the next century, but it could also become a leading cultural centre.

King's Cross and St Pancras stations are be merged and a new Underground station built and a rail link is to be provided to the Channel Tunnel and to Stansted Airport's new international terminal (opening in 1993 and 1991 respectively). Also under discussion though, is a new arts complex, with its own theatres housing both RADA and the Contemporary Dance Trust, both of which are nearby, to the south of Euston Road.

Provided the local community and Camden Council can be satisfied with the architects' and developers' plans, work will start on the development in 1990 and aim for completion in 2000.

CORRESPONDENCE

From Mr. Andrew Blosse

Dear Sir

I enjoyed reading your article in Cue ("Is there a future for our piers?", May/June 1988) on the financial prospects of Britain's seaside piers. Perhaps I could be allowed on or two brief comments?

Your correspondent, Anthony McCall, mentions that some larger piers are thriving, while some less well-known ones are struggling to make ends meet. The seaside holiday, in short, is under threat from the modern package holiday which offers cheap flights, cheap accomodation, cheap food and cheap (or even free) entertainment, in a long list of foreign countries.

Does this represent an inevitable decline in British holidays? And could this soon be the end of the famous and much-loved British summer season, with its end-of-the-pier shows running from April through to September? I sincerely hope not. Like many other entertainments managers in the business, I have seen too many successful and highly enjoyable summer seasons in my career to believe that they will ever come to an end. I worked at Great Yarmouth with the likes of Larry Grayson, Cannon & Ball and the late Dick Emery, and although I am fully aware that times and public tastes are slowly changing, I do not think the British public wants to see the end of this type of entertainment. After all, look at the popularity of light entertainment shows on TV.

But it is perhaps time that impresarios got together with British Rail, the hotel chains and other parts of the leisure industry to offer competitively-priced holiday packages to compare with the foreign competition. We get a lot of foreign tourists in Britain, but I doubt whether we are selling holidays or short breaks at the seaside as attractively as we could.

The summer season shows are undoubtedly an attraction to all resort in Britain, which help to draw visitors to spend their money there. This needs to be used effectively to keep the resorts *and* the shows healthy for years to come. I have no doubt it can be done, if tackled with imagination and professionalism: we just need to change with the times.

Well done, bringing up such an important subject.

Yours faithfully

ANDREW BLOSSE
136 TIMBER MILL
SOUTHWATER
HORSHAM
WEST SUSSEX

From Patricia Webb

Dear Sir,

Stagehands was delighted that Cue covered our first course on familiarising technicians with new technology, held in Birmingham. Thank you for giving it such prominent treatment in your last issue.

May I perhaps just add one or two comments of my own? Paul Need, the lighting designer who wrote your report, adopted a generally positive and accurate view of the proceedings, in my view, except for his criticism of the evening sessions. He felt these were "a stop-gap in the schedule" and that the time "could have been put to better use". Fair enough. But I am glad to report that an informal poll I took of participants' feelings showed the opposite view: that they were virtually all keen on the evening talks, since it was time better spent than simply being in the pub.

A reflection of it's success is seen in the number of requests already received to register for next years course. Which is already being discussed and it promises to be bigger and better. We may divide participants into groups according to experience, to ensure demonstrators know how much explanation to give to different products and technologies. It also seems likely that we will have more participants, more manufacturers and a wider scope of technical subjects than this year. I think everyone is agreed that this year's pilot run went well and that the need for a 'Latest Technology Familiarisation Course' has proved itself.

Anyone wishing to put themselves down for August 1989 - or with suggestion of subjects to include somewhere in the course, is very welcome to drop a line or ring me at Stagehands (0222 374159). I look forward to hearing them.

Yours faithfully,

PATRICIA WEBB
Principal, Stagehands,
70a Llandaff Road
Canton, Cardiff

Translations Tactfully Conveyed

MARTIN HALL

How Glyndebourne Touring Opera achieved a silent and subliminal audience prompt.

When the Glyndebourne Touring Opera made its annual visit to Oxford in 1985, the audience was startled to see a translation of the events occurring on stage displayed on a small screen mounted above the proscenium arch, rather in the form of television subtitles; called Supertitles because of their position above the stage, these translations are now an established feature of the Touring Opera's productions, and may in the future make an appearance at the Festival Opera itself.

Glyndebourne is by no means the first company to use titles; American and Australian houses have for several years recognised the language barrier involved in opera and set up their own systems. In Britain, the Royal Opera House was the first to do so, in 1983; titles at first were only provided for school performances, but their application was gradually stepped up. All foreign-language productions at Covent Garden now have titles.

There seems to have been a good deal of speculation as to exactly *how* the supertitles are produced; everything from huge electronic displays to rear-projection systems have been suggested. The reality is much more mundane, though practical: a slide projector sits at the back of the auditorium, controlled by an operator with a marked script.

Of course, matters are inevitably more complicated than that; those titles in 1985 were displayed by an unmodified slide projector, and it was thought that this made the slides appear too abruptly, causing an unnecessary distraction to the audience; what was acceptable for a slide show was not suitable in the middle of an aria. Clearly, a means was wanted to bring the projector's light level up and down smoothly and controllably: a dissolve unit.

The dissolve unit is a servo-controlled mechanism which replaces the projector's normal shutter, moving two comb-shaped sheets of metal in relation to each other; this allows a separate box of electronics to raise and lower the light level as required. Glyndebourne hired a Hokushin projector with a dissolve unit, and all would have been well had it not been for their notorious perfectionism.

Having solved the problem of slow fade-in, it became obvious that the off-the-shelf dissolve unit was too limited. There was not enough time between two slides to set a new fade time or light level, so the same values had to be used throughout a performance, no matter what the mood of any particular passage. Although a compromise value could in principle be selected, this was a very unsatisfactory solution. Bring on the computer.

It may at first sight seem quixotic for a traditional art such as Opera to resort to the tyranny of the high-tech; after all, if Glyndebourne isn't safe, who is? In fact, this was the only solution to the problem which gave the needed flexibility.

