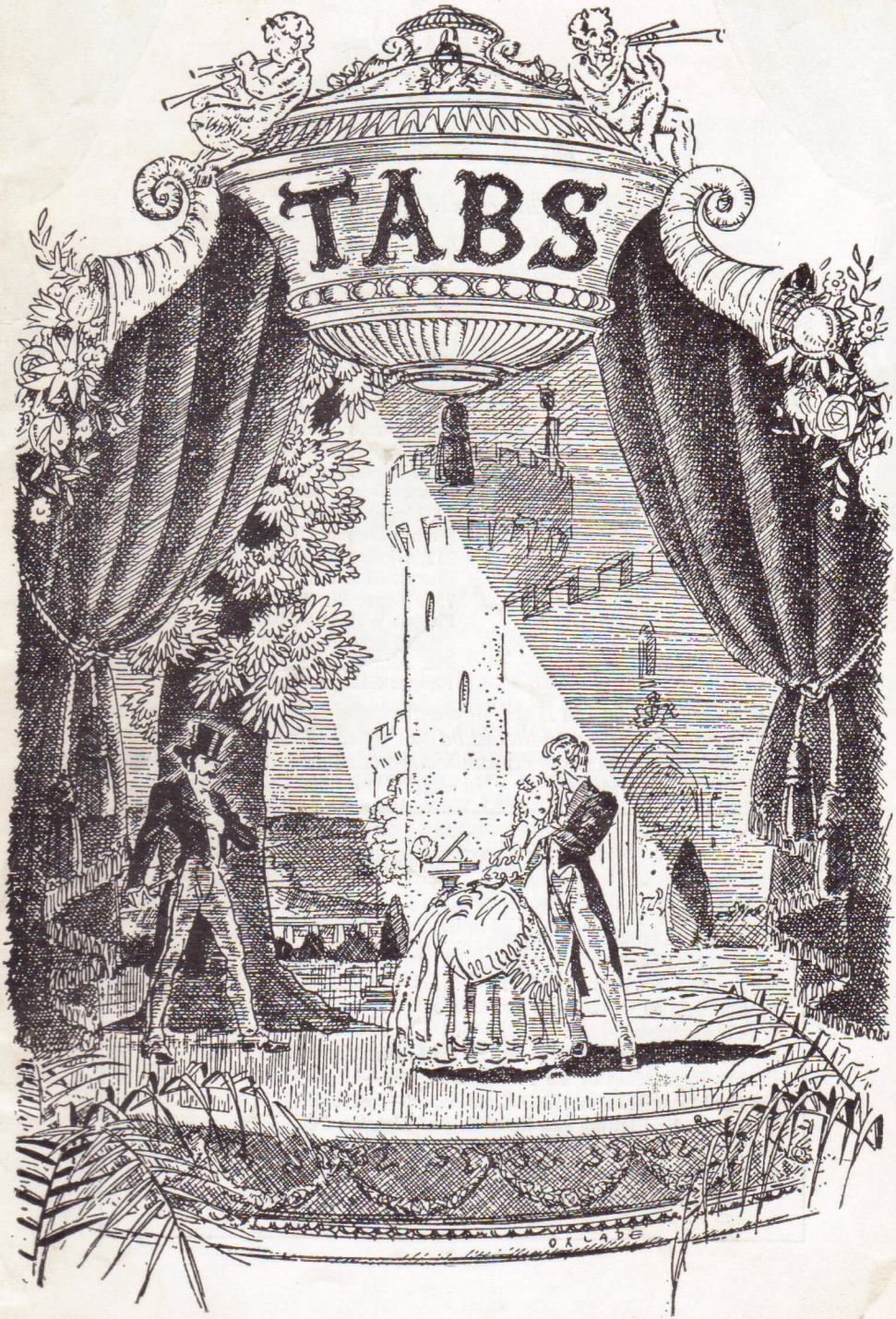

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TABS

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CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Richard Leacroft

The report of the Leicester theatre committee is such an important document, and the project is of a kind dear to most TABS readers, that we thought we should allocate a generous amount of space to it. Richard Leacroft, who is a member of the committee, and who has drawn the plans and sketches for the report, has condensed it for us. Mr. Leacroft is an architect with an intense interest in the theatre. He is the author of many authoritative books and articles on the subject, including a short history of the theatre for children.

