

TABS

Published in the interests of the Amateur Theatre
by
The Strand Electric and Engineering Co., Ltd.

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EDITORIAL

Forthcoming Lectures etc., in
Head Office Demonstration Theatre, 1956/57

“Colour and Directional Light as Applied to the Stage.” Demonstration and Lecture. By L. G. Applebee.	} Wednesday, October 31st, 1956 Wednesday, February 6th, 1957
“Basic Stage Lighting. 1956/57 Edition.” Demonstration and Talk. By Frederick Bentham.	} Monday, September 24th, 1956 Wednesday, October 10th, “ Monday, December 3rd, “
“Producer’s Uses of Light.” Lecture by P. Corry.	} Thursday, October 25th, 1956 Tuesday, February 12th, 1957
“Lighting the Stage,” Demonstration and Talk. By William Lorraine.	} Wednesday, January 9th, 1957
“Advanced Technical Lecture,” Part I. Dimmers and Direct Operated Boards.	} Monday, January 21st, 1957
“Advanced Technical Lecture,” Part II. Remote Control. Both by Frederick Bentham.	} Monday, January 28th, 1957
“Cue for Questions.” (see below for details.)	} Thursday, November 15th, 1956

The above will be at 6.30 p.m. on each day except “Cue for Questions” which will begin at 6.45 p.m. Entrance to the theatre is at 29 King Street, W.C.2 from 6.15 p.m.

Those wishing to attend should apply in writing as early as possible to Head Office, 29 King Street, W.C.2, marking the letter “Demonstration.” Personal applications can also be made at the Hire Showroom, at the same address, and sales counter in 25 Floral Street, W.C.2, but should be confirmed in writing.

Cue for Questions

On Thursday, November 15th as an alternative to a lecture-demonstration Strand Electric will hold their own session of “Questions and Answers” in the Demonstration Theatre at 29 King Street, at 6.45 p.m. Readers are invited to submit questions for answering at this session as quickly as possible. Questions should be of a practical nature to do with the theatre, but need not necessarily be concerned with lighting and should be of general interest. They should be addressed to the Editor of TABS in a sealed envelope

marked "Questions" at the top lefthand corner. The team will not be allowed to see the questions beforehand.

Application for tickets to attend this session should be made in the usual way as for lectures, and priority will be given to those who have submitted questions for answering. Anyone who will be unable to attend in person but would like to send in a question is invited to do so. If time allows for the question being dealt with, the team's findings will be communicated subsequently by post.

On this occasion the team will include Mr. L. G. Applebee, Mr. Frederick Bentham, Mr. P. Corry, Mr. William Lorraine, and in the Chair, Mr. H. M. Cotterill.

Darlington Depot

In order to give better service to North and North-East England, Strand Electric have opened a depot at Darlington. Details appear on page 13 of this issue.

Help Yourself Service

As costs of carriage for our hire equipment are high relative to the actual hire charges a number of customers may be able to save money by collecting and returning equipment by car or with the help of a friendly tradesman's van.

Our Hire Stores at 271 Kennington Lane, S.E.11 are near the south end of Vauxhall Bridge and are open daily from 8.00 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. (Saturdays 12.30 p.m.).

To assist those who cannot call during these normal working hours we propose to keep these Stores at Kennington open on Fridays and Mondays until 7 p.m. commencing September 7th. Notice of a customer's intention to collect should be given when the hire order is placed, with the date when it is proposed to call so that we may have the equipment ready. (See map on back page).

Melbourne—Change of Address

Owing to expansion of business it has been necessary for us to leave our premises in Malvern Road and to seek other and larger accommodation elsewhere. The new address is given on page 2 and there are further details on page 14 of this issue.

New Cinemoid Colours

The following colour filters, hitherto only available in gelatine can now be supplied in Cinemoid :

No. 55. Chocolate Tint.

No. 56. Pale Chocolate.

No. 60. Pale Grey.

Samples of these additions to the Cinemoid range for adding to existing colour booklets may be had on request. Complete colour booklets are temporarily in short supply owing to demand.

An Omission

We regret that Mr. Richard Southern's name was inadvertently omitted from the foot of his comments on Raked Stages which appeared on pages 24 and 25 of our last issue. Mr. Southern is Director of the Theatre Planning Dept., of The British Centre of the International Theatre Institute at 7 Goodwin's Court, W.C.2.

Moscow—A Correction

In our last issue in an article "Hamlet"—London Via Moscow" by Joe Davis, when dealing with the Philial or Second Moscow Arts Theatre, we stated that the spotlights, for example, were "all designed and manufactured by the Stage Lighting Dept., of the theatre . . ." The author points out that this wording is misleading and that the lighting equipment for *all* theatres in Moscow is provided by the State Theatre Lighting Dept.; that is to say from a central Government source, there being no private enterprise.

Think of working in any theatre and having not a Strand Electric but a State Department to call upon in time of need! Of course it all depends on the Department *and* the State in question.

Lighting Control

The second article in this series by F. P. Bentham which should have appeared in this issue has been unavoidably held over.

Telescopic Stands—A Safety Precaution

In future telescopic stands supplied on hire or for sale will have a red band painted round the inner stem or liner, to indicate the maximum safe extent of lift.

That Vicious Spiral

In these days of ever rising prices we have become so accustomed to assume that everything costs far more to-day than it did in our father's and grandfather's times that it comes as rather a pleasant surprise to find that certain items of stage lighting equipment are in fact cheaper to-day than they were at the turn of the century. About 1900 a 21 ft. batten cost a few pounds more than to-day and required 84 electric lamps against the 28 used in modern equipment. A 21 ft. footlight cost almost exactly £20 more then than now, and used 54 lamps against our 28.

At the same date a form of footlight was available which was equipped with both electric lamps and gas jets. A 21 ft. length of this cost over £35 more than the present-day float of the same length—a high price, surely, to pay for a stand-by form of lighting!

Why, it may be asked, have we worked out our comparison on 21 ft. lengths? Pure nostalgia! Twenty-one shillings to the golden guinea, if you remember hearing or reading about it!

Incidentally, the old prices on which the above comparisons are based were taken from an 1899 catalogue of Messrs. Verity who at that time occupied the King St. offices from which this note is written.

LA ROULOTTE

A Mobile Theatre for the Young

(with acknowledgment to C. Robillard Director of Parks, Montreal City)

Montreal's Parks Department clearly contains some highly imaginative people. Instead of waiting for an audience to come to the theatre they have reversed the process. La Roulotte is a 7½-ton mobile theatre, primarily for young people, complete with curtains, lighting, sound amplification, dressing rooms and so on. The venture started in June of last year and by mid-September many thousands had applauded its performances in 25 parks. An audience of 5,000 is stated to be nothing out of the ordinary.