Design

Glyndebourne now approached us at ELSEC, a small engineering company in Oxford, to tackle the project. They wanted to set matters up so that a computer could be primed in advance with each slide's text, along with the information it would use to actually display the slide: its place in sequence, its final light level, fade-up and fade-down times. In addition, we were to use (as far as possible) the equipment they already had. Most important of all, everything had to be portable, following the Company from place to place on tour.

The first problem was which computer to choose? It had to be small and light, with a screen easily read in a darkened projection room and some means by which it could talk to the projector and remote-control unit. Preferably, it should be something familiar. At the time, very few machines fitted the bill; we settled on Toshiba's T2100, one of their now extensive family of 'laptop' computers which match the hugely popular IBM-PC standard.

Next, we had to find some way of controlling the projector from the computer; as well as adjusting the light level, we had to tell the carousel to step forward and back as required. All this was already built into the dissolve unit, but we could get no technical details on it at all. It was a matter, more or less, of gingerly sticking voltages into the (hired) projector's control socket and seeing what happened. No disasters occurred, and we at least knew what the computer had to do, to make the projector go.

The main problem with the computer was that, in order to keep it small, Toshiba had left out the 'expansion slots' which are built into full-sized IBM-PC machines, by which the computer's links with the outside world may be enhanced. Actually, it is possible to plug in a separate and bulky expansion box, but this throws away the advantages given by the small computer. We decided to use one of the computer's existing interfaces: for the technical, the RS232 serial port. Although this kind of interface needs a bit more work in the electronics, it operates in both directions; this meant that our remote-control unit could send commands to the computer by the same route.

In the end, all our electronics were squeezed into a flat box, about 60 cm square by 5 cm high, making a plinth on which the computer sits. From this emerge cables which go to the computer, the projector and the hand-held remote control unit.

Having got the hardware sorted out, the real work started: programs were needed to actually control the projector, and to define for each slide all the factors which affect its projection. This was the most time-consuming process of all, with the usual false starts and teething problems. In the end, however, Glyndebourne had exactly what they had originally wanted: a projection system which takes account of the character of an opera, as well as the lighting being used on stage.

Operation

Before the titles from the opera can be projected, they must of course be produced: an expert must sit down and split the libretto up into two-line gobbets. This is a very skilled and time-consuming job; one of the most difficult tasks is knowing just what to leave out: even the most triumphantly monoglot audience will know what "Si" means, and will resent being reminded.

When the translation is finished, each slice of text is assigned a slide number, the numbers suitably spaced to allow future insertions. The text now is typed into the computer, where it is converted to a form that is understood by the projection system. Another copy is sent to the company which actually produces the slides.

The slides must now be assigned all the various values which govern their appearance: how long they take to fade in, how long to fade out and how bright they are to be. This is no small task, and must be done well in advance so that everybody can argue about the artistic values involved. In addition to the allocation of timings and so on, the slides must be split up into carousels: changing a carousel can take some time, so a suitable gap must be selected every 75 slides or so for this task. The computer is told where these breaks occur, so that it can remind the operator in good time.

On the night, the operator starts up the computer, which 'boots up' to the supertitles menu. The projection program is started, loading in the text of an opera from another floppy disk. Before the actual projection can begin, a 'theatre brightness factor' must be

selected: because the distance from projector to screen varies greatly from one theatre to another, the overall brightness of the titles must be changed accordingly.

The actual cueing of the slides must be done by the operator, using either the computer's keyboard or the remote control unit. This little box came in extremely handy at a recent performance: the sound link from stage to control room was accidentally cut, leaving the operators with no idea of what was being sung. After a few frantic attempts at lip-reading, they carried the remote control to the back of the auditorium and finished the act by torchlight.

In addition to the routine cue-on and -off, various other operations can be done: in particular, skipping over one or more slides without actually displaying them. This is needed for occasions when singers under stress miss out great slabs of text, or produce them in the wrong order.

The Future

A number of improvements could be made to the basic system, and are being considered by Glyndebourne. First, the slides themselves are a significant recurring expense; each one costs about £3, and it would clearly be better to make them in-house. Unfortunately, the equipment needed to produce high-quality slides is very expensive.

A better solution would be to abandon the slide projector entirely and feed signals directly from the computer into a 'caption generator', a device which builds the characters on the spot and displays them in the same way as a projection TV; this is the solution now being installed at Covent Garden. Sadly, all such machines are huge, delicate and costly to maintain – the technology must progress a little before a touring company can consider this option.

One improvement which is worth considering is cross-fading between two projectors, thereby eliminating the pause as the slide is changed; a clever program could also use this for special effects, such as displaying one line, a question for example, and then bringing up the reply as a second line. To do this, a second interface unit and projector would be needed.

Supertitles seem now to have gained the acceptance of most people, and are clearly here to stay. However, like most innovations in a frankly traditional art, they have attracted their fare share of vitriol from the 'purist' camp. I have a good deal of sympathy for the purists' point of view; they have steeped themselves in a work over many years, memorising every detail until the story has achieved the comfortable familiarity of an old friend. It must be extremely annoying for them, to be told what is going on, when they already know. The great majority of people, however, appreciate some help in understanding an unfamiliar work, especially if it is sung in a difficult language, such as Czech or American. Supertitles are a major factor in the spread of Opera's popularity, and Covent Garden and Glyndebourne are to be congratulated for their enterprise.

The Hollow Drum

Machinery in the theatre

JOHN BOUD

W.C. Fields once observed 'Any man who hates children and animals can't be all bad' – his version, perhaps, of the old pro's advice against acting with them.

Why is doing so unwise? Any art which depends on illusion – to whatever degree – disappears when it ceases to be illusion and becomes reality. And a child or an animal is real. We are instantly made aware of the hollow pretence of what we're doing.

Some years ago there was a John Osborne play at the Lyttelton called 'Watch it Come Down' ('it' being, as I recall, Western civilisation). The production was chiefly remarkable for the virtuosity of its stage management – lines of machine-gun bullet holes appearing in the flats and so on. At one point the body of a dog is brought on; we learn that it has been shot. It was, of course, a prop. But the actors were convincing in their grief – this was the pet they had loved for years; moreover, a few minutes earlier we had seen a real, live animal as it prepared to go with its owners on the fatal walk. The trick thus had a powerful immediate effect, but its very success became a liability; most members of the audience were so preoccupied over the next few minutes in reassuring themselves (or their neighbours) that what was on stage was a long-inanimate stuffed skin that the real point of the scene escaped them. The medium intruded on – and distracted from – the message.

