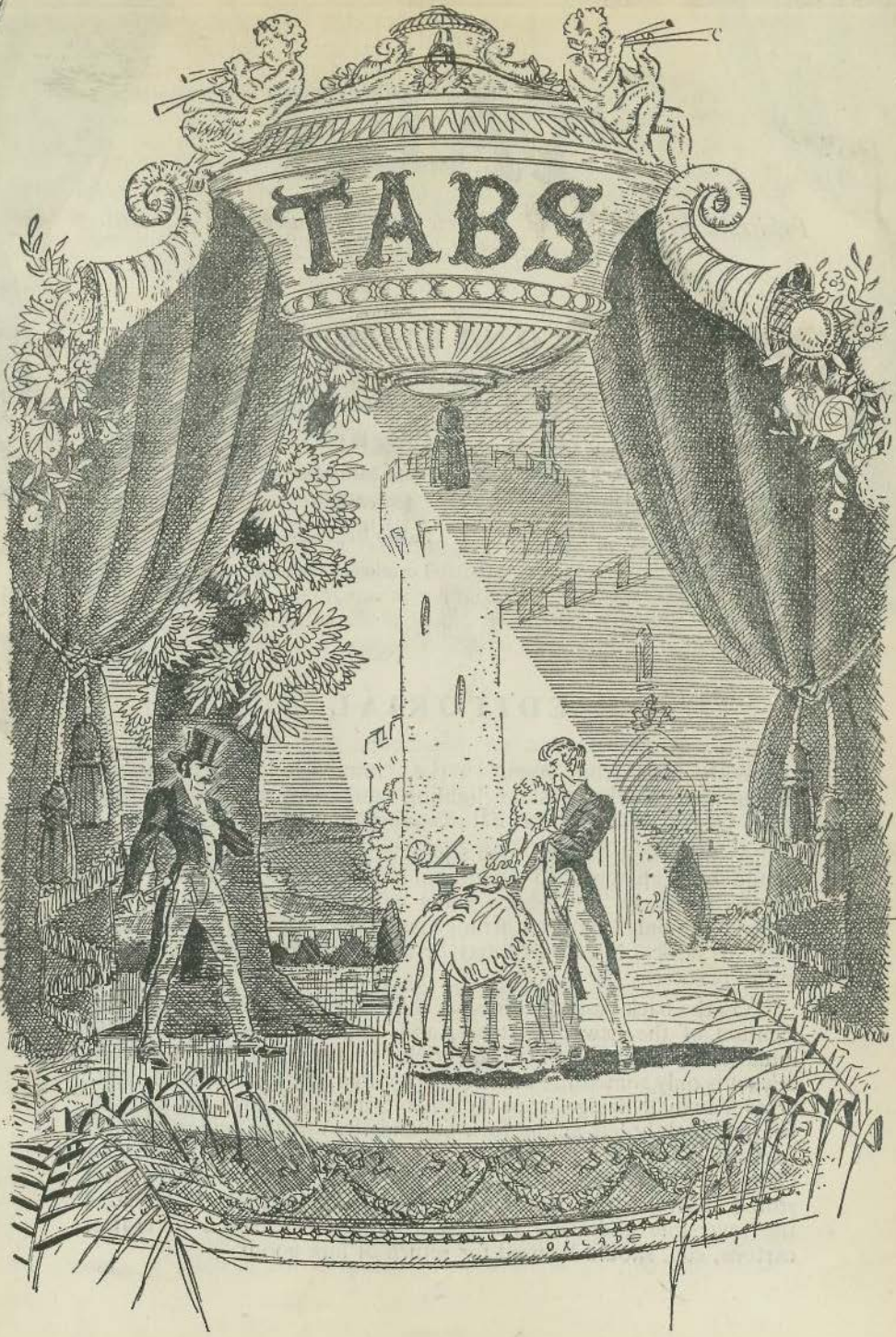


TABS



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TABS

Published in the interests of the Amateur Theatre

by

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EDITORIAL

Our Australian Branch

With this issue we welcome to the ranks of our readers a number of our cousins in Australia where the Strand Electric have opened a branch at 481 Malvern Road, Melbourne, under the managership of Mr. Alec Brown. Mr. Brown was formerly Chief Engineer at the Savoy and Coliseum Theatres, London, and was more recently with the J. C. Williamsons Theatre Circuit down under. A very useful hire stock has already been set up at Malvern Road, but until import restrictions are eased, sales must necessarily be restricted.

That Dollar Gap

As time goes on the international currency and import regulations become more involved. A strangely complicated case arose recently when an English speaking company placed an order to be delivered to Brussels with payment to be made in France. Settlement was made from Paris, but we received a cheque made out on a Swiss Bank paying us in American dollars.

Miracles take Longer

Our Manchester branch have received the following from a customer in the Isle of Man. "I am prepared to join any Society you may promote for the education of producers; but I fear that, so long as you answer their last minute demands in this way, they will continue in asking for the impossible!" The incident referred to was the arrival by air in the Isle of Man of a parcel of colour mediums ordered on the telephone less than two hours previously.

One good turn deserves another. If you are satisfied with our service we would appreciate a courtesy mention in your programme. It costs nothing but it tickles our vanity, massages our ego and generally speaking it urges us on to do the impossible even a little quicker than last time.

Mr. Dim Again

It is again necessary to point out to Mr. Dim, resident in the Southern half of England that our Hire Stores at Kennington are *only* a stores and that any letters addressed there suffer delay in onward transmission to our King Street offices where *all* Southern Area correspondence is dealt with.



News About Our Contributors

John Casson, who contributes an article on page 13 and who is the son of Dame Sybil Thorndyke and Sir Lewis Casson, spent five years as a prisoner of war. Returning to England he became producer to the Glasgow Citizens Theatre. A little over a year ago he left Scotland for Australia to become permanent producer to the J. C. Williamson organisation's theatres. Incidentally we hear a whisper that he may be producing his parents in a play in Australia next year.

Pyrotechnics

Readers are reminded that such inflammable goods as flash and smoke powder, maroons and fluorescent liquids, cannot be sent by Passenger Train. They can only be consigned by Goods Train or by a carrier licensed for such traffic. Not less than 14 days' notice should therefore be given to avoid disappointment. The facilities for handling such traffic on board steamships to Northern Ireland are now so limited that as much as a month's notice should be given. Even then, no guarantee of delivery by a certain date can be given.

Colour Filters

The following new colour filters are now available in "Cinemoid" and "Gelatine."

- No. 38. Pale Green.
- No. 41. Bright Blue.
- No. 42. Pale Violet.
- No. 48. Bright Rose.
- No. 49. Canary.

Samples of these, or colour booklets showing the whole range, are available on application. Quantities of 12 or more sheets of "Gelatine," and six or more large sheets of "Cinemoid," or 12 or more small sheets of "Cinemoid," are now despatched packing and postage free. For smaller quantities postage and packing (which is not returnable) is charged at 1s. 3d. in the case of "Gelatine," and 1s. 4d. in the case of "Cinemoid."

The Coronation 1953

A leaflet showing a range of coloured "Chrysaline" lighting fittings for use on public buildings, etc., is available on application. The range includes crowns, Tudor roses, thistles, Fleurs de lys, and several other designs all of which are available in different colours.

The Editor is granted an interview by

ROGER FURSE

Whose designs include amongst others for the Old Vic the modern dress "Hamlet" before the war with Guthrie and Guinness; "King Lear" in 1940, with Granville Barker, Sir Lewis Casson and John Gielgud; "Lear" again for Sir Laurence Olivier; Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth" for the Oliviers and their recent double bill of the Cleopatras by Shakespeare and Shaw. Also the film of "Hamlet." He has also done both Ballet and Opera.