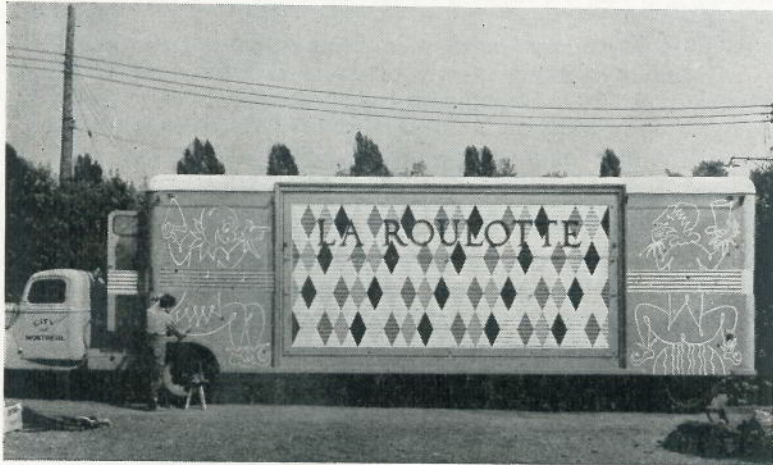


FIG. 1. *La Roulotte closed and ready to move off. Photo by courtesy Montreal Parks Department.*

The cast varies between the regular staff and the children on the various playgrounds etc., which the theatre visits. The "regulars" are two girls, three boys, an electrician, the truck driver and the Director Producer. The usual arrangement is for La Roulotte to draw up in a playground in the morning and open up. In the afternoon auditions are held to see whether any of the local children are able and willing to take part. Rehearsals follow and the performance takes place in the evening. The programme ranges through comedies, dramas, musicals, puppet shows, folk singing and dancing, pantomime or any other form of entertainment of which the children are capable and may be in English or French.

The van itself is all steel and fireproof, 31 ft. long and rises 12 ft. from the ground. When closed it is 8 ft. wide. The clearance inside from floor to ceiling is 9 ft. and the 17-ft. wide sections of both side

panels drop down to be supported on the ground by means of adjustable screw jacks forming a stage area 17 ft. wide by 17 ft. deep extending through the middle of the vehicle, with a proscenium arch of the same width 8 ft. high. The space at both ends of the van is divided into dressing rooms and an electric control room while

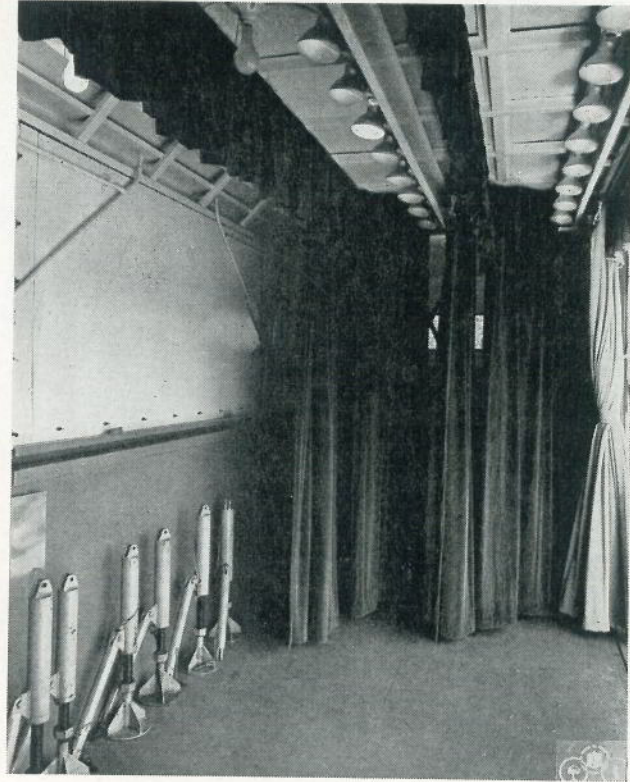


FIG. 2. *The stage of La Roulotte showing some of the jacks used to support the hinged forestage which, when closed, forms a side of the trailer. Photo by courtesy of Montreal Parks Department.*

some of the space at the rear of the stage is used for storing properties and so on.

The lighting equipment includes two permanent battens and one permanent upper frontlight bridge, all with 60 or 100 watt coloured lamps, a removable footlight with 100 or 150 watt lamps, indoor plugs for portable spots and floods and outdoor plugs for additional long range equipment acting as balcony front spotlights. The

permanent lighting is grouped over three colours, red, green and blue, each colour circuit being of less than 750 watts. The whole connected load is about 10 kilowatts and is divided into 16 circuits each protected and operated by means of a single pole thermal-magnetic circuit breaker. Lighting changes are effected by plugging circuits

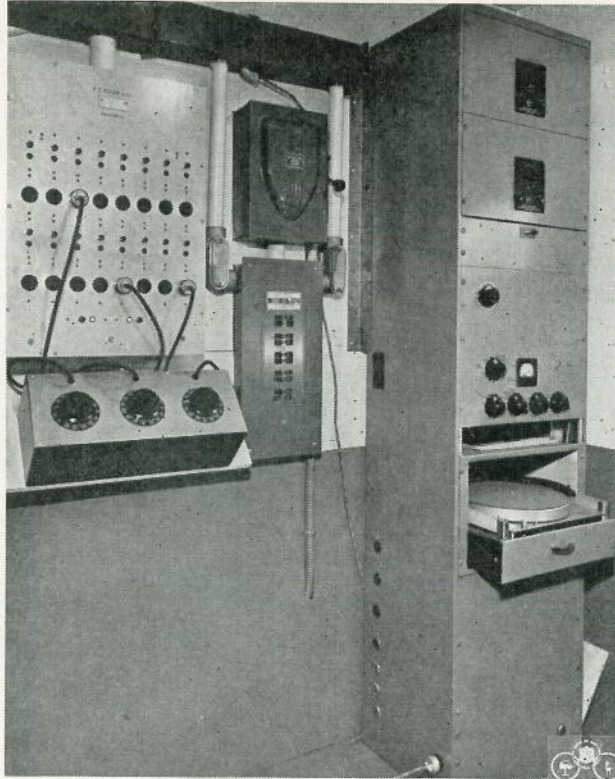


FIG. 3. *La Roulotte's Electrical Control Room. Photo by courtesy Montreal Parks Department.*

across a switchboard panel and thereafter to one of four dimmer units. Each of these portable three kilowatt dimmers has a single control but can accommodate four 750 watt circuits. Twelve of the sixteen circuits are fed through a master switch for blackout purposes. The dressing and control rooms are adequately equipped with lighting and plugs for high fidelity amplification and a pickup unit.

The parks and public places which the trailer visits are all equipped with a watertight 60 amp. 115/230 volt supply which feeds the whole electrical system of La Roulotte via a 150 ft. multi-



FIG. 4. *The stage of La Roulotte opened and in use. Photo by courtesy Montreal Parks Department.*

conductor extension cable. When on the move the safety lighting of the trailer comes from the 6-volt electric system on the towing tractor.

Seeing is believing. It would seem from Fig. 4 that this most praiseworthy venture has the support of the young of all ages!

A Canadian paper writes of "La Roulotte":—

"It is an extraordinarily refreshing experience to witness the native, unconscious skill of a child lost in the immediate drama of a simple story or situation of which he is a part, and although a great deal will be lacking in technique, the spark is there—the natural flair. For an adult, the Land of Make-Believe may be at horizon distance, but for a child, it is but a step away. We lose too soon our fancy, and our imaginations stumble with the years, so is it any wonder that a "children's children's play" should be such a delight to everyone, to adults because it represents a spirit that they wish they could know again, and to the children because it is a reality which they know and believe they will always know. . . . The cultural effect of good theater, most persuasive of the Arts, cannot help but influence the child whom it pleases, and here in Montreal particularly, where two languages side-by-side tend to dilute each other, a special service is rendered in demonstrating that each language is entirely adequate and beautiful within itself."