The fact is that a dog is a dog; it is not some other kind of animal doing a canine impersonation. In the same way, a baby is a baby – the idea of acting has not so far entered its head – but all these grown-ups are standing round making fools of themselves.

I was a student at the short-lived London Old Vic School under Michel St Denis, who was preoccupied with style – not high camp or the like, but the appropriate style for Chekhov, for Shakespeare, for Congreve. I remember concluding that whatever subtleties might be involved, maintaining the style of a production meant being consistent in the conventions you choose to employ. An audience will happily accept almost any convention as long as it knows what is expected of it, that is as long as the convention is established and stuck to. If you decide to do 'Faustus' on bare boards, Mephistopheles can say:

This is the goodly palace of the Pope

without getting a laugh. But fill the first scene in Faustus's study with books, retorts, and all the impedimenta of Renaissance intellectual curiosity – and you're in trouble.

Whatever style you settle on, it must be somewhere within a spectrum, and not at either extreme – as it might be of utter reality at one end or arbitrary personal fantasy at the other.

A more recent memory: 'Of Mice and Men' at the Crucible, just over a year ago. Much as one may enjoy the semi-circular form of stage and auditorium, it imposes limits on the degree of realism possible. A shallow pit in the peninsula stage was filled with water, and reeds grew from it, as at the bank of a river. At the climax of the play, George and Lennie have to hide in them, so Barry Jackson and Matthew Kelly slid into the water. Until then, the audience had been caught up in the action; now it was preoccupied with the condition of the actors – they weren't acting wet, they were wet.

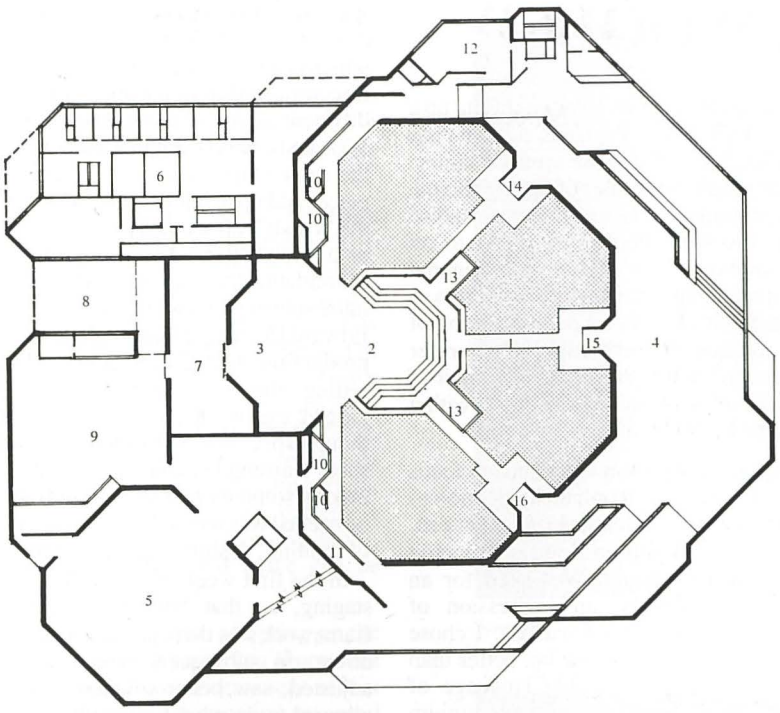
Most of the time, these things are matters of degree; you might decide that the Scottish play needs red liquid of some sort but that any blood in 'Hamlet' should stay in the lines. But what is dangerous is the demolition that can follow the appearance of the hundred-per-cent-authentic (say a real cab in the first act of 'Pygmalion') or even too good a trick or property. We may hold a mirror up to life, but everything the audience sees should be through that mirror, even if it is at times distorting.

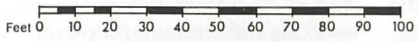
These reminiscences were prompted by Richard Pilbrow's article, 'Beating the Drum', in CUE September/October 1988. So let me turn to that explicitly.

It is invaluable to have an insider's account of how the Olivier house at the National got like it is – some correction, maybe, for the gossip I repeated in 'Arch and Arena' (CUE, March/April 1988) – though blaming Chichester's shortcomings on Guthrie is like blaming tower-blocks on those who developed reinforced concrete.

Pilbrow tells of the dilemma inherent in the Olivier's configuration: should it be 'for actors and text alone' or should it be (loaded phrase coming) 'capable of employing the scenic techniques of its time'?

The complexity of The Drum is an attempt to suggest that the second of these answers is correct. It is not – but neither is the first. The question cannot be answered satisfactorily – there can be no real resolution of the dilemma – because a right-angled stage (one with an effective angular spread of audience of 90 degrees) is ultimately unworkable.





The semi circular form of stage and auditorium at the Crucible imposes limits on the degree of realism possible.

An incidental difficulty in this sort of discussion is a fault (and that's not too strong a word) which we almost all share: we are infatuated with technology. This it is in architecture which leads the Stirlings and the Fosters to struggle with the problems of all-glass facades without first having given sufficient thought as to whether an all-glass facade is really desirable. This it is which leads Lasdun to giant fly towers and complicated under-stage mechanisms without first really considering their relevance. Our pleasure in seeing a technical problem well solved can make us ignore the question of whether the problem should have arisen in the first place.

Perhaps the essential objection to a 90-degree spread of audience should be spelled out again. It is that it falls into the no-man's-land between two forms of playhouse which are irreconcilable: single-view and multiple-view. The conventions of the two patterns are not merely opposed but often directly contradictory. In crude, slogan-like terms: single-view theatre is extrovert, pictorial, and naturalistic; multiple-view theatre is introvert and less realistic while being more concerned with being rather than seeming to be. It is the medium of the playwright who says:

On your imaginary forces work!