ED.: *Before asking you about your own work in the Theatre, would you care to give those of our readers who feel that they have a bent in that direction a hint or two as to how to become a successful theatrical designer. How should they set about getting their first West End job?*

F.: I think there are two methods of approach. Either the aspirant should join a Repertory or other Little Theatre or else he or she must do what they can with their social connections. With the former method of approach the candidate for West End honours will pick up a lot of essential knowledge of the Theatre which is not immediately or obviously part of their own trade or craft. If the latter approach is adopted the aspirant may well fall down on his first job and if he does he will fall so hard and so far that he may never rise again.

ED.: *You feel then that designing for the Theatre is not just a watertight compartment, but that it is essential to learn something of other trades?*

F.: I think that I personally learned more from working with Komisarjevsky than at any other time in my career. He was not only a producer, but also an actor, designer and even an architect in his own right. He knew what was possible and what was impossible. He never asked for the latter, but he was always in a position to insist on getting the former. It may be like putting the cart before the horse because I only met him as a producer whereas you are talking about designers. Nevertheless, the designer cannot know too much about the other trades and crafts of the Theatre. He must be in a position to understand the producer's problem, the actor's outlook, and at the same time lend a sympathetic ear to stage carpenter, stage director and electrician.

ED.: *In the Amateur Theatre the designer very often does much, if not all, of his own "sloshing" for the simple reason that if he didn't his self-styled masterpiece might never see the light of day or rather the light of any stage. In the Professional Theatre, on the other hand, it is, of course, customary for the scene painting to be done by con-*

tractors specialising in this work. Do you think that in the Professional Theatre, too, the designer should be able to paint his own scenery?

F.: Yes, indeed. I don't know whether Inigo Jones did or could paint any of his own stage settings, but it is obviously important for the designer to know quite a lot about this subject because the time comes when he must discuss colours and other details with those who are going to do the painting and once again there is no point in his asking for the impossible or being persuaded that the possible is unachievable.

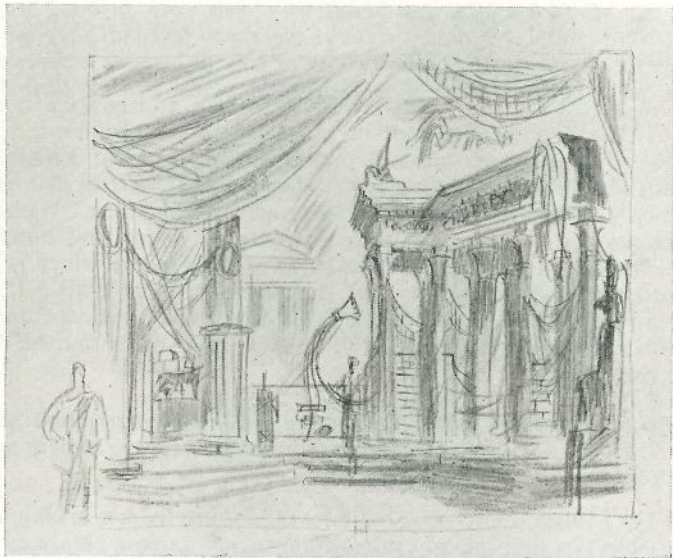


Fig. 1. Roger Furse's first pencil rough of general impression for double production of "Caesar and Cleopatra" and "Antony and Cleopatra" at St. James's Theatre, London, and later in New York. To show both Alexandria and Rome.

ED.: Would you tell me next what you do first on being commissioned to undertake the decor for a new play?

F.: I go into the Seventh Heaven of delight at the thought of being paid for something and then soon after into the Seventh Hell of depression at the thought of the amount of work I shall have to do. More seriously, though, if it is a new play the first thing I do is to read it and if it is a revival, even if it is one on which I have worked before, I re-read the play. The next and most important thing is a discussion with the producer. He and I may have widely differing opinions as to how the play should be treated from the point of view

of decor, and it is therefore essential that we have an early exchange of ideas in a general way.

ED.: Supposing that your ideas do not coincide—and there is still room, thank goodness, for more than one point of view in the Theatre about almost anything—who wins the day?

F.: My first allegiance must always be to the producer and to his production. If we find that we cannot agree on some half-way measure it is then up to me to retire gracefully. On the other hand, and more usually, I find that after a few concessions on both sides we both get what we think we want—one of us in fact, and the other in imagination at any rate.



Fig. 2. A further development in colour by Roger Furse showing specifically one of the scenes in "Caesar."

ED.: Does the author come into the scheme of things at all at this stage?

F.: I personally have a session with the author at this time if the producer wishes me to do so. On the other hand, I have known occasions when the producer has specifically requested me not to do so. As I said earlier, my first loyalty is to the producer, and if he is already finding his author "difficult" I keep well out of the way.

ED.: Apart from leaving the poor little man unconsulted, do you and the producer ever conspire together to go directly against his known wishes, for example, as to the number of scenes and so on?

F.: Though it is possibly rare it has been known to happen, particularly, of course, when the author is out of harm's way.

Shakespeare, for example, is not in a position to cause us any trouble if, when he calls for "Another part of the Forest," we turn a blind eye to his stage directions and expect the audience to do likewise.

ED.: *Do you consult anyone else at this stage?*

F.: Yes. If I don't already know them I go and see the principal actors and get their own feelings about their individual costumes. I find that their comments are usually intelligent, and as far as possible I usually try and meet their wishes because I find that if they are unhappy about their costumes the result can be most damaging to the production as a whole. Also, at an early date I



Fig. 3. A more exact development of another scene in "Caesar." The same groups of pillars were used in both productions.

have a session with the stage director and stage carpenter. I may have my own ideas as to how certain pieces of scenery should be made or handled, but they are the people who will have to make things work "on the night," and once again if I can meet their wishes it is one less headache for me myself ultimately.

ED.: *I notice that you have made no mention of lighting so far. Is this because you feel that it is unimportant?*

F.: Indeed no. The lighting will ultimately form part of the stage picture and I must therefore always have it in mind when doing my designs. Do not forget that I have already had a discussion with the producer and it is he who ordinarily "does" the lighting. The "feeling" and direction and other details of the lighting are one

of the things which I discuss with him at a very early stage. It is of the greatest importance to me to get this information as soon as possible, and if I can find out the name of the theatre in which the play will ultimately appear I go and find out what the lighting facilities are and particularly those in the front of house.

ED.: *I don't quite see how that helps because you can always import more lighting equipment if you want for your own particular production, and equally, on the other hand, any equipment you may see in the theatre to-day might not be there in a few weeks' time.*

F.: I agree, but what I am principally interested in is the angle at which any front of house lighting equipment will strike the stage. I will learn from this that if I put the back wall of my settings at less than a certain distance from the proscenium I must expect shadows to be cast by front of house spots and so on. That is not, of course,

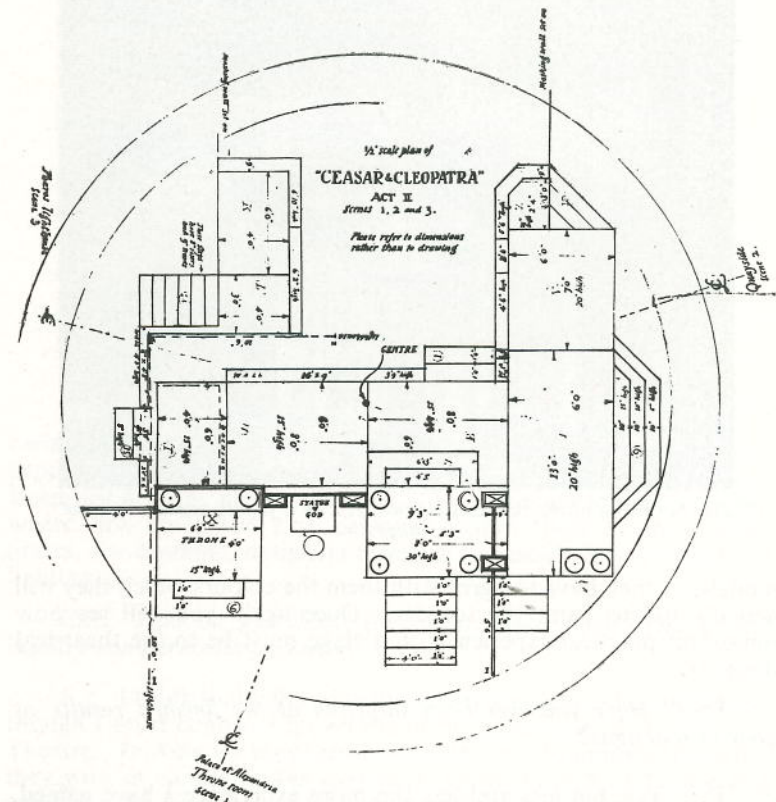


Fig. 4. Stage plan for "Caesar." Minor changes were made during the intervals.