AN AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL THEATRE

*By Hugh Hunt, Executive Director of the
Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust.*

The Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was formed to commemorate the 1954 visit of Her Majesty the Queen and His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh to Australia. For this purpose an appeal was launched by a group of business and University people, led by Dr. H. C. Coombs, Governor of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia, to provide a capital sum for the development of theatre, opera and ballet in Australia.

The object of this Trust Fund was boldly stated: "To provide a Theatre of Australians, for Australians"—in other words a National Australian Theatre. The project differs from the proposed establishment of a National Theatre in the United Kingdom by the fact that Australia being a Federal Commonwealth—whose main centres of population are divided by vast distances—would naturally expect its National Theatre to be equally divided between the six States.

In the initial stages a capital fund of £90,000 was raised by private persons and Institutions in Australia. To this was added a grant of £30,000 from the Commonwealth Government. In addition to the above, the Trust has recruited 1,400 members contributing annual subscriptions of £5 each, and each State Government has undertaken to provide annual subsidies, which amount to over £40,000 a year.

The idea of creating an Australian theatre was not new. The ground has in fact been well prepared in advance. Several experimental seasons of home-grown Opera, Ballet and Drama had been spasmodically presented in each of the States and these were often supported by the State Governments and City Councils. In many cases good artistic results had been achieved, and although costs and receipts had seldom managed to balance, the margin between success and failure was often narrower than would be the case in Great Britain or America. The commercial theatre organisations in Australia, in particular the long-established firm of J. C. Williamson, has a unique record of Opera, Ballet and Drama importations from the U.K., U.S.A., and Italy—a record which is unsurpassed in the British Commonwealth. Undoubtedly these visits from overseas companies has done much to stimulate the Australian public's desire for a theatre of its own.

In 1949 the Commonwealth Government invited Dr. Tyrone Guthrie to report on the best method of establishing a National Theatre. Although Guthrie's report on the state of the home-grown theatrical product in Australia at that time was not entirely flattering

to local hopes, theatre enthusiasts refused to give up their dream for the speedy creation of a National Theatre. On the artistic side, the considerable number of Australian actors, singers and dancers whose services are currently in demand in London and elsewhere is, I think, a substantial proof of the country's ability to provide a worthy contribution to International Theatre.

Shortly after my arrival in Australia in February 1954, I decided the best method to build an Australian National Theatre was to concentrate the best available talents into a few single units, rather than disperse our funds by assisting the large number of existing theatre organisations in each State. The initial phase of our plan is, therefore, to form touring companies which visit each capital city in turn on an annual tour of the Australian Commonwealth.

The programme laid out for the first phase of our work is as follows :—

- (a) *An Australian Drama Company.* (This is currently presenting three plays in repertoire namely : *Twelfth Night*, *The Rivals*, and *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*—a new Australian play.)
- (b) *An Australian Opera Company* currently presenting four Mozart Operas: *Figaro*, *Don Giovanni*, *Così Fan Tutti* and *The Magic Flute*.
- (c) *A Training School for Artists* which is to be established next year in co-operation with an Australian University.
- (d) Small grants to Repertory Companies which produce Australian plays of merit approved by us. These grants take the form of guarantee against loss.

At the outset, we were aware of the necessity of possessing our own theatre building in which productions could be mounted and tried out. We accordingly acquired an 8-year lease of a theatre in Sydney, which we have redecorated, refitted and renamed the Elizabethan Theatre. The State Government of New South Wales and the City Council of Sydney generously came to our assistance by providing us with funds to acquire this lease and by providing funds for refurbishing the theatre. This theatre is now one of the finest theatres in Australia seating 1,560 people. The New South Wales Government also propose to build a new Opera House in Sydney, which will in the course of time take the place of our present theatre. This is to be built by international competition and the designs are expected by the end of this year.

In addition to the Drama and Opera Companies which I have mentioned, we have undertaken other tours which, it is hoped, will help to build up our financial reserves. We are at present presenting

a tour of *The Boy Friend* which has played in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane and is now touring New Zealand. We are also presenting a company of Australian puppets which is touring with our Opera Company presenting matinee performances, primarily to children. The latter will, we believe, serve a double purpose: firstly, in stimulating children's interest in the theatre and, secondly, in assisting the financial position of our Opera Company.

Although our primary object is to offer greater opportunities to Australian artists to earn a living in their own country, this does not preclude our inviting guest artists from overseas to join our companies. Our first interest is obviously to invite Australians who have already emigrated to return for a season—in our first venture we brought Judith Anderson back to Australia to play *Medea* for us. But we also propose to invite British and American star artists to play seasons with our companies as guests. For instance, Sena Jurinac, Elizabeth Grümmer and Broscantini are appearing with our Opera Company and next year we have two distinguished London stars who will join our Drama Company.

For the second phase of our policy we propose to organize tours of the country towns with small companies, mainly recruited from our school of acting. We have already undertaken one large tour of 64 country towns in New South Wales and Queensland with a production of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*. This latter play has been our most successful venture to date. It is, I think, one of the few really important Australian plays and is to be presented by Sir Laurence Olivier in London early next year. For this production the Trust is sending over its own main acting company. This visit will make theatrical history, being the first time an Australian company has visited London and the first time an Australian play has been seen there.

The development of the Australian Theatre has been exceedingly rapid. In the space of just over one year we have established Drama and Opera Companies as well as promoting training facilities and sponsoring new plays. Difficulties and dangers clearly lie ahead. It will take time to establish Australian leading artists on a level of popularity with overseas stars; it will take time to develop a repertoire of Australian plays; it will take time to train a sufficiently large number of experienced artists to meet the increasing demands of the theatre, television and cinema, but our efforts are rapidly capturing a warm response from Australian audiences, and I feel confident that the dynamic pioneering spirit of Australia will undoubtedly succeed in creating a worthwhile contribution to International Theatre.

DEPOT IN DARLINGTON

Many operatic and dramatic societies which are not within reasonable distance of our headquarters or branches are sometimes deterred from making full use of the Strand Electric Hire Service by the constantly rising transport costs. To provide better and less costly service to the societies in the northern counties (Northumberland, Durham, Cumberland, Westmorland and the North Riding of Yorkshire), our Manchester Branch has now opened a depot in Darlington. Adequate stocks of our standard lighting equipment will be held at the depot available for hire, and deliveries can now be made very much more cheaply than formerly: many customers will, no doubt, be able to collect the equipment they require and avoid any transport charges.

Stocks of Cinemoid, Gelatine, Lamps and other accessories will be available at the depot for purchase. A limited sales stock of lanterns will also be held.

The Darlington Depot will be under the supervision of Mr. Philip Rose, who has been resident in the area since June, 1955. Mr. Rose will, of course, continue to spend most of his time travelling the northern counties and the Depot will be operated by Mr. Roland Warburton, who is already well known in the amateur theatre in the area. Mr. Warburton was trained for the theatre at the Guildhall School of Music and Drama in London, and has had considerable experience in acting, production and stage-management, both as professional and amateur. During the war Mr. Rose and he served for a time in the same unit in the Middle East, and it is a happy arrangement that they should now work together in the North-East.