My belief is that if you have, willy-nilly, a right-angled stage you can cope with it by treating the whole as a multi-view playhouse. That is you employ production techniques and direct your actors as though it were an adaptation of four-sided theatre ('arena' or 'theatre-in-the-round') or of three-sided theatre ('peninsula'or 'thrust') rather than regarding it as a grossly fattened end-stage configuration. The best treatment, of course, is to avoid it.

Neither form of theatre – single-view or multiple-view – is superior to the other. When André Simon was asked whether he preferred Bordeaux or Burgundy he replied that he had sons and he had daughters – he recognised that they were different but he loved them equally. Nevertheless, he would never have put left-overs of each into a bottle, even for cooking.

There is little doubt that sophisticated machinery and state-of-art electronics can reduce the labour and indeed, make possible the frequent changes of a full repertoire. But Murphy's Law applies: if it can go wrong, it will go wrong. One of the earliest horror stories I can remember was of the new hydraulics at Drury Lane failing during one of the first performances of 'Cavalcade' – the dream of the Titanic's designers was realised: it would not sink.

Further quibbles arise from the Pilbrow piece (and as a Life Member of the Guthrie Fan Club I'm tempted). His enthusiasm for multi-level auditoria is surprising in one who hankers after the pictorial (does he really think the balconies in the RSC's Barbican playhouse improve it?). But let me, in conclusion, venture a generalisation or two about drama, life, the cosmos, and the place of machinery in the theatre.

Austerity is a matter of personal taste. It is often sterile, springing from the Puritan Conscience and mistaken notions about the past. The ruins make many people see classical Athens in monochrome and they go on from there. In reality those Greeks loved colour and used it without inhibition. In the theatre they enjoyed exaggeration – sound, height, costume, you name it – and they rejoiced in fireworks, fillibustering, and the full use of pulleys and gear-wheels (was not their favorite dénouement device the god 'out of the machine'?).

In our own time, however, the illusion of realism is more properly the business of newer media – films and television. Even in the cinema, being too convincing can prove counter-productive. When I saw the gripping B movie, 'The Window', a fellow spectator was moved to the classic cry of anguish 'He's behind you!'; the audience was amused, but the moment destroyed. paradoxically, utter suspension of disbelief had restored our knowledge that the insubstantial pageant was but a shadow on a screen.

A spectacular scenic device in the playhouse either fails (and is laughable) or it succeeds in itself only to distract attention from the real matter. Theatre will never again be a mass medium as it was a hundred years ago; it was then that transformation scenes and the like were at their peak.

Of course, there is room for a wide range of live entertainment, from Brook to Brecht, from Becket to Bergère; keep the coach parties coming! But the theatre now has the chance to be true to itself, its own self.

We do not serve its cause well if we are for ever trying to make it into something different.

"A WALK IN THE WOODS"

From the Director

RONALD EYRE

"A Walk in the Woods" is an effective two-hander which traces the growth of a friendship between a pair of negotiators on either side of the East/West divide. The scene is a wood near the U.S./U.S.S.R. arms control headquarters in Geneva. The time could be any time since such talks started. The characters are Andrey Botvinnik, a seasoned Russian diplomat, and John Honeyman, a callow American negotiator. There are four scenes in four seasons. The theme is the apprenticeship of a younger, brasher, vainer, young hopeful to an older, more whimsical, less driven, less deluded master of his craft. The "craft" in question is sitting in Geneva giving the appearance of getting somewhere in arms negotiations while actually (and deliberately) not reaching any final goal.

The appeal of the play to an audience seems to me to lie in the archetypes it summons up (the learner-teacher, father-son, hare-tortoise, Uncle Sam-Big Bear) and the variations which the author plays on them. The appeal of the play to me is double. It involves me in its shifts, ploys, games and glooms as I read it. And it offers the chance to work again with Sir Alec Guinness. He is, to say the least, cautious in what he will and wont do and a formidable judge of a good vehicle. In "A Walk in the Woods" he found one. Together we found the best possible American casting for his partner – in Edward Herrmann.

The play has had quite a history. It first appeared at the O'Neill Theater Center's 1986 National Playwright's Conference. It was developed in workshops at the Yale Repertory Theatre. Its second production was in La Jolla, California. Then Broadway a year ago. There was a certain amount of huffing and puffing that the Broadway director-designer team didn't come to London. But Guinness wanted a clean start for all of us – director, designer, lighting designer, composer and actors. Those of us who direct have all encountered the hazards of redirecting an old production with a new cast and Guinness didn't want the feeling of having to struggle into the cast-off moves and intentions of another actor.

Though the play is called "A Walk in the Woods" it is really a sit in the woods and the staging problem is to create some mobility without straining the play's modest demands. The idea of a revolve took hold early. In this way we could vary the vista. Various revolve positions were tried: four turns of 90°, two turns of 180° or something between. The 180° solution worked out best.

Scene One, then shows a summer vista up a mountain slope; Scene Two is an autumn vista over a lake; Scene Three the same in winter; Scene Four back to the start of Spring (So the seasons go round, the talk goes round, and so does the revolve). Pooled ideas led to an elegant solution of the seating: a hexagonal bench surrounding a tree was carved in two so that in one pair of scenes a demi-hexagon of seating, backed by its other half further upstage, is on stage right. In the other pair of scenes, the seats are, ditto, stage left, with a different bench to the fore.

The style of design was calculated to focus interest on the actors. Too much attention to naturalistic detail – extending, if unchecked, to live rabbits and pop-up flowers – would distract from the people. We opted for an **impression** of woods, an impression of distance, an impression of seasons. I chose Robin Don to design because he, better than most, understands the double language of materials – how what is clearly alluminium mesh and fibre-glass can subtly suggest wood, bark, branch, light and shade, without the deadly heaviness of attempting the real thing. He also dares to take risks with mirrors and endless vistas.