to say that I can always make my sets sufficiently deep to avoid such shadows, but at least I am prepared for the worst and in so far as I can, I take "avoiding action." If the front of house lighting is bound to cast shadows which I know will be unacceptable, then I know also that lighting from some other direction will be necessary to cancel out those shadows and I must make allowances accordingly.

ED.: *Lighting then comes into the scheme of things quite early on?*

F.: Yes. The general colour scheme, including that of the lighting, crops up at my first discussion with the producer. Admittedly I probably do my first designs under daylight, but always bearing in mind the general colour of the lighting under which the finished setting will ultimately appear. This point is covered again when I see the scene painters with my finished designs or scale

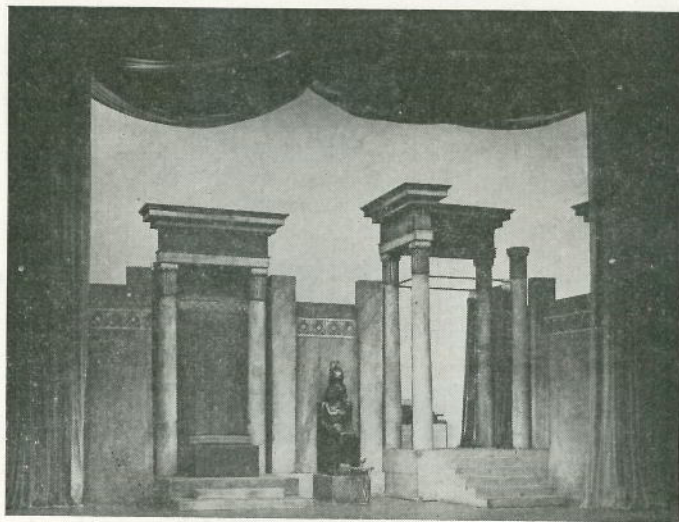


Fig. 5. *Photo of the set sketched in Fig. 2 as it finally appeared on the stage.*

models. I then have to agree with them the colours which they will actually use to paint the scenery. Once again you will see how important practical experience on a stage must be to the theatrical designer.

ED.: *Have you ever been surprised at the finished results of your own designs?*

F.: Yes, but less and less the more experience I have gained. Colour is certainly one of the problems, and another is the difficulty

of visualising from a two-dimensional sketch the shapes and sizes of some of the surfaces which will come into being when the setting takes a third dimension.

ED.: *If lighting is so important, do you not consider that the designer should perhaps light the play in preference to the producer?*

F.: No, I do not. Right from the start I have an idea what the producer has in mind for his lighting and I design accordingly. I



Fig. 6. *Photo of the set sketched in Fig. 3 as it finally appeared on the stage.*

certainly expect to be present at lighting rehearsals, but I equally expect the producer to conduct them. If it was the other way round I can just hear the producer saying, "Your scenery looks lovely, but where are my actors? I personally think that in the United States, for example, designers have far too much to say about the lighting.

ED.: *How do you think, then, that lighting and decor in this country compare with overseas?*

F.: I think that lighting in this country is as good as anywhere, though I must confess I have little or no experience of the German Theatre. In America they seem to use far more equipment, but what they gain in candle power they seem to me to lack in finesse and subtlety. So far as decor is concerned I think that the French are perhaps more imaginative than we are and that their managements

and producers are very much less "literal" and conservative than in this country.

ED.: *What sort of job interests you most and which do you consider to have been your own best effort?*

F.: I think probably I enjoy doing Shakespeare as much as anything because the scope is so wide. Comedy, tragedy, and practically any period. A show I particularly enjoyed doing was Thornton Wilder's *The Skin of our Teeth*, possibly, of course, because I always enjoy working with my great friend, Sir Laurence Olivier. In that production the decor had to "act" itself.

ED.: *Have you any strong feelings about Shakespeare in modern dress?*

F.: I certainly had some qualms about a modern dress *Hamlet* at the Old Vic before the war. Tyrone Guthrie produced and Alec Guinness was in the lead. Latterly, however, I quite enjoyed it and felt that it was justified.

ED.: *Finally, would you mind enumerating the sequence of events from the time of your being commissioned to do the decor for a production up to the first night?*

- F.:
1. Read the play.
 2. Discussion with the producer.
 3. See author and actors if necessary.
 4. Make elevations of all scenes.
 5. Make plans of all scenes.
 6. Rough ideas on costumes.
 7. Further meeting with producer.
 8. Get out detailed plans and models.
 9. Decide on colour details.
 10. More costume detail.
 11. Scenery details to builders, and
 12. From them to scene painters.
 13. Meanwhile, choice of materials for costumes.
 14. Costume fittings.
 15. Setting up and finishing scenery.
 16. Attend lighting rehearsals.

ED.: *Stop! That's enough. I don't think after that list anyone will disagree with you about the amount of work involved or that the theatrical designer is well and truly worthy of his hire. Thank you.*

LIGHTING AND SPEECH

By JOHN CASSON

When, by research and experiment, an effort is made to improve a technique or to develop a craft, consequences often follow that cannot be foreseen at the time of the innovation. A new idea is born and applied to some specific technique, and because a great deal of attention is paid to the idea, the balance or pattern of the technique is disturbed. The idea which appeared to be an improvement, and indeed, which would be an improvement if not developed to the exclusion of all else, can in fact cause damage rather than good. Thus when theatre lighting began to develop as a craft in itself, when electricity made brilliant illumination possible to an extent undreamed of in previous eras, it appeared at first that only good results would follow. New effects could be staged, new methods of production and acting could be developed, and audiences would be able to observe subtleties of stagecraft which poor lighting had previously prohibited.

In the days of poor lighting, actors had been forced to act on a very large scale. The flick of a wrist, the raising of an eyebrow, the slight shrug of a shoulder were not sufficiently visible to an audience to be effective on the stage. And so movement, gesture and voice were all on a scale seldom seen in the theatre to-day.

Then came electricity and powerful arc lamps, to be followed by all the beautiful equipment of spots, floods, acting areas and pageants which are at our disposal to-day. The oldtime gestures and expressions which were vital when the audiences could not see clearly became, under the impact of this vast amount of candlepower, not only unnecessary, but even slightly ludicrous and acting technique began to change. Because an audience could see everything clearly it became possible to reduce the scale of bodily movement and facial expression, and be far subtler in their use. A play began to be acted more "naturally." This has perhaps gone a little too far in many instances, but on the whole the development has been for the good.

Unfortunately in reducing the scale of physical movement, in bringing subtleties of sight within the vision of an audience, actors have also reduced the scale of sound, and have endeavoured to be "natural" vocally. But no increase of illumination can possibly make an actor more audible or more intelligible, except in so far as the audience can see the movement of lips. The development in the last few decades of the "natural" use of the voice on the stage has reached a point where in many theatres only the front half dozen rows of the stalls can hear what is being said. Our charlady made a remark the other day which was a sad commentary on present-day theatre. After seeing a production in Melbourne she said "It was really lovely. I could hear every word, and it was so

easy to understand." To hear every word from even a reasonable seat in the stalls has apparently become a matter of note, and a reason for congratulating the actors.