Our many friends in the northern counties are assured of whatever assistance they may need in the lighting of their shows. Both of these young men are enthusiasts with the necessary knowledge and experience of the effective use of light on the stage, and each has a real understanding of the problems of the amateurs. They are available to give lectures and demonstrations.

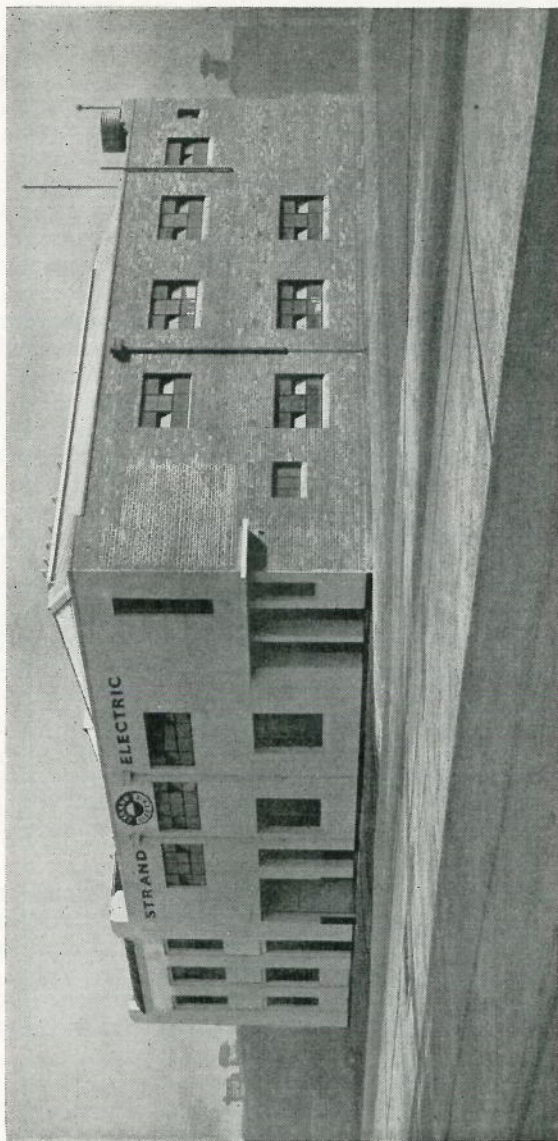
It is certain that the facilities will be welcomed by those for whom they have been provided, and every effort will be made to meet the needs and convenience of all users of stage lighting equipment in the area. The Depot premises will be open daily until 6 p.m. (12.30 p.m. on Saturdays), but arrangements can be made for Mr. Rose and/or Mr. Warburton to be available at any other time by appointment.

All enquiries should be addressed to:

The Strand Electric & Engineering Co. Ltd.,
26, High Northgate, DARLINGTON.

Telephone No. Darlington 67350.

Telephone enquiries during periods when the Depot is closed should be made to Mr. Rose's home: Croft 502.



STRAND ELECTRIC'S NEW PREMISES AT PORT MELBOURNE

Owing to expansion of business it has been necessary to leave our earlier premises in Malvern Road, Melbourne and the address of the new branch buildings, illustrated above, is 212, Graham Street (corner of Graham and Nott Streets), Port Melbourne. Being situated at the corner of two main roads and with its own delivery yard, parking facilities are excellent.

Graham Station on the Port Melbourne line is only two blocks away, a Tramways Bus running between Port Melbourne and Kew passes within one block of the premises and a private line bus en route between Fisherman's Bend and St. Kilda passes the door. These larger premises should help us to maintain a satisfactory service to the ever-growing demand on our resources in Australia.

CRITICISM

(Reprinted with permission from the Bulletin of the Scottish Community Drama Association.)

WHAT FUN! The adjudicator criticises the players and the players criticise the adjudicator: it's fair enough. And the audience criticises both: but they're entitled to do that—they paid to get in.

Of course, adjudicators differ: they didn't see the same performance. Sometimes they're wrong; but mostly they're right; 80% to 90% of what they say would be supported by almost any other adjudicator. The battle rages round what they disagree about: and if you put up two adjudicators to fight it out, in the white heat of their 100% sincerity they would scorch each other to cinders.

PROFESSIONALS HAVE TO SUFFER much harsher things than do amateurs. An *Observer* critic wrote: "The Confidential Clerk with all its cryptic commonplaces was spoken at dictation speed as though the Book of Revelations was being re-written by a committee of civil servants." The critic of *Plays and Players* said that the same play "was a perfect bore. If Eliot intended to write a comedy or farce, then no dramatist has ever failed so lamentably." A *News Chronicle* critic said the Regent's Park *Ariel*, instead of being a spirit of joy and liberty, looked like a decomposing corpse. Amateurs are seldom hit as hard as that.

Varying Views

There is no absolute uniformity of opinion among judges of any art. Reviewing *The Shadow of Doubt*, the *Observer* writes: "The best first play since Mr. Greene wrote *The Living Room*." Of the same play, the *Sunday Times* critic says: "Ideas and emotions alike are expressed in language of nerve-tearing banality which suggests—however unfairly—a sluggish imagination." Another example: reviewing *The Lark*, the *Sunday Times* critic says: "In my opinion, this is the best play about Joan of Arc which the English theatre has seen." Of the same play, the *Sunday Express* critic wrote: "Compared with Bernard Shaw's Joan, this one is a pale and shallow thing, inferior intellectually, dramatically, emotionally and, surprisingly, in its poetry."

WHAT'S THE GOOD of all this? Should we give it up? Certainly not, but give up the foolish hope that two adjudicators seeing different performances, will give the same marks. The morals are (a) You are getting no worse criticism than the professionals get, and generally it is handed to you more kindly; (b) In the criticism of art there is no such thing as finality; (c) In multiplicity of counsel there is food for thought. And that is a really useful and beneficial thing to come out of the Festival—thought: yes, and argument.

Was He Right After All?

An adjudicator should be sympathetic to the effort, and his criticism should be couched in kindly terms. If he cannot always be clever, he should at least be clear in his judgments, leaving no doubt as to why he gave his decision. Then, though they may disagree, the audience will respect him. And if you feel hardly done-by and your intimate friends are full of sympathy, listen to the not-so-intimate ones. You'll be surprised how many of them are silent—because they think you deserved it.

* * *

A SLOPING ACTING AREA ON A FLAT STAGE FLOOR

On page 17 of this issue a correspondent draws the distinction between the raked stage floor and the sloping acting area. The illustrations accompanying this note illustrate the latter in an interesting manner. In this instance the raked rostrum, covering the acting area only, is superimposed on a flat stage and the degree of slope increases in steepness according to the distance upstage, until it finally reaches the vertical.