I had seen some Rick Fisher lighting for a Howard Brenton play about Shelley and Byron at the Royal Court Theatre. There he managed to create the impression of palpable light, not just illumination of the set but a light-web in which the characters seemed somehow to be caught. He was an obvious choice for lighting designer. Jeremy Sams, with horn and synthesiser, wrote the music. By way of inspiration I played him a tape of a Carl Nielsen overture, "Helios" which starts with misty horn calls. "Isn't it too romantic?" said Jeremy (fearing perhaps that Julie Andrews and Christopher Plummer might be expected to appear, climbing every mountain). But it's not too romantic. Nor are the scene links it inspired in Jeremy. If anyone thinks it is, I take the rap. It's worth adding that, with Robin Don, Rick Fisher and Jeremy Sams, this was my second collaboration with them and we met with the useful knowledge of having enjoyed the first.

Edward Herrmann came to London just ahead of rehearsals but responded very positively to design, staging and lighting ideas. Alec Guinness, being more to hand, was in touch with them throughout. He was the one who sent pen-and-ink sketches of possible park benches when those were being considered. He invoked Vuillard drawings when we were trying to pin down the visual style. His application is tireless. Because neither he nor I had met a Russian diplomat, we asked the Russian Embassy to ask us to tea. They did better. They asked us to lunch with the Ambassador and two aides. Whenever Gorbachev or Gromyko appeared on television (and they appeared a great deal while the production was being prepared) their shirt-styles, their ties, their haircuts were noted and filed away.

Each production demands work from the director in a different area. "The Sneeze" which I had just opened at the Aldwych needed directorial and design work to make three very different actors (Rowan Atkinson, Timothy West and Cheryl Campbell) seem to belong on the same stage, and to make eight separate pieces add up to one evening. For "A Walk in the Woods" all seemed to hang on the pairing of the two actors. More anguish, meetings, transatlantic phoning and water-divining went into exploring (without his knowing it, I think) Edward Herrmann than might go into a whole production in different circumstances. The setting, the stage ambience, too had to be judged exactly and early. Guinness at 74, though spry, was concerned at the amount of sheer learning he would have to do (a titanic task for someone half his age) and the last thing he needed was unresolved worries in the areas of lighting, design, wigs, clothing.

In the first week of rehearsal I did a rapid staging, so that both actors could feel a framework was there and it wouldn't let them down. In subsequent weeks we changed, adjusted, saw better solutions, but I wasn't allowed to do what I often do – which is to throw it all in the air and start again, just for the hell of it. This is one of the advantages of working with the same people more than once. We know in advance when one or other of us is going to autodestruct; we know when to slam the brakes on, when to allow elbow room, when to leave well alone or intervene, when to listen. Gone are the days when I had to convince myself that I was spinning all the design ideas, production ideas, light and sound ideas out of my navel. These days, if I have a good idea and you – Alec, Ed, Robin, Rick, Jeremy – have a better, I hope, I'd have the sense to listen and use it.

From the Designer –

ROBIN DON

On top of the fact that the script required the woodland to reflect the changing seasons, the dear director thought it would be awfully nice to revolve the whole vista by 180 degrees at the end of the first scene to enable the audience to view the autumn sunset across the lake. "Perhaps also we could have a jet trail in the sky or a distant steamer reppling the calm surface with an alpine quartet on board playing some half remembered malancholy waltz".

Ron is terrific at throwing verbal visuals. They are accompanied by varying degrees of twinkling in the eyes. The brighter the twinkle, the more you know he means what he says. His instincts are usually right, so here we are, not only having to fill the tiny Comedy Theatre with a forest of trees but also having to find a way of changing the woodland backing into a lakeside in a mere 15 seconds. – The 15 seconds allow BOTVINNIC (Sir Alec Guinness) to change his tie and HONEYMAN (Edward Hermann) his suit.

Jeremy Samms composed evocative music to hold the atmosphere as the house tabs came in. Our actors could then be discovered mid-stage when the curtain was raised. The same technique was employed in the second act in order to change from the melting snow to the bluebell wood.

The proscenium opening at the COMEDY THEATRE is 25 ft. wide and the stage is 30 ft. deep. The distance between the fly floors is approximately 30′0 and with a bit of a squeeze here and a shove there, the trusty crew managed to fly framed cloths 29′6″ wide. The sides of the cloths are masked by mirror surfaced flats 22′6″ high, permanently fixed up and down the stage parallel to the fly floor, all the way from the back cloths, sensitively painted by John Campbell, to the iron curtain. Mirrors used in this way are extremely treacherous when it comes to focusing lamps, but the quality of light and space can be relatively surprising.

If you compare the photo of Spring on the cover with the one of Winter, you'll note that in the former the trees and greenery reflect images in all directions eliminating any need for conventional side masking. In the Winter scene it's the sky and mountain back cloth which reflects off to the sides. The false floor (the UPSTAGE 9 ft. of which is also mirror) conceals the bottom of the cloths and gives an effective simulation of mountains reflected in the lake. "Could we please spray the lake down" was a note I kept getting from Rick. Hesitate long enough and sure enough, he came up trumps.

The foliage panels were skilfully fabricated by engineers and sculptors at Phil Parsons studio. Each panel is approximately 10 ft. × 15 ft. and had to be very light and translucent enough to register the back projected foliage motifs.

Experiments revealed that Crystic resin 388 (class 1 fire retardant) produced the ideal quality. Various sizes of expanded metal sheeting were trimmed into organic shapes and embedded into the glass matt and resin. This gave the panels inherent strength as well as an appealing surface pattern of abstracted foliage which responded extremely well to Rick's seasonal projections. A concealed revolve in the false floor, 7 ft. in diameter, subtly altered the groundplan of the seating units and tree stumps during each scene change.

From the Lighting Designer –

RICK FISHER

When I first saw the model I knew light would play a crucial part in realizing the designs full potential. The set elements; tree trunks, fibre glass foliage pieces, changing back cloths and the floor cloths were supplemented by mirror finished walls running up and down stage and a mirror section on the floor that aids in visually joining the back cloth to the floor cloth. The seasonal changes are essential to the fabric of the play, apart from the cloths, the set

Summer

Autumn

Winter

pieces moved into different configurations but did not change, the various seasons would be registered by the angles, quality and colour of light. While the effects with Robin's angle poise were enchanting, I knew that achieving anything similar on stage would be complicated and require careful paperwork. The mirror pieces that added depth and distance to the vistas were going to be very tricky indeed.