The process of developing the visual side of acting with the vocal being left to look after itself has been going on for some time. The use of the voice as a delicate and subtle instrument in acting, an instrument to be worked on and practised, has been almost entirely neglected in contemporary stagecraft. One has only to conduct a very simple experiment to know the depressing truth of this. Go to a theatre where there is a production of some quality, put your hands over your ears and look. You will be enchanted. The grouping will be interesting and tasteful, the decor will be exquisite, the lighting subtle and ingenious, and the actors will move gracefully and smoothly. Now close your eyes and listen. Nine times out of ten you will be sound asleep in a few minutes.

It is impossible now to know whether to place the responsibility for this on the shoulders of actors or producers. Actors, finding they can achieve startling effects by the use of clearly illuminated gestures and expressions, have perhaps subconsciously tended not to bother so much about their voices; and producers, finding that actors are becoming less and less trained in the vocal side of their craft, have produced more for the visual effect. Whoever is to blame, there is no doubt that modern production is visual rather than vocal, and the tendency in this direction may be a "snowball." But the matter does not rest there. Audiences are now ceasing to listen because it is so much more entertaining to look and so, to mix the metaphor, the snowball has become three-sided.

Audiences are in fact somewhat surprised when they can hear, understand and be interested in what actors are saying. But surely there are only two important ways in which one can understand and feel with another human being. Firstly, one sees the look in a person's eyes, and secondly, and more important, one hears his voice. On the stage everything else should be a background to enhance, but not to supersede, these two things. Lighting has made it possible to see the first, but because everything can be seen, it is atrophying the second.

In the Elizabethan theatre audiences really listened to words and were moved at a play by what they heard. They played mostly in daylight at close quarters with their audience. This feeling of closeness has been made possible to-day through lighting. Despite this, many actors are now frightened of playing Shakespeare because they are firmly convinced that Shakespeare demands a totally different method of acting. But Shakespeare wrote to obtain his effects by the sound of the human voice. It is impossible to play him effectively using the "natural" method of speech, because the majesty of his language, the glorious splendour of his words, demand an equivalent large-scale use of voice and tongue. The "natural" method is too anæmic and ineffective. This, however, does not

necessarily call for a special Shakespearean technique. It means that Shakespeare demanded from his actors the highest possible development of the most important instrument of their bodily orchestra—the voice. Younger actors, however, being insufficiently trained in the art of effective speech, are now tending to rationalise this insufficiency by calling it a new method of acting of which Stanislavsky appears to be, most unjustly, the patron saint. Stanislavsky produced for the Russian theatre, which had become at that time over-formalised, absurdly and outrageously large-scale, and consequently out of touch with reality. He tried to bring reality back and preached the gospel of naturalism.

I cannot believe that he expected his method to be used as justification for vocal inadequacy. The popular present-day habit of speaking lines in low undertones during early rehearsals until the "mood" or "reality" of a scene is captured (apparently to be achieved only by the intervention of super-normal powers), seems to be merely the rationalising of an inability to use the voice effectively, and the consequent fear of committing oneself.

But the result of this is a fear of vocal experiment, and the forming of a habit of using quiet, ineffective, "natural" speech in acting. I had occasion recently to be producing an actor in a speech that told a rather dramatic story. I had been driving him fairly hard to increase the scale of his speaking, and he was firmly convinced that I wanted him to become a "ham." One night, shortly after we opened, probably exasperated by repeated notes from me, he decided to pull my leg, and go all out really to "ham" it. He was both delighted and somewhat rueful to discover that he held his audience as never before. "Ham" in speech is after all only effective speaking badly done, which is always better than ineffective speaking "beautifully" done.

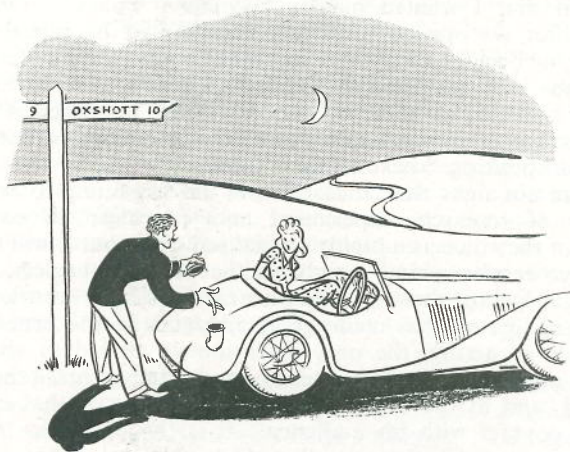
There are signs that at last actors are beginning to realise the necessity of research, experiment and education in continuous exercise of the voice as a highly specialised craft, but it will take time to achieve results owing mainly to the years of neglect, and the consequent lack of those people with the necessary knowledge.

Where lighting has made great advances to the benefit of the visual side of acting, the only invention as an aid to speech has been the microphone, which does no more than increase the volume of sound, and at the same time loses to the actor that close and intimate contact with his audience. It is through voice above all that we come to know each other, feel with each other and move each other, and unless the full-blooded use of the sound of words comes back to the stage, the live theatre will lose the battle with films, radio and television. That may happen in any case, but if it does, the world will be the poorer.

Modern techniques of lighting, and all that follows from it in visual effect, can give a life to our theatres unprecedented in theatrical history, if only we can make the art and craft of our speech match up with it in beauty, skill and significance.

NO WIDTH: NO DEPTH: NO CYC.

When a factory is built the architect is usually very concerned to provide accommodation not merely for the processes of manufacture but also for the handling and storage of materials going into or coming out of the factory space. On the contrary, if a stage is being designed by somebody without stage experience, it is a fair bet that the space required for the handling and storage of scenery, props., etc., when not in use on the acting area will be overlooked or underestimated: stage territory not seen by an audience will be naively treated as wasted space, useful only for the placing of lots of stairs, radiators, windows and all odd impedimenta that can be sited there. If one should request the responsible architectural archangel (with appropriate humility, of course) for an extra 6 ft. on each side for "off-stage" accommodation, there will be an oppressive silence and looks of pained surprise. There will follow a pugnacious resistance to any suggestion that the proscenium might be contracted; a slightly acid comment about "sight-lines" will delude the petitioner into assuming that the plan has not evolved by accident but by design. He (the petitioner) will applaud this concern for functional planning (perhaps, however, looking slightly



“ . . . not evolved by accident but by design.”

askance at the flat floor of the auditorium) and put in an alternative plea for expansion of width between the walls of the stage. This will almost certainly provoke vigorous condemnation of extravagant ideas, with chilling references to building costs. And for ever afterwards, a succession of stage managers will blaspheme their way through a succession of nightmares called “scene-changes.”

It is obvious that what is a “stage” to most people is merely the “acting area” to theatre people. Most of the halls in use as amateur theatres bear witness to this distressing delusion. The uninitiated cannot comprehend that when Hamlet pursues his father’s ghost, it is a Bad Thing if he forcibly collides with a mass of too, too solid flesh immediately he leaps from the battlements of Elsinore into a confined clutter of props, furniture, scenery-braces, wing floods and perspiring bodies waiting for the next scene. As a consummation it is devoutly to be deplored.



“ . . . somebody must be sacrificed.”

Although much has been said and written about this vital need for generous width and ample depth of stages intended to be used for theatrical purposes, there is still a depressing lack of understanding. It is indeed rarely that the width of a stage exceeds the width of its auditorium. This is doubtless due to the universal practice of fitting a stage into a hall or theatre that is designed as an auditorium. If the stage were designed first and the auditorium added to the stage, there might be less cause to regret errors that would seem to be inherent in the reverse process.