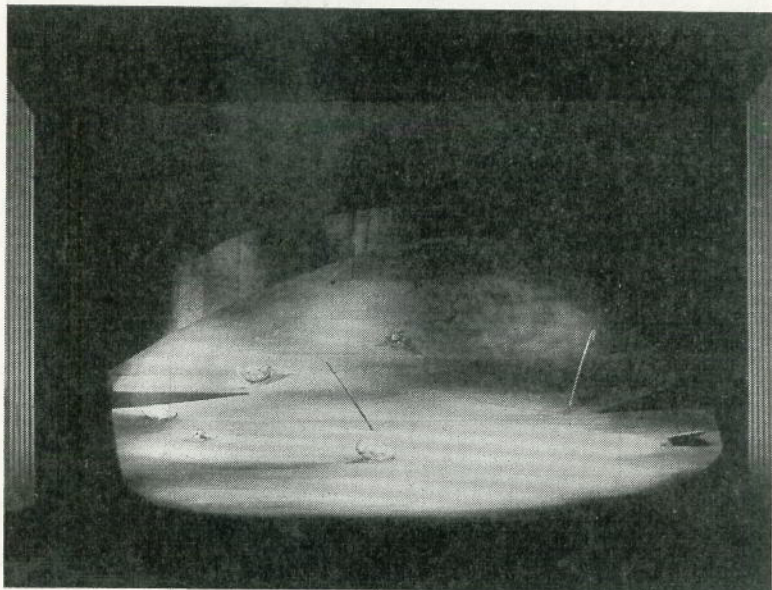


FIG. 1. A sloping acting area laid on a flat stage for a production of "Troilus and Cressida" in Berlin. (Photo: Buhmentechische Rundschau).

for a production of *Troilus and Cressida* at the Schiller Theatre, Berlin. Both illustrations are by courtesy of Pro. Dipl. Ing. Walther Unruh and Die Buhmentechische Rundschau.

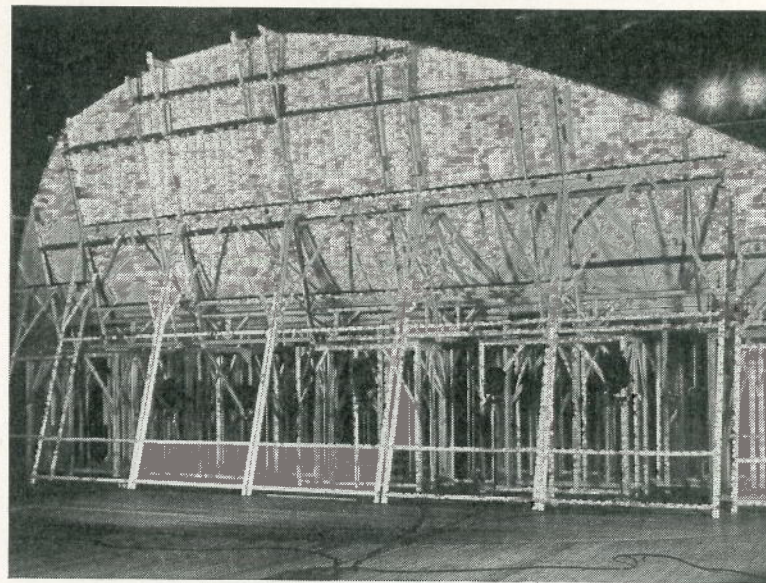


FIG. 2. A rear view of the rostrum shown in FIG. 1. The degree of slope increases up stage until it appears to reach the vertical. (Photo: Buhmentechische Rundschau).

CORRESPONDENCE

Raked Stages

TO THE EDITOR OF "TABS"

DEAR SIR,—The remarks in the cutting from the *New York Times* which you quoted in your issue of April, 1956, are headed "A Trend towards Raked Stage Sets Noted," so that although a number of readers (including your correspondent) may have been misled by portions of what followed, it has to be admitted that the writer of the remarks indicated at the start that he would refer to sets and not stages. Enquiries have indicated that no Broadway stages are themselves raked and Mr. Donald Oenslager, who has been a stage designer since 1925 and created the sets for 180 productions, has stated in a subsequent article in the *New York Times* that few theatres with sloping stages survive in the U.S.A., notably Boston's Colonial Theatre, The Walnut Theatre in Philadelphia and Ford's

Theatre in Baltimore. He believes that possibly there are a few others but that most have been torn down.

There is undoubtedly a trend in the U.S.A. towards sets with sloping floors but erected on a level stage. In *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*, by Tennessee Williams, now running in New York, the setting designed by Mr. Jo Mielziner employs a noticeably steep "false" floor extending the greater part of the width of the proscenium opening (and somewhat angled to it), the downstage edge of this floor being appreciably above the head of a spectator in the front row of the stalls. The setting itself is essentially simple and the "walls" of the (interior) set (so far as there any indications of them at all) are set on the level permanent stage. There is an illustration of this setting in the edition of the play available in England.

Among Broadway productions having (or which had) sets with a sloping floor are *A Hatful of Rain*, *The Diary of Anne Frank*, *Inherit the Wind*, *Red Roses for Me* and *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof*. All these are what may be termed "powerful" plays, where some degree of the unusual in the nature of the setting, such as a sloping floor, may be more than usually capable of enhancing the mood of the play and the tempo of the performance. In the case of *Cat*, Mr. Brooks Atkinson, of the *New York Times*, refers to Mr. Mielziner's "dynamic" setting. Of course, it must be a matter of opinion to what extent a sloping floor incorporated in the setting for a particular production is necessarily an improvement upon the level stage floor which would normally be available. Up to this time, writers on the theatre in this country seem to lean towards the view that artificially sloped floors have been used with advantage; some of the suggested gains being improved visibility and also the projection towards the audience of a greater sense of "urgency." So far, only straight plays of a certain *genre* seem to have been involved, although it is now reported that a "ramped stage" (which will certainly be created specially) will be used for the forthcoming production of the musical *Shangri-La*. Apart from the possibility of enhanced visibility (still a contentious matter), it is a little difficult to imagine how a sloping floor to the settings for a musical production (at least of the more or less conventional type) can have any very significant effect on the mood of the audience, and the technical difficulties if multiple sets and revolving stages are in use are obvious.

It will be interesting to see whether the evident trend in the U.S.A. towards artificially sloped floors gathers momentum and whether the trend becomes evident in England. However much the actors in such a setting may feel that it contributes towards their performance, or the designer may feel it contributes towards the "projection" of the particular play, one imagines that no practical stage technician would welcome a return to actual raked stages themselves, which involve tiresome problems of perspective and

special scenic construction. Fortunately, it seems that there is no likelihood of this and that the trend will be confined to portions of settings in particularly appropriate circumstances, thereby leaving available the normal level stage for technically essential uses.

Yours very truly,
David Balfour, New Hampshire, U.S.A.

The Rake's Progress

TO THE EDITOR OF "TABS"

DEAR SIR,—I am disappointed though hardly surprised to find that there seems to be no record of stage floor rakes in England, either as they are now, or as they were through the years. Intermittent editions of the *Stage Year Book* give certain basic dimensions and other technical information regarding London and Provincial Theatres, but the omission of any reference to a rake for the guidance of touring managers would seem to imply that for one reason or another it need not enter into their calculations.

How much more thoroughly they do these things in Germany! In his monumental text-book on theatrical technicalities *Bühnentechnik de Gegenwart*, published in Berlin in 1929, F. Kranich lists 73 German Theatres and against each he states whether a raked stage was installed, if so the degree of rake, and whether or not the rake was subsequently replaced by a flat stage and if so when. Fifteen of these theatres were dated prior to 1850, 26 between 1850 and 1900 and 32 between 1900 and 1927.

Of the total, 31 did not have raked stages in the first place, whilst of the remaining 42, 16 had their rake removed so that finally nearly two-thirds were flat.