The Comedy Theatre is quite small. Robin's set didn't leave much room to let light in, so the first problem was to choose a position to light the cloths. A traditional flood bar would have been impossible to focus evenly while avoiding the side and floor mirrors, the unnaturally low back border necessitated by the grid height. There was not enough room to sidelight the cloths as the Spring and Summer cloths butted slcosely to the side mirrors and the off-stage space was limited or non-existent. Robin and I spent a great deal of time with the section. The desire to have the foliage pieces at different heights to give variety to the season necessitated a careful choice of lighting angle and type of lantern. By choosing fresnels, we would be able to focus off those mirrors and the odd wayward tree trunk. Eventually the ''flood'' position was determined with the maximum coverage and clearance of set elements. It was 26 ft. high and confirmed the best way to light the set, for the on stage rig was almost entirely dedicated to that role, was to build bridges well above the fly floor. This would also assist in the focusing of the innumerable break-up gobos on the foliage pieces without a tallescope fouling them at the same time. Since there was no access for a 'scope onto the set a ''Tallescope-free-zone'' had to be turned into an advantage. All equipment was hung on trusses or accessible from the bridge or fly-floor so we could have longer throws for the gobos than a tallescope would allow.

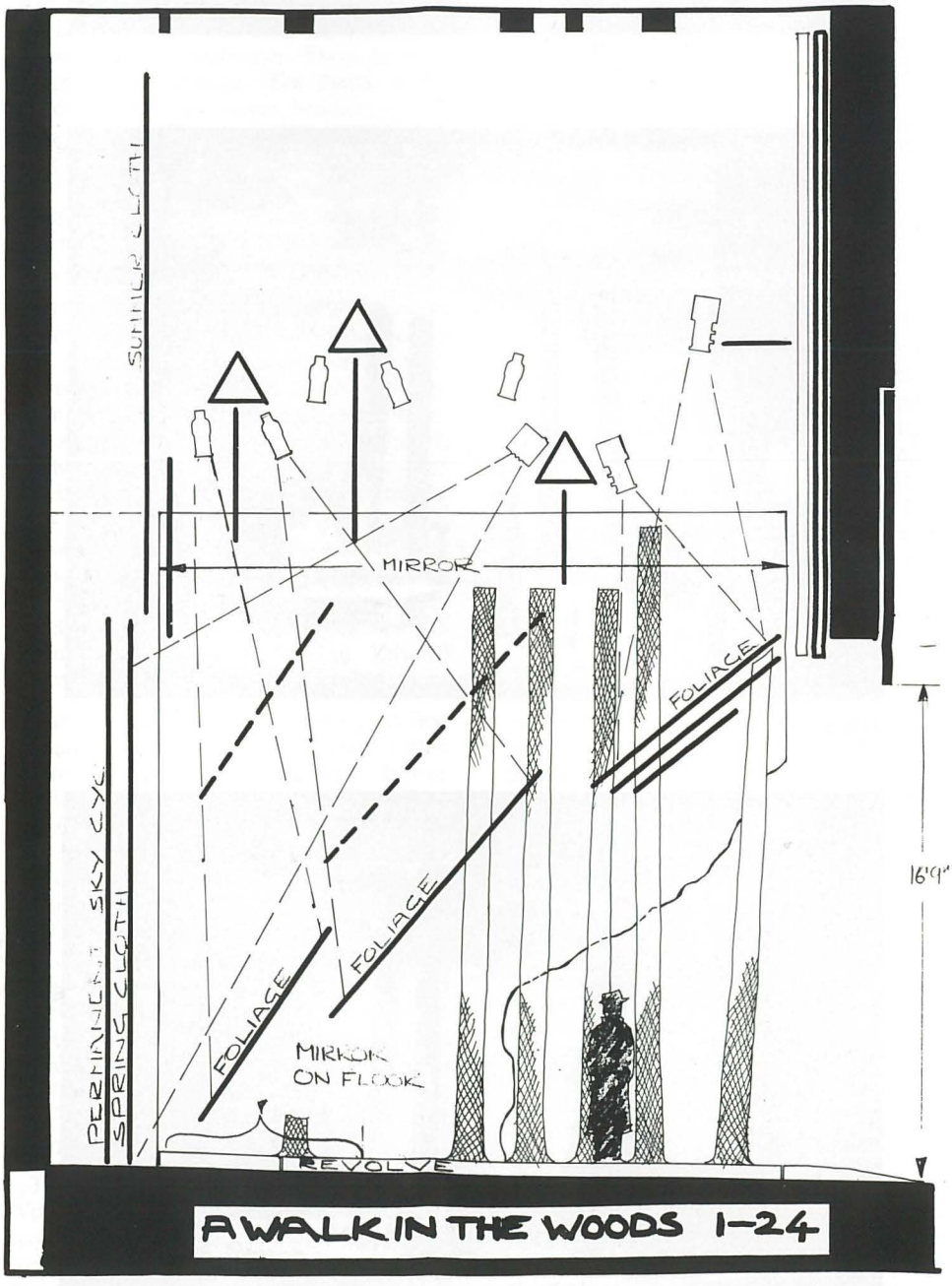
The original design included an upstage tree in the first two scenes. Initially we all felt it filled out the vista, but I was having problems with the shadows caused on the Autumn cloth. Any light steeply sweeping down the cloth to wash out the shadows would catch on the floor mirror, causing exquisite but wrong effects.

Finally after many touch up sessions and the help of a bit of side light sneaking in between the mirror wall and this, the upstage, cloth we had a viable lighting state, without shadows. At this point the tree was cut as it was found not to improve the overall picture. Curiously there was a ''shadow'' of the tree when the tree wasn't there.

The foliage pieces took light beautifully. Colour was going to be the main tool in registering seasonal change on the translucent fibre glass. A selection of break-up gobos also helped to give richness and depth to these flat pieces. In addition to the traditional leaf break-ups I was pleased with the results of some of the old cloud gobos (non-mesh) as break-ups. Again the work on the section was crucial in determining the placement and type of lighting equipment used.