When a stage is designed within the inevitable rectangle of a hall it is necessary either to impose poor sight lines on the occupants of the side seats or to ensure acute congestion in the wings of the stage. It is quite impossible to have perfect sight lines from every part of the house *and* ample wing space, unless the stage is wider than the auditorium seating. If, in this cruel age of materialistic austerity, somebody must be sacrificed, then let it be the audience. They should be accustomed to suffering, anyway; and they are mostly voluntary sufferers, doubtless sustained by the more dominant emotions of consanguinity. If “our Wendy” is playing the lead, everything is bound to be right with the world.

When the stage and the designer’s mistakes are actually in existence there is little that can be done except to make the best

of a bad job. Which does not mean merely grouching about the difficulties and using them as a convenient excuse for not doing anything to overcome them. An attempt could be made to reduce the effective width of the proscenium opening and provide some of the missing wing-space. If there is liberal depth . . . (slight pause for hollow laughter) . . . a false proscenium could be fitted 3 or 4 ft. up-stage, with a reduced width of opening to which the scene is set. This also has the effect of creating or extending an apron stage, which is a Very Good Thing. Apron stages are much favoured by The People Who Know.

If, however, the limited depth of stage available would make a false prosc. too false, the width of the set could still be reduced and finished off at each side by a neutral "return" well down-stage and extending into Prompt and O.P. corners, to mask the extra wing space created. Alternatively, it is often recognised that a box setting need not have rigidly unbroken straight lines. A few 2-ft. returns, cunningly placed, can create an effect of architectural solidity as well as contriving an extra 24 in. of wing-space: even if the solidity is dispelled by the actor who rocks the entire house with the handle of the door, the extra wing-space will still be a boon.



“. . . entry by a kind of side-step shuffle.”

As far as possible, the settings should conceal, not emphasise, the off-stage limitations. It is necessary to avoid slavish adherence to the positions of doors, windows, etc., as indicated in the script or the illustrations in the acting editions. If there is a maximum depth of, say, 12 ft. from footlights to the confused medley of radiators, steam-pipes, fuse-boxes, doors and windows that effectively obliterate the back wall, it is rather futile to insist on the inevitable french window, popularly known as a "centre opening."

A producer who insists on the centre opening with an acting area that leaves only a passage of about 2 ft. to accommodate the backing and the actors, is inflicting unnecessary hardships on the latter. Even the poise of a Henry Irving is likely to be shattered if he is able to make an entry only by indulging in a kind of side-step shuffle. Architects who know nothing about stage practice may be expected to fall into error but a producer must know that acting begins *before* the entrance and ends *after* an exit: the beginning and the ending must be provided for adequately. A fumbled entrance or exit can ruin a performance. Any part of the off-stage area used by the actors is as vital as the more obvious "acting area."

There are, in the amateur theatre, those undaunted enthusiasts who, on a stage with neither width nor depth, will recklessly present any theatrical masterpiece, be it *Charley's Aunt* or *Uncle Vanya*; *The Flying Dutchman* or *Song of Norway*. When imagination matches courage, they can be unbelievably justified; but scene design and stage practice must be adjusted to the physical limitations. Much can be achieved by subtle suggestion when clumsy, pseudo imitateness would ignominiously fail.

To those with reverential regard for a cyclorama, the shallow stage can be a sinister snare and a devastating delusion. It is now becoming common practice to clear the back wall of its excrescences and to provide it with a smooth, hard surface of cement with a matt finish, painted off-white, sky-blue, or multi-tinted stipple, according to taste. If the stage be shallow, the lighting problems will be profound: an Einstein would boggle at their solution. But that does not deter the enthusiast. Fortunately, Nature frequently provides sky-effects that are contrary to all accepted formulæ for cyclorama lighting; but the shallow-stage cyclorama can be guaranteed to reflect a unique conglomerate of light, shadow and colour at which even Nature would blench. The enthusiast, however, is always able to get away with sky-murder merely by adopting a supercilious attitude and murmuring vague obscurities about symbolism. He could also be disarmingly refreshing by stating on the programme "lighting by accident."

Light can be tiresomely conventional in its insistence on **travelling the** shortest distance between two points, and in its refusal to pass through or round solid objects. The resultant shadows might be intrusive but they are quite inevitable unless dispelled by more light. It is impossible to light acting area and cyclorama adequately unless they can be lighted separately. No depth . . . no separation! With a lot of directional lighting equipment and a lot of time and patience, a lot of fun may be had but . . . it is not necessarily the result of an ignoble defeatism if one is prepared to accept the proposition that: No depth = No cyc. No sir!

AUSTRALASIAN IMPRESSIONS

A rather alarming difference is immediately noticed by the interested British visitor to Australasia in the interpretation of the word "Theatre." It is a little disconcerting when you first arrive to discover that there are no cinemas in this part of the world. Cinematic entertainment is provided in the "theatre" and live productions are presented at the Tivoli, the Royal, or His Majesty's, etc. To go to a theatre means seeing a film, but in describing a visit to a stage presentation one names the building and/or the title of the show. One never sees the word "cinema" even in advertising matter. I presume it is because quite often the one building has been used to provide both forms of entertainment.

Most Australasian theatres (using the word in its Home Country sense) have far greater stage space, scene dock and property room accommodation than their British equivalents, yet amenities for artists fall far below the generally accepted standards found at home. Hot-water services in dressing rooms, for instance, are the exception rather than the rule, and members of the theatrical profession, excluding staff, appear to be the only human beings who can be called upon to work a forty-eight hour week without overtime pay while every other industry is employed for forty hours only.

The most notable differences from the technician's viewpoint are the use of two ropes in a set of grid lines for hanging cloths, etc., and the lack of reflectors in stage lighting apparatus. The latter is quite hard to understand, as electricity costs are high and in a number of towns the supply is rationed. Attitudes regarding modernising installations are rather conservative, but one Australian management has imported a good deal of Strand equipment with noticeable results.

I have yet to discover apparatus designed primarily for touring, such as portable switchboards, multiple cable and the like in this part of the world, yet companies are constantly going from one town to another.

Touring New Zealand can be great fun. The managements and the railways provide accommodation for the staff in a railway coach. One does not get much time for sleep, as in quite a number of towns only one or two performances are given and to-night one may be playing a hundred miles away from the site of to-morrow night's effort. After dismantling the show and packing it into a railway truck, you retire to your coach. Mattresses, blankets and pillows are provided, primus stoves are lighted and steak and eggs are devoured while the train carries you to your next destination. On many Sundays I have enjoyed soup, roast chicken with three or four vegetables and an excellent sweet all prepared by New Zealand theatre technicians on three or four primus stoves, and listened to

very interesting stories of stage personalities who have toured with these excellent fellows round Pig Island.

I have been deeply impressed throughout my Australasian journeyings by the interest and enthusiasm displayed by Amateur Societies. In New Zealand, especially, they are doing wonderful work, and in Christchurch and Nelson have even purchased theatres in which they present their productions. It is a great pity that more good equipment has not been available to them, as while presenting very creditable efforts, lack of modern apparatus is quite often noticeable in scenes where subtleties of lighting and advanced scenic technique are needed to create the necessary atmosphere. In many towns societies have very little time to rehearse in the theatre in which they present their work to the public, and as there is no permanent stage staff, the scene shifting, props, etc., being undertaken by members of the society, the results deserve very sincere compliments to all concerned.

In Australia I have found a great link between the professional and amateur artist. Some professional companies are augmented by members of amateur societies, and often between commercial engagements professionals will appear in amateur group presentations.

There is no doubt that interest in the live theatre is growing in Australasia. Visits to Australia and New Zealand by the Old Vic company, the Stratford Memorial Theatre company, Robert Morley, Evelyn Laye and Frank Lawton, and many other stars of the British theatre, have infused a new spirit into those concerned with Thespian activities. The John Alden company which, I understand, for many years, as amateurs, presented Shakespeare to Sydney audiences, have recently invaded the professional theatre and ably managed by Miss Elsie Beyer, have aroused tremendous enthusiasm during recent visits to Adelaide and Brisbane.