Of the more recent stages, namely those built since 1900, 4 had rakes but 1 was removed after one year only so that less than a tenth were raked.

The extent of the rake is interestingly diverse. The rake on those 26 stages which were finally left sloping varied from 5.6% down to 1.5%. By far the most popular rake was 3%. The most common rake in England is $\frac{1}{2}$ in. to the foot or just over 4%. Only 4 of the German theatres had a rake of 4% or more, and whether or not one agrees with the principle of raking, it is difficult to see how anything less than 4% can have fulfilled any purpose whatever.

Apart from the figures quoted above for the theatres from 1900 onwards, one cannot really trace any definite trend from the facts given. The oldest theatre of all (1753) had a rake of 2.9%, while that with the steepest rake was constructed in 1817. The second oldest (1777) was constructed with no rake at all, while that with the second steepest rake was dated 1880. From the facts it would seem

that the rake had definitely fallen into disfavour by the turn of the century, but it is hardly possible to say that it had been losing popularity with increasing speed prior to then.

All the above information, of course, refers to the Continent and not to England and it may well be said that what was best for the theatre in Germany was not necessarily best for the theatre in England. It would have been most interesting to have made a comparison with English theatres over a similar period of time if only the information had been available. It is to be hoped that some such body as the Society for Theatre Research will see that this kind of information is collected now and made available to posterity.

Yours etc.,

D. D., London, S.W.3.

On the Trail of Drama in Australia

THE EDITOR OF "TABS"

SIR,—How things can look different if you look at them in a different light—Strand knows all about that, of course. Miss Harris (see TABS, April, 1956, page 25) has turned a Pattern 23 on the Victorian Drama League and revealed a setting appropriate for one of T. S. Eliot's gloomy visions—those dish cloths draped on the banisters, drying, are evocative. But if you look at it from the Victorian end, the picture is different, positively rosy.

The Victorian Drama League has only been in existence three years. Eight years ago, there were virtually no amateur dramatic societies in Victoria, now there are over 100. The fact that the V.D.L. has acquired a home at all—even in dismal surroundings, is extremely important to us and the library, disparagingly referred to by Miss Harris as "moth eaten" is in fact the largest and indeed, the only collection of plays and books about the theatre available in Victoria—the whole collection has been built up in the past 5-6 years and it is remarkably complete, well catalogued and well cared for.

It is true that the staff—both very recently appointed, may not have known the address of the dramatic society at Northcote. It is certainly true that they serve the 100 or so affiliated dramatic groups of the State with great efficiency. Miss Harris, on the strength of one hasty visit, sees despair and decay. But we know better than that, we see the obvious, evident and heartening signs of progress.

C. B., Victoria, Australia.

(We ventured to agree with this correspondent in an editorial note in our last issue—ED.)

BOOK REVIEWS

Staging the Play By *Norah Lambourne.* (*The Studio.* 18s.).

This is the work of an artist who understands the importance of craftsmanship and is able to preserve a nice balance between the art and craft of creating stage settings. Miss Lambourne is no highfalutin theorist but one who realises and emphasises that flights of fancy must be bounded by the physical limits within which ideas must be translated into actuality. She rightly presupposes that those for whom the book is written will have their own ideas of design and she is concerned primarily in enabling them competently to express those ideas in terms of canvas, timber and paint, stressing, nevertheless, that the result must be judged not merely as a work of scenic art but as a part of the composite art of play production.

Miss Lambourne begins with a brief survey of the history of scenic design and technique and the development of modern practice. She deals very fully with the settings designed on conventional lines for the proscenium stage and also gives valuable advice about curtain settings, cut-down scenery, screens, open-air staging, etc. The book emphasises the importance of lighting to stage design, an importance often overlooked by many designers, who fail to realise that the quality, quantity, direction and colour of the light will all materially affect the appearance of the stage picture. All designers should regard lighting as an essential branch of their art and should be able to specify in practical detail, the precise lighting effects they consider necessary. In practice, most designers are content to leave the design of the lighting to somebody else, without any collaboration. Which is a pity. The designer who neglects the study and practice of stage lighting is neglecting one of the most fascinating and rewarding aspects of the art.

The book, which is excellently printed and lavishly illustrated, should be in the library of every organisation that is concerned with the design and construction of scenery. It will be found to be interesting and helpful to producer, stage manager, scenic artist and stage carpenter, as well as to the scene and lighting designers. The actors, too, might study the book with some profit. They often fail to realise that the work of the back-stage gang is as important as their own.

P. C.

Stage Lighting for Amateurs. By Peter Goffin (Fourth edition. Demy octavo, cloth boards with 158 pages, 23 plates and numerous line drawings. Published by J. Garnet Miller, 7s. 6d.)

No book which reaches its fourth edition would seem to call for much introduction or recommendation. Nor would it seem to merit much criticism, but in the hope that Mr. Goffin may one day treat us to a completely new book on the same subject but along quite different lines, I venture the following comments.

I must agree with the author when he writes: "The title of this book would have defined the contents more accurately if the word 'Play' had been used instead of 'Stage'." He goes on:—

"Strictly speaking, stage lighting is the business of the electrical engineer, and play lighting that of the producer and designer. The engineer is concerned with the general science of the subject, with the construction and mechanical function of the lighting apparatus, with how it works, and what it can be made to do. On the other hand, the production of a play is primarily an æsthetic problem. But this does not mean that all the 'science' is behind the iron curtain and all the 'art' in front. The creative intentions of art cannot be fulfilled without practical knowledge of the materials and tools which have to be used in the creative process."

I wish Mr. Goffin had written "without *some* practical knowledge" in the last sentence, for it seems to me that he expects the amateur producer and the amateur electrician to learn far more than is necessary of each other's business. Does it really matter to the former how Ohm's Law got its name, and does the latter really require the life history of Chekhov before proceeding to the lighting of *Uncle Vanya*? (A chapter on this play runs to twenty-seven pages but only the last seven are about lighting. A chapter on Ernst Toller's *Masses and Man* runs to twenty pages but only about half are to do with lighting. Each chapter contains a scholarly study of the play's author, his life and times, the plot of the play and very **useful suggestions for the design of the setting: but I personally feel** that on such a scale this is out of place in a book of this nature. By the same token there is a complete chapter of fifteen pages on "Types of Stage" including a section entitled "Building a stage of our own" but there are only two pages on lighting in the chapter. On the whole I am inclined to think that a more appropriate title for this book would have been "All about the Amateur Stage," but this would not suit Mr. Goffin for he writes (and the italics are his) "*the labels 'Amateur' and 'Professional' have nothing to do with art.* The best work is not accomplished *because* a wage is earned for doing it, but by the best workman." As his own work in the theatre bears witness, Mr. Goffin is himself a craftsman of the highest order, and although one may disagree with the title of his book and find its scope over generous in places, this is unquestion-

ably a publication which should be on the shelves of everyone who works in the theatre—amateur or professional—and takes both it and themselves seriously; but then of course this must largely be the case already.

If, as I have no doubt, a further edition is shortly found to be necessary I trust that the opportunity will be taken to overhaul the text once again. The list of colour filters requires correction for example, and the dimmer board described on pages 54 and 55 has a number of shortcomings and should give way to the more modern type at present only described in the appendix. Personally I shall also live in hopes of a new book by the same author with a new balance between æsthetics, electrics, and mechanics.