The front-of-house positions were going to provide the bulk of light for the acting area. Sadly as is the case in all too many theatres, an accurate section of the house was not available. The shallowness of the Comedy's position was a continuing problem. Those mirrors which so enlarged the vistas were disasters when directly lit, turning our Autumn sky into a Hockney-esque swimming pool. This might have been balanced with cyc-floods but due to the unusual position of our ''flood bar'', the fresnels weren't strong enough to wash out the ripples – particularly close to the floor without spoiling the overall picture. Fortunately the director wanted the upstage area to be dappled as compared with the clearing around the bench. The front of house rig was focussed abnormally far downstage to avoid the mirror, and the upstage area was lit mainly by light squeezing around the foliage pieces in their various positions.

The overall result for me is neither naturalistic nor artificial. The set and lighting hopefully work together to create an environment the audience accept as a wood in Switzerland, allowing the actors to comment on the beauty of nature while surrounded by elements that are not natural but allow for changes in season that a ''real'' wood couldn't. It was this which excited me about the model and made the difficult challenges of mirrors and awkward lighting positions worth pursuing. But our final result depended on careful work on the plans to try and better the effect of two anglepoise lamps on the model box.



Comedy Theatre stage, side elevation.

The British Council Theatre Lighting Course 848

Twenty specialist visitors from 12 countries came to Britain to eat, sleep and live theatre lighting

"I wonder just how many 'dark' theatres there were around the world during the middle two weeks of October", asked the British Council's Sally Goggin as a large contingent of international lighting designers, technicians and enthusiasts were all in London, and had temporarily switched off their own lights while away. Sally was able to use her A level in Theatre Studies when she joined the British Council two and a half years ago as a Course Officer. Previously she had worked in the Medical Information Department at the Middlesex Hospital. British Council course officers are responsible for ensuring that no administration snags prevent participants from learning from and contributing to British Council Courses. Sally has also worked on courses whose subjects have ranged from teaching agriculture to cancer in children to computer-assisted language learning.

From 9-21 October Sally was the Course Officer for the British Council with the expert direction of Francis Reid. 20 specialist visitors from 12 countries came to Britain to eat, sleep and live theatre lighting. This was the first time anywhere, as far as we know, that such a group of committed people had got together for the sole purpose of learning, seeing and debating theatre lighting. The enthusiasm of this group and the dedication of Francis Reid meant that discussions started at breakfast were carried right through to last orders in the hotel bar each day. I quickly became familiar with Rosco No. whatever or Strand No. something else. Francis was pleased with these continued discussions because as he said, "they were concerned with the totality of theatre experience rather than merely with its technical details. Even when we let the group have some free time they all headed off for yet another theatre performance, one even managed to take in two shows on a Sunday, gluttons for punishment. One element of lighting continually used was the flash bulb. I think the photographic companies must have made a killing during our course as I worked out that between the group, including Francis, they got through 200 rolls of film, one member even shot about 10 hours of video!

The British Council promotes cultural, educational and technical co-operation between Britain and more than 80 countries around the world. It has been developing its programme of short specialist courses and seminars for more than 40 years and now organizes 60 of these in the field of education, medicine finance, technology as well as the arts. Each course or seminar is intended to present the best of British experience to specialists from other countries. British specialists, such as Francis who is undoubtedly one of the most respected in his field, are invited to direct these courses and are responsible for the professional content. Almost 2000 people attended British Council courses last year.

Francis Reid, who has helped the British Council over the years by giving lectures and workshops in such countries as India, Iceland and New Zealand, long had an idea of getting together a group of "lighting people" to exchange views about the pain, sweat and jubilations of their profession. This would be within a framework that would draw upon the wide range of resident experts in lighting design and technology who would be willing to talk to the group and naturally include visits to various theatres and manufacturers. It was while Francis was contributing on another of the Council's courses, for architects on Theatre Planning, that he told the Council of his idea. We encouraged him to develop this. Francis discussed his idea with our in house Drama and Dance Specialists. So thus the idea of a British Council Theatre Lighting Course blossomed into reality.

Our publicity waggon is the first to roll and a prospectus was produced outlining the aims and objectives that Francis hoped to achieve during the two weeks. This was then circulated to all our overseas offices in 80 countries for forwarding to likely participants. We also placed advertisements in professional journals and publicized the course at various international conferences.

They came with the intention of taking part rather than just passively listening

Francis was supplied with large quantities of the prospectus for his visits overseas. Interest in this course was unusually high and we soon had 27 applications, but unforeseen changes in schedules or illness led to some withdrawals. The eventual group of 20 proved to be the ideal number for visits and discussions.

The 20 members came from Australia, Bahrain, Canada, Cyprus, Denmark, Egypt, Iceland, Italy, Norway, South Africa, Spain and Sweden. Some had experience of lighting design, some of technical management and most had tackled both at some time in their careers. Only one member of the course was a woman and her colleagues were almost exclusively male, a sad reflection of the unequal opportunities, still prevalent amongst any profession with a technical bias.

Despite the mixed interests of the group, everyone very quickly got to know each other and a happy, easy going atmosphere was set and the varied view points held within the group complemented rather than detracted from the cohesion of the group. It was obvious that everyone came with the intention of taking part rather than just passively listening during the course.

During the second week we had a session that gave the members an opportunity to share experiences with each other by either giving talks or by means of illustrations around the lecture theatre, what work they either were or had been involved in. It was in this session that we had the most inspiring moments when our participant from the Market Theatre, Johannesburg using video demostrated the incredible integrating power of theatre in a difficult situation. The video is used in raising funds to purchase the theatre's site.