The National Theatre movement in Melbourne has consistently packed the Princess Theatre with their productions of opera, drama and ballet, and Jessie Matthews is playing to excellent business in *Larger Than Life*, an adaptation of Somerset Maugham's novel by Guy Bolton.

I feel sure that with so much more interest revealing itself in the acting sphere, a desire to improve the technical side of the theatre will eventually be noticed. One must remember that there are no Brunskill & Lovedays to build scenery, no Alec Johnsons to contract to paint the decor, no Lyons to supply furniture, no Hollidays to manufacture curtains and draperies, no Hall Manufacturing Company to build revolving or sliding stages, etc., no Robinsons to make or hire jewellery. All these necessities have to be made in the theatre or acquired by devious means by managements or societies on this side of the world; all of which calls for ingenuity and takes time and labour and the result, therefore, may not quite compare

with an Old Vic production. Given time, there is no reason to doubt that commercial firms with specialist technicians may in the future be ready to assist Australasian producers, as they do in other countries, and I must congratulate Strand Electric in pioneering in this field. In spite of import restrictions, there is now at 481 Malvern Road, Melbourne, a stock of scientifically designed apparatus and somebody to advise about lighting problems. All equipment is available for hire, and the colour medium range includes some that have been previously unobtainable in Australasia.

In conclusion, I must refer to the dramatic efforts in schools and universities. Very good work indeed is being performed by the rising generation, which raises one's hopes for the future of the theatre. Two of the university stages I have inspected are as well equipped as most of the commercial theatres, and so they should be. In a Teachers' College in New Zealand I witnessed a very good performance of a play written and acted by the college students. I wished that they had the necessary lighting units to match their enthusiasm. I am sure my readers will understand that I have used the word "theatre" in the sense that it is a building where live entertainment is performed, and not a Projectionist's Paradise.

Lester S. Quare.

LIGHTING THE AWKWARD AREAS

Every stage presents some awkward lighting problems before a scrap of scenery has arrived thereon. A lot of these are caused by various malformations of the auditorium and stage itself. Absence of height above the proscenium, less height up-stage than down, no wing space, nowhere to put lanterns in the auditorium, no view from the stage switchboards, etc., etc. . . .! We all know them all.

These things are caused mainly by lack of specialised knowledge in those designing and building the halls and stages, and might therefore be avoided one day. However, **even on a good stage of the size the *Tabs* reader commonly uses**, there will always be some lighting problems.

The first of these concerns the separation of acting area lighting from cyclorama or backcloth lighting. How do we produce a fine day with a blue sky on an average or less than average stage? Nor does this become much easier if the scene does not present an open sky but a backing to windows. Light may reach the cyclorama directly from lanterns or by scatter from the floor and scenery or even from dust particles on lenses and in the air. For the open cyclorama this means poor colour, and shadows of actors and masking scenery.

In the main the required results are achieved by the abolition of flooding equipment except for the backcloth itself. This policy, after a tough battle with tradition in the 1930's (and confused by the latest lamp—the fluorescent tube, which only floods), is by now recognised, and has resulted in the relegation of compartment battens and footlight to a minor role on all stages where serious lighting is practised. Contemporary with the decline of the floods is the emergence of the narrow beam units often referred to as directional lighting. Spotlights, mirror spots, pageant lanterns and acting area floods are all important these days. Incidentally, the acting area flood (see *Tabs*, Vol. 9, No. 2, Sept. 1951) has so narrow a beam that the term "flood" is a misnomer which, however, habit makes it impossible to correct.

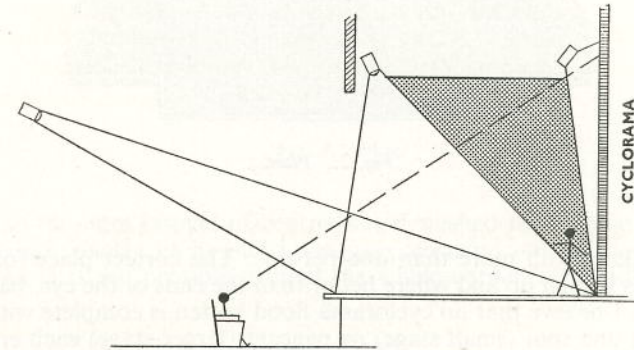


Fig. 1. Section.

Thus, whatever the size of stage, we find the main body of lighting coming from units whose light can be localised to specific areas of the stage. Yet this facility will lead to traps for the unwary. Although we can cover our stage plan with beautiful pools and squares of light, it may well be that in some areas these pools must illuminate only the feet of actors or light their faces at such angles as to make them unrecognisable.

These are the "awkward areas"—the subject of this article. The first of these is upstage just in front of the cyclorama. All the lighting is carefully directed to clear the latter. Every inch of the stage must be used, so how are we to light the gentleman shown in the section, Fig. 1? A narrow beam spotlight or acting area imme-

diately overhead would in theory light him clear of the cyc., but who would benefit by the light? Anyone in the flies, but in the auditorium, not a soul. If the overhead lantern is brought slightly down stage then some light may get on his face, but the result will be a travesty, heavy shadows under every prominence.

The only true solution here is lighting from the sides (Fig. 2 plan). This could be done by spots on stands, but there would be the risk

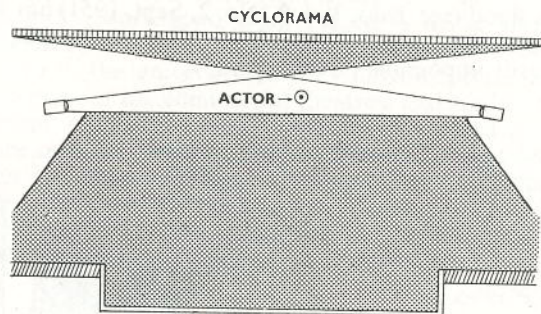


Fig. 2. Plan.

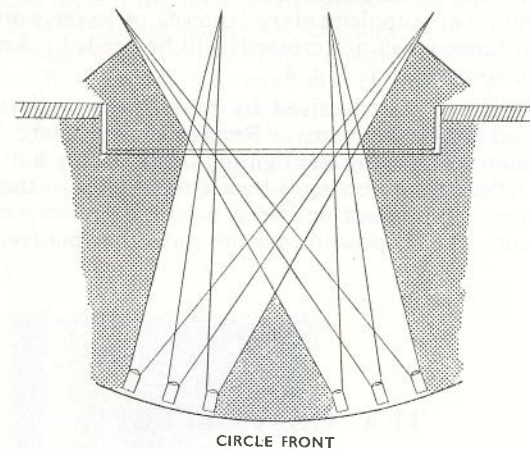
of masking with more than one person. The correct place for the lanterns is high up and where better than the ends of the cyc. batten. In fact, I believe that no cyclorama flood batten is complete without at least one spot (small stage) or pageant (larger stage) each end to throw sideways. The actor then makes his entrance facing the lantern opposite. Of course in a large layout these lanterns may hang in frames as "ladders," but in the small-scale theatre these are not easy to find room for, and use might just as well be made of the suspensions for the main equipment.

This principle might well be applied to bars of lanterns elsewhere, the barrel being made sufficiently long to take a certain proportion of lanterns sideways at each end, and separate circuits being wired for the purpose, thereby reducing the clutter of "booms" and "ladders" to some extent.

Lanterns of this sort are also very useful at half stage to light side scenery when high-set pieces run up and down stage, blocking the wings.

The second most awkward area is down stage left and right just behind the pros. This awkwardness is created by the well-known principle which says lantern beams must be crossed.