G. M.

* * *

Central and Flexible Staging By Walden P. Boyle. University of California Press. Agents: Cambridge University Press. 25s.

This book will be welcomed by those who wish to have a theatre that does not depend on picture-frame presentation. The author has had practical experience of the staging he describes, and offers a practical guide based on practice in America. The flexible theatre is not restricted to play presentation "in the round": the producer may choose a shape which he thinks he can best adapt to the needs of the particular play to be produced. Mr. Boyle does rather less than justice to the picture frame, which is not unusual. But one can by-pass the special pleading and accept the obvious fact that for "theatre in the small" the flexibility which is explained and illustrated can be stimulating, successful and economical.

From the author's statement that "The ideal is a square area, with each dimension at least 30 ft.", one realises that the flexibility is conceived on a small scale. This is supported by the illustrations, most of which show few rows of seats. The flexibility is achieved by varying the arrangement of the rostrum-units provided for the seating, or by varying the arrangement of the actual seats on one level. Obviously, if the acting area is at floor level, the number of rows of seats on the same level must be restricted. Mr. Boyle suggests that no more than three rows of seats should be installed on the floor level as "otherwise the spectators in the rear will have difficulty in seeing." It is fairly obvious that unless the seats are elevated and staggered, visibility from the third row would be very seriously obstructed, and one understands why a strong plea is made for the stepping of the seats when it is financially possible.

The book is extremely well illustrated and has many informative diagrams. A few of these are reproduced, by kind permission of the publishers. Fig. 1 shows the plan arrangement for four variations of the seating units. The latter are similar to the collapsible

rostrums normally used on the conventional stage, of varying heights to provide tiers for the seats. Fig. 2 illustrates the desirability of raising the first row of seats above acting area level. This reduces possible discomfort from spill of light and creates a more definite boundary to the acting area.

In Chapter IV, the author gives useful advice on the preparation of the floor plans and it is best illustrated by sketch-plans for particular plays, as may be judged from the following selections.

Fig. 3, *The Time of Your Life*, by William Saroyan.

Fig. 4, *The Trial of Mary Dugan*, by Bayard Veiller.

Fig. 5 shows three interesting arrangements of the seating and acting area in Royce Hall 170, University of California.

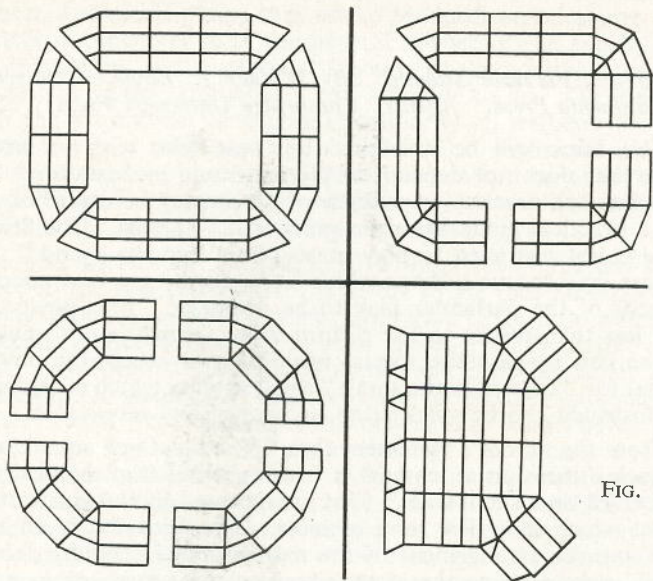


FIG. 1.

On the subject of lighting Mr. Boyle gives much practical guidance: he presupposes the reader's knowledge of good stage lighting practice and concerns himself solely with ways and means. He does not deal at all comprehensively with the use of light as an essential part of the presentation. In fact, one suspects that he does not regard lighting as being as important as some of us would expect. He says:—

“Stage lighting deficiencies should never discourage a group from attempting a play. Many productions have been successful with merely general illumination throughout the auditorium. The play and the actors can assure the theatrical effectiveness of a production in almost any reasonably favourable circumstances, although

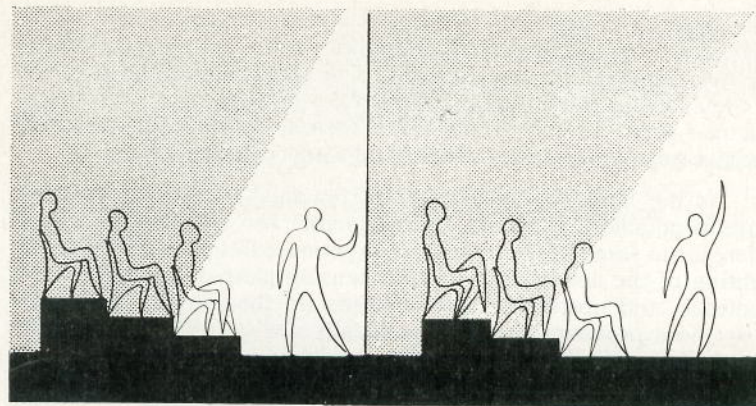


FIG. 2.

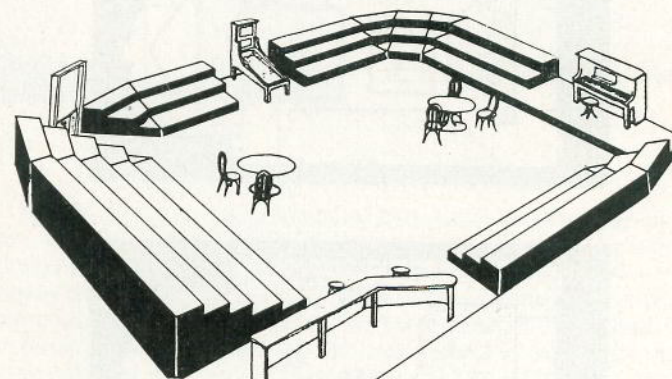


FIG. 3.

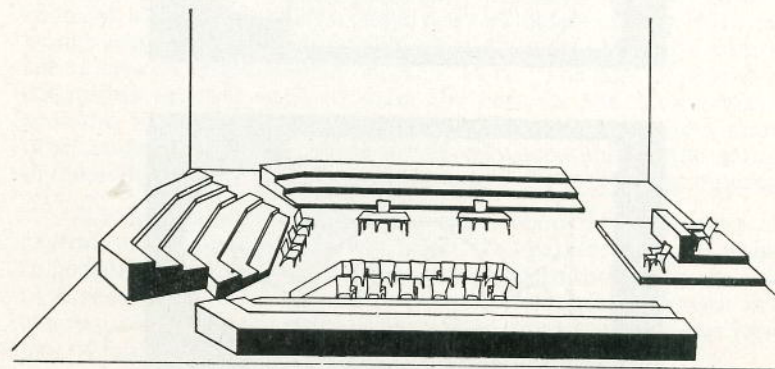


FIG. 4.

naturally the impact will be greatly increased if some way can be devised to provide brighter illumination in the acting area than in the space reserved for the audience. The cast can hold the attention of the audience more readily; the devices of 'lights up' and black-out can serve as substitutes for a formal curtain, thus assuring decisive beginnings and endings of acts and individual scenes."