The programme combined lectures, panel discussions and visits to a number of theatres. We saw six performances during the two weeks, *Les Miserables*, *Carmen* at the Coliseum, *Richard III* previewing at Stratford, *Dancing and Shouting* by Second Stride performed as part of the Dance Umbrella Festival at The Place. Then at Second Stride's home base, Basildon, we saw The *Bacchae* from Shared Experience. There was the opportunity to chat with their lighting designer on the shared coach back to London. Finally we caught one of the last previews of *Bartholomew Fair* at the NT, where we all played spot the scenery seen being made the week before. We had kicked the course off with a tour of the NT though due to the mammoth work that Bartholomew Fair's extravagant set required we couldn't see everything (though as I said we did see the scenery production workshop). Luckily, thanks to the generosity of our guide, the group were invited back to the NT on the following Sunday so that the group could crawl around, under, over and above the stages, grids etc to their hearts content.

This was an energetic course. They were kept climbing up and down countless steps to the top and bottom of theatres. With all the hospitality that the course was given during the course this was probably a good thing, otherwise the excess baggage wouldn't have just been on their suitcases! We had a West End Theatre walkabout taking in Wyndhams Theatre, to illustrate a typical playhouse. Then we went on to The Shaftesbury Theatre showing the set up of a theatre housing musicals, and with the amount of technology and equipment that is presently being used in *Follies* this was a good insight. After the Shaftesbury to show the total contrast in theatres we went to the Donmar Warehouse. We included a talk on the perplexing operation of West End Theatres, which cleared some of the bemused looks from the members faces.

Though this was under planning for about 18 months before its start, we weren't in time to book tickets for *'Phantom of the Opera'* but

the Society of Television Lighting Directors, who were having as part of one of their meetings a talk and demonstration by Andy Bridge at Her Majesty's, kindly invited our group to join them for that morning. Thanks to this generosity we were able to see the crashing chandelier and the boat trip to the Phantom's world, complete with candles coming up through the stage. It was also a most interesting talk, at each stage of how the end result was achieved, from initial images through the practicalities to the finished effects. Though it must be extremely difficult to verbalise about visible creativity, these were clearly explained.

Thursday offered a history lesson, pioneers came to take us back to the beginning of theatre lighting, back to limes, arcs and grand masters. This day caused the biggest problem in preparing the course as it took us weeks to locate a 3¼″ × 3¼″ archive slide projector but when we eventually found one the search was well worth it as Frederick Bentham had some amazing slides of the bygone years. Of course, he won over the whole group with his great personality, and he even put the Australians straight about their Castlemaine XXXX!

On Friday the course was on the move again but we didn't make the members walk to The Dernagate Centre, Northampton or on to Stratford. The whole group were flabbergasted by the air castor system installed at the Derngate, for some who had come from small provincial theatres or from touring companies, to see a centre that had the capacity to transform from a concert hall into a clear area for a dinner dance within a few hours was quite astonishing. We saw a similar system on a smaller scale when we visited the New Towngate Theatre in Basildon the following week. For someone who used to attend the old theatre in Basildon the new complex is an amazing improvement.

We visited The Swan Theatre in Stratford and saw the superb rehearsal room above the theatre. Sally observed ''I don't know how the company can work in there as the fantastic views of Stratford and along the river Avon would be too distracting for me''. We saw *Richard III* in the main house but we didn't get an opportunity to look around all the nooks and crannies in there.

The second week started off with visits to CCT's factory in Mitcham to see Silhouettes being made and then we went on to Strand's new premises in Isleworth where the members ''played with the goodies'' that were on display, so we had a continuous light show during lunch.

Most of the second week consisted of lectures and panel discussions. The topics that we covered were as wide a spectrum as possible from lighting for dance, opera, rock and trade shows, tattoos and tournaments to lighting in regional theatre, economics of lighting (a sobering lecture), and lighting requirements and the architect.

The panel discussions were always very lively especially the one discussing the lighting designer as a production team member. For this Francis invited a director, a designer and a production manager to make up the panel, a lethal combination. I think the lighting designers, in the majority, got a sympathetic hearing. We also had discussions on educational opportunities for lighting personnel. Hopefully this course would be regarded as an educational tool. Everyone felt very strongly that there was no wholly satisfactory training available anywhere in the world; everyone had learnt from on the job training, sometimes by being dropped in at the deep end. As the course drew to a close we naturally discussed in which direction lighting would be going in the future. As with all the discussions this one went very well. But although problems were identified solutions were not so easily found.

The course included a visit to the CCT factory to see Silhouettes being made.

The course met the needs in some measure of all who attended and as it was rather an experimental project this was extrememly pleasing and made all the work worthwhile. One of the important aspects of all our courses is that not only do the group listen to some of the best experts in their field, visit some of the finest locations and, as with this course to see some of the good (and bad) performances, but the members also make some important contacts and some firm friends.

''I thoroughly enjoyed working on this course even when suffering from vertigo up however many hundred feet, on a grid.'' said Sally, ''I really found it an experience to be involved and to hear some of the marvelous stories. I'm sure when we repeat this course, hopefully in 1990, with Francis Reid's professionalism, knowledge and understanding and genuine love for his profession, and together with the great support of all those involved in the business it will be just as successful again. It really was an achievement for Francis to get 30 theatre professionals to agree to come talk and for more or less all of them to turn up, despite last minute crises or changed schedules – amazing! To quote one of our members 'Francis Reid is just what a course like this needs, for he just sparkles with interest' ''.

THE BRITISH COUNCIL COURSE 848: THEATRE LIGHTING 9-21 OCTOBER 1988

Back Row (left to right)

Mohammed A Al-Jazzaf (Bahrain), Francesc Rodellas i Vinyoles (Spain), Lars Andersson (Sweden), Kristin Bredal (Norway), Michael Hallbert (Sweden), Greg Taylor (Australia), Mannie Manim (South Africa), Peter Huntingon (Australia), Andreas Christodoulides (Cyprus), Johann Palmason (Iceland), Peter Andersson (Sweden)

Middle Row

Jesper Garde Kongshaug (Denmark), Erik Nordlander (Sweden), Guy Simard (Canada), Tony Youlden (Australia), Francis Reid (Director of Studies), Palle Palme (Sweden), Bjarne Dankel (Norway), Ahmed Moustafa Zaki (Egypt), Lars Lindberg (Sweden)

Last Row

Sally Goggin (Course Officer), Maurizio Longano (Italy), Diana Henry (Assistant Course Officer)

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