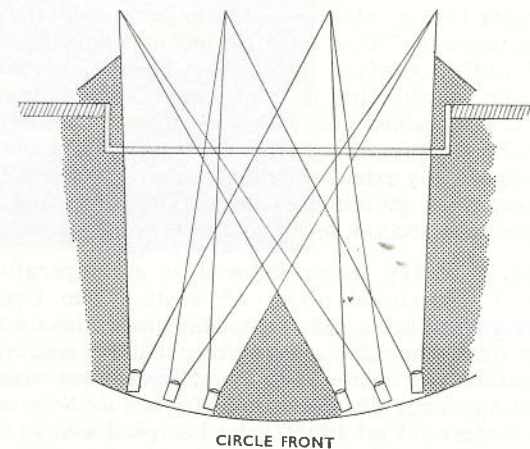
Crossing the lantern beams from the auditorium means that the actor's left lanterns are lighting the actor's right side of the stage, and *vice versa*. This is good general practice because it ensures that the "on stage" aspect of the actor is the best lit and shadows



CIRCLE FRONT

Fig. 3. Plan.

run to the sides instead of centre, but if pushed to extreme we will find him poorly lit in the down-stage corners. Firstly, as Fig. 3 shows, it is not possible to light the whole corner. Secondly, what



CIRCLE FRONT

Fig. 4. Plan.

is lit is lit at such an angle as to appear only partially lit from the audience on the same side as the actor, so that however much light is put into the corner the effect is still poor.

The solution is to re-angle the end lantern to light the corner directly. In the case of a circle front of several lanterns this is easy. Where, as in most small halls, there are only two or three spots in the auditorium, two supplementary lanterns of lesser wattage (they throw less distance when not crossed) will be needed. Anyway, the result will be somewhat as Fig. 4.

To sum up, be not deceived by beam angles, circles of light calculated and drawn on paper. Remember that stage lighting is not just a matter of getting the lighting on the actor but by diffuse or specular reflection projecting it thence to the eyes of the audience. It is what they will *see* and not what a photometer registers in the lantern's beams at that position on the stage that matters.

F. P. B.

TEA OR COFFEE?

Three years ago the Strand Electric installed the complete lighting apparatus including a Console remote-controlled type of switchboard in the Opera House, Ankara, Turkey. We were recently asked to send an engineer to report on the installation and instruct new staff. Having spent two months in Ankara he has now returned and the following are some of his experiences and impressions of this particular theatre.

The Opera House, which was originally an exhibition hall, has a seating capacity of 750, a stage proscenium opening of 8.40 m., and a depth to Cyclorama of 14 m. They have a fairly considerable off-stage space and the Grid is 23 m. high. The whole theatre is a completely self-contained unit with a permanent staff of actors and singers capable of presenting Opera, Drama and Comedy. The Opera House is really extensive and includes workshops for scenery building, properties, painting, model making, ironwork, and even their own tailoring section, as all costumes are made in the theatre.

Theatre in Turkey, as we know it, is a comparatively recent innovation—I understand about 15 years. The Opera House engages foreign producers and at the same time trains its own people against the time when the productions will be entirely Turkish. While I was there the operas *Fidelio* and *Fledermaus* were produced also a Turkish comedy *The Corner* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*. At the same time Professor Carl Ebert, who has produced in England at Glynedebourne and Edinburgh, was producing *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

As you may imagine, production by foreign producers is a very exhausting business, each line and often each word having to be translated separately. It is usual to have in attendance during rehearsals two Turkish producers who are able to speak the language of the visiting producer, but nevertheless from time to time serious complications arise. Lighting rehearsals are, for example, a tricky business. It is so easy in one's own language to obtain those subtle settings of lanterns and the particular dimmer positions required to produce an effect. When you have first of all to try to remember the names of the circuits in Turkish (there are 144 on this switchboard), and then, by many signs and violent waving of arms, explain down or up stage, Prompt or O.P., it becomes a very exacting affair. Often through misunderstandings lights would appear for no reason at all except that from the language point of view you and the electrician were equally "in the dark."



Fig. 1. The Strand Light Console at the Opera House, Ankara, is situated in a box in the front-of-house and the operator views the stage through the window at right.

Colour is a medium practically unknown in the Turkish theatre and the use of specific lanterns for a particular job equally unknown. Strand Electric design equipment with a very definite object in view and it is essential that the particular use of a lantern is studied. In this case, on the No. 1 Bar they were using two Pattern 49A 1,000-w. wide-angle floods. These were in No. 33 Amber and were used in all scenes irrespective. In this country we would not consider using

such equipment (or colour) in this way. It must be said, however, that Turkish producers or electricians have no literature whatsoever available in their own language on the technical side of theatre, neither can they, like people in England who wish advice on some particular problem, telephone the Strand Electric.

The two months in Turkey were spent in a variety of ways. Firstly, inspection of our apparatus, which for three years had been in the hands of people to whom it was a complete novelty, but we are happy to say it had withstood the test extremely well and only minor faults had to be rectified. The Turks had kept the apparatus extremely clean, and one's first thoughts on entering the dimmer room were of pride that the installation was British. This may seem a little like "flag waving," but it was a wonderful feeling when one was many miles from home; especially when, as is so often the case in England, expensive installations can be anything but well kept.

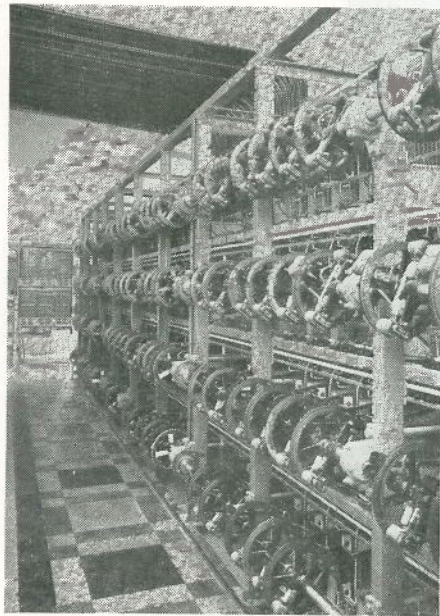


Fig. 2. The "slave" dimmer bank operated by the Light Console at Ankara. The wheel-like objects are the magnetic clutches whereby the operator selects the dimmers required to be moved. Instantaneous full-on or blackout of any circuit is by means of contactors, one across the dimmer, another in series with it.

The second part of my job there was to instruct nine electricians on the operation, maintenance and general use of stage lighting. The students ranged from 18 to 26 years old, and time being reasonably short, the course of necessity had to be condensed. These men, with very little experience, were extremely keen to learn, but it was first necessary to teach them the electrical operational circuit to

enable them, when operating the console switchboard, really to understand the potentialities of this extremely vital job in the theatre: after all, a switchboard operator is a key member of any theatre organisation. For this purpose we held classes in the dimmer room, complete with blackboard and coloured chalks. Then, the students having grasped how the equipment worked, practical demonstrations were given at the Console. Fortunately in this Opera House the control position is in a box in the front of house and each student in turn was able to see exactly what he was doing with the lighting when he operated the switchboard. Of course, one can only teach operators electrically and physically "how it works." They have to gain experience by actually "working shows" themselves. The competition amongst the nine men was extremely keen.

My third task was to lecture to producers, actors and Stage Management on both the use of the switchboard and what it is capable of; and how to use the very extensive lighting equipment installed in the Opera House. The Turkish producers and actors are very keen to adopt English practice; those of them able to visit England have brought back good reports of our methods. We discussed lighting, scenery building, effects, acting, presentation, even make-up, and particularly the use of colour. As you will realise, many of these subjects are really out of an engineer's range, but the discussions that took place were exceedingly interesting and, I hope, instructive.