As the book has resulted from practical experience of open stage production, it would be reasonable for a reader to expect reference to some of the difficulties experienced in providing suitable lighting of the acting area without causing glare-discomfort to the audience, and obtrusive facial shadows on the actors. Unfortunately these problems are not specifically dealt with. Nevertheless there are many helpful hints and diagrams which can be valuable to

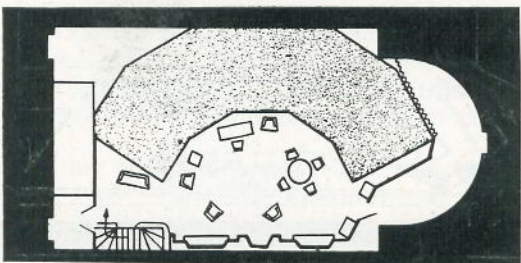
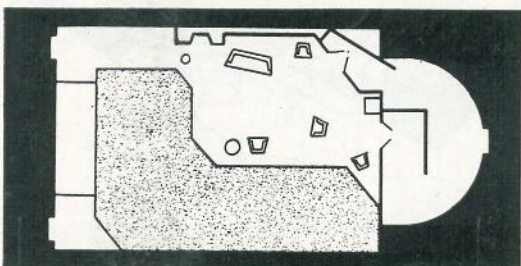
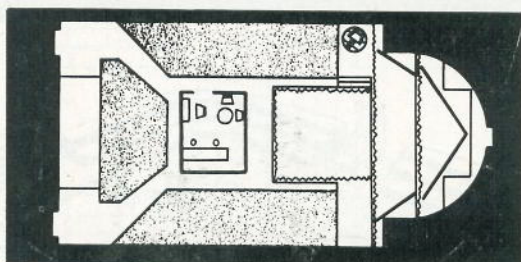


FIG. 5.

those wishing to light the open stage, without there being any attempt to influence the particular use of lighting for theatrical effect as distinct from mere visibility. Fig. 6 shows a suggested combination of flood and spot lighting, and Fig. 7 gives a layout of spot lanterns to provide a much more localised direction.

As the author has also dealt with choice of plays, direction, acting, scenery, furniture, costumes and make-up in a book of 114 pages, profusely illustrated, it is inevitable that each section should be condensed.

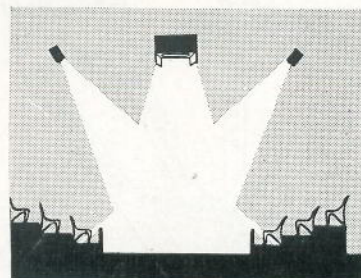


FIG. 6.

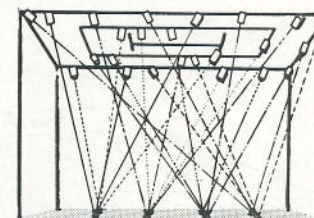
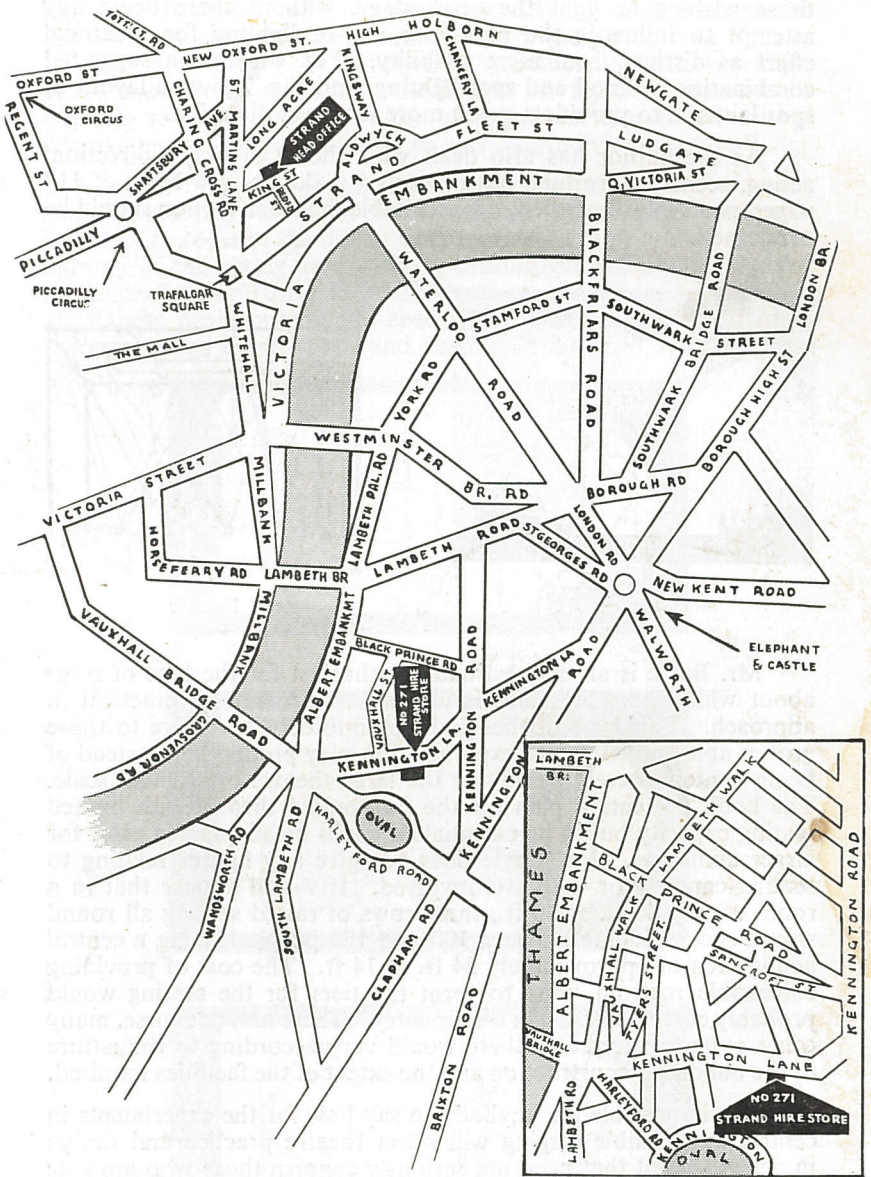


FIG. 7.

Mr. Boyle is an unquestioning enthusiast for the type of stage about which he writes and is content to be entirely practical in approach. This type of theatre is undoubtedly attractive to those groups able and willing to experiment in play production, instead of being content merely to imitate the large theatre on a small scale. The book presents a plan for the improvised theatre with limited seating capacity but in its essentials it could be adapted to cater for larger audiences. Mr. Boyle does not give any figures relating to seating capacity or the costs involved. It would appear that in a room of, say 40 ft. x 30 ft., three rows of raised seating all round would accommodate between 100 and 150 people leaving a central acting area of approximately 24 ft. x 14 ft. The cost of providing collapsible rostrum units to form the tiers for the seating would probably cost £400/£450 in this country. There are, of course, many other costs involved and these would vary according to the nature of the building's construction and the extent of the facilities required.

It is impossible for anybody to say how far the experiments in central and flexible staging will affect theatre practice and design in general. But that need not seriously concern those who are able to experiment. It provides a medium of theatrical expression that can be exciting and satisfying; and the experimenters can have lots of fun in the process.

P. C.



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