Often actors and producers not actually engaged on the stage with rehearsals would foregather in their small canteen, where the inevitable Turkish coffee or cay (tea to you, without milk) is served, and form a quiz team asking a multitude of questions. One of their number who could speak a little English would find our interpreter and ask the engineer from London, "Like coffee?" Invariably the engineer from London would ask for tea and then settle down to answering the thousand and one questions thrust upon him.

As mentioned above, Professor Carl Ebert had been engaged to produce *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Professor Ebert produced in German, so you may imagine with what patience this production eventually reached opening night. The translation of Shakespeare had been done by a Turkish professor who was in attendance during the whole of the rehearsals, to correct the odd word here and the odd sentence there, until the curtain ultimately rose on a packed house to listen to the work of the Master of English Playwrights being presented in that rather mysterious and far off land, Turkey. But I wonder what the Bard would have thought one was driving at if one had told him he would one day be an "Invisible Export"!

W. L.

NOISES OFF

The following, which originally appeared as a leading article in The Times, is reprinted with acknowledgment.

Behind the Scenes

"The mere cog in the machine, as the inconspicuous worker sometimes chooses to describe himself, does not in this egalitarian age revolve unnoticed. On the contrary, he is dragged from obscurity and paraded—with a certain amount of justification—as the salt of the earth, the backbone of the nation, or a bulwark of democracy. The private soldier on active service may find himself as much before the public gaze as his commander-in-chief, and a good deal more than his immediate superiors. The worker at the factory bench has become a more familiar figure than his foreman to the world outside. This democratic tendency is less apparent in the world of entertainment. There the stars still shine undimmed. Scene-shifters do not link hands with the rest of the company at the final curtain, and although the programme notes may reveal the name of the designer of the leading lady's dresses, the audience is not introduced to the woman who irons them and keeps them free of moth. It is gratifying, therefore, that in the notices of a new play at least one critic found space to applaud the 'anonymous backstage artists' who reproduced, apparently with much success, the sound of coach and horses arriving at an inn.

"Anyone with the faintest knowledge of amateur theatricals will appreciate that the job calls for a more than ordinary degree of skill. The sound of horses' hooves must not, for example, be allowed to continue after the horseman, striding uncertainly about in riding boots, has appeared upon the stage; and a thousand other little niceties of timing must be observed if the confidence of the audience is not to be undermined. Responsibility weighs heavily on the man with the coconut shells. Progress has, no doubt, lightened his burden. Gramophone records and mechanical equipment have replaced the trays, the dried peas, and the strips of three-ply wood which used to be his stock-in-trade. But the 'anonymous artist,' even if to-day he is more accurately described as a technician, must sometimes feel he deserves as much recognition as the lesser characters in the play who can bask in the reflected glory of the principals. He, after all, is playing a key part, and cannot afford to put a hoof wrong."

* * *

Ed.—The writer of the above is, of course, quite right. "Anonymous artists" of the backstage regions get far too little praise and usually far more than their share of kicks. The fact that gramophone records are rapidly ousting coconut shells and dried

peas does not mean anything more than the transference of responsibility from the shoulders of the stage effects man to those of the recording studio engineer. Both are craftsmen in their own way and richly deserve the applause they will never get from the audiences they will never see.

"Stagesound" theatre effects records are tailor-made to requirements from a library of over 15,000 stock recordings. Complete effects for 250 separate plays are available. Your next production may well be among them. Prices on application.

REVIEWS

(The Strand Electric CANNOT supply any of these books, which should be ordered from a bookseller or direct from the publishers.)

Twenty-five Years of Play Production. By L. du Garde Peach.

The Hucklow Players have published, in an impressive limited edition, a lavishly illustrated record of their progress from an "ad hoc" company of village actors to what is still "ad hoc" and is probably the most famous amateur Little Theatre in the country. On the title page L. du Garde Peach quotes J. L. Paton's assertion: "I'm not boasting; I'm stating facts," but it doesn't delude us; of course, he *is* boasting as well as stating facts. He does so with characteristically vigorous good humour and makes us believe that the facts are well worth boasting about. To those of the amateur theatre who know Peach (and who doesn't?), the boasting and the facts make delightful reading; the record would have been less attractive had it been sicklied o'er with the pale cast of false modesty. It would have been out of character.

There is probably no other amateur theatre that plays each production for three weeks, i.e. twenty-one performances (with a total audience for each run of nearly 6,000 people), and has to reject almost as many bookings as it accepts. And all this in spite of the fact that the theatre is situated in the wilds of Derbyshire accessible only by road and helicopter (or glider?). A theatre like this has got something; it has L. du G. plus. It has also not got something. It has no officials, no committees and no subscriptions. The name of the village is, of course, *Great Hucklow!*

A limited number of copies were, we understand, available for sale to patrons and friends at 10s. 6d. each, which is rather less than half the cost. What other amateur company can afford to give its customers a dividend?

P. C.

* * *

Amateur Stage Handbooks. Edited by Roy Stacey.

1. Plays of 1951. 2. Acting. 3. Scenic Design. 4. The Play Produced. 5. Your Problems Solved. 6. Production. (Stacey Publications, London.)

This collection of six very practical handbooks is extraordinarily good value. Each book sells at 2s. and is an authoritative examination of the subject with which it deals. There is much shrewd comment and good advice, particularly in the books dealing with Production, Acting and Scenic Design. The experienced producer, actor or designer will not necessarily agree with the anonymous authors in every detail and it is right there should be differences of opinion; but the opinions stated will be treated with respect since they are obviously based on sound practice. The inexperienced amateur should be

grateful for the opportunity of receiving so much for so little. Book No. 2, *Acting*, has a section dealing with voice production that should be studied carefully by those far too numerous actors who seem to believe they should be seen but not heard.

The problems of stage lighting receive rather scant attention, being confined to the section dealing with the Lighting Rehearsal (No. 6, *Production*), in which it says:—

“lighting . . . is a subject on its own. There are, however, certain aspects of it which particularly concern the producer” ;

which is something of an understatement. What little is said, however, is useful comment.

P. C.

* * *

Changeable Scenery. By Richard Southern (400 pages with 32 half-tone illustrations and many line drawings). (Faber and Faber. 3 guineas.)

In a publisher's handbill it is stated that this book is the result of 20 years' research. If that is correct the author cannot have wasted much of his time, and this not inexpensive book, which is worth every penny, deserves a place on the bookshelves of anyone interested in either the history of the Theatre or in detective work.

Richard (“Groove”) Southern traces the use and tradition of stage scenery in Britain from the Restoration to the early twentieth century, but there is nothing sketchy in his tracing—indeed tracking-down would be nearer the mark, for every shred of evidence is produced, weighed, confirmed or found wanting in a manner worthy of the sleuth of detective fiction. The clues, many of which prove false, come from the most diverse sources. The uninitiated might assume that original contemporary account books and inventories might be considered as reliable, but not Dr. Southern. Having conducted such earlier theatrical post-mortems as *The Georgian Playhouse* to mention one only, now, with a surgical skill worthy of any operating theatre he dissects each item, in some cases altering the spelling and consequently the meaning, so that the operation shall prove conclusive one way or the other. The result is a case book which is not only authoritative, but extremely readable. It should not, however, be taken to bed, for every line matters. It will be a work of reference for all time. C.

* * *

A Dictionary of Theatrical Terms. By Wilfred Granville. (The Language Library—Andre Deutsch. 206 pp., 12s. 6d.)

In his foreword the author sets himself the task of recording the technical, colloquial and slang speech of the 20th century stage. I found the technical side most disappointing. Others may be able to form an idea of whether the rest of the book is likely to be otherwise, from the fact that the following entries appear: *Bobby Doughnut; Boo; Casting-couch; Chucker out; Cop big; Corny; Flea-pit; Force's Sweetheart; Go down the drain; Glam; G-String; Our Gracie; Raspberry; Your Codding.* So far as I am concerned, the author was **codding**.

H.