G. E. Calthrop

Mrs. Calthrop is the designer responsible for virtually all Noel Coward's productions. She began with *The Vortex* at the Everyman in 1924 and there followed *Hay Fever*, *Private Lives*, *Bitter Sweet*, *Cavalcade*, *Conversation Piece*, *Blithe Spirit*, *This Happy Breed*—to quote but a few of the famous names. Altogether, she carried out a prodigious amount of work for the late C. B. Cochran whose prodigy Noel Coward was. Observed at the first night of the Mermaid Theatre, Mrs. Calthrop was obviously the very person to comment on this theatre for us.

Ibsen-Shaw-Corry

We have shown a glimpse of the vast scale of activity in the German Theatre. There is an inclination to shrug this off, as the German Theatre is unique and anyway a large part of the building is opera house anyway. At a time when this country is busting itself with pride, rightly so, over the success of Bernard Miles's efforts at the Mermaid Theatre, it is salutory to see what Norway has done.

When in Oslo last autumn, your Editor met Karl Eilert Wiik, the touring director of the Norwegian State Travelling Theatre. Ever on the lookout, a promise was extracted for an article for TABS.

The article begins in this issue with historical development and will continue with actual touring experiences. Reading the first part, your Editor has to confess that it came as a surprise to him to learn that Ibsen was familiar from practical experience with staging. Thus *Peer Gynt* and the last scene of *Brand* were written by someone fully aware of the problems he was setting. A step from Ibsen leads one naturally to Bernard Shaw, who had an enormous regard for his work. From Bernard Shaw down several flights of stairs brings us to Percy Corry, who, as everyone knows, holds an idolatrous regard for Shaw. What would Mr. Corry, who has played Tanner, King Magnus, Mephistopheles, produced *Pygmalion*, *Major Barbara* and so on make of *My Fair Lady*? On the principle "Back to Methuselah" we sent Mr. Corry, at his own expense to report. The result is an article, " Fabulous Lady."

Autumn Lecture Programme

As is probably well known, the demonstration theatre is run by the Technical Department in order to give them first-hand user experience of the equipment their research and development provides. Due to an exceptional demand for remote control dimmer equipment this autumn, only the minimum time can be allocated to setting up and dismantling demonstrations. The programme below has been devised to give interest and instruction without elaborate setting up.

The **demonstrations begin at 6.30 p.m. and admission is free** but by ticket available on application to Head Office.

Tuesday, October 20th

" Planning and Lighting The Stage "
World Première of Recorded Lecture No. 2 with P. Corry and Frederick Bentham in person to answer questions afterwards.

Monday, October 26th

" Lighting The Scene "
Recorded Lecture No. 1 with Frederick Bentham in attendance to demonstrate colour lighting on the theatre cyclorama, etc. and answer questions.

Friday, November 6th and Friday, November 20th

" Remote Lighting Control for Theatre and Television "
Technical Lecture by Frederick Bentham and L. W. Leggett. This lecture includes demonstration of the new S.C.R. dimmer and the punched card system K.T.V. as well as the systems in common use today.
(These lectures cannot be booked separately as the one lecture spreads over two evenings.)

Thursday, November 26th

" Planning a Modern Theatre "
Lecture with slides by Dr. Richard Southern.

Monday, December 7th

" Planning and Lighting the Stage "
Recorded Lecture No. 2 with P. Corry in attendance to answer questions.

The lecture by Dr. Richard Southern on " Planning a Modern Theatre " promises to be of exceptional interest. Not only is this problem the subject of much discussion, but a certain amount of experiment even in conservative England. Within two weeks of each other the Mermaid Theatre and the Queens Theatre were opened. The one presenting a novel approach to theatre building, the other completely orthodox but very welcome nevertheless.

Dr. Southern has made a unique study of the theatre and is also a very expert lecturer. Those who attended his lecture last season, on the German Theatre, will remember that he has a way of marshalling the facts which makes them clear and memorable and enjoyable.

The technical lecture on the subject of remote control is being extended to cover two evenings this season. Mr. Bentham is being joined by Mr. L. W. Leggett, our research engineer, in whose back room experiments in new forms of control take place. Together they will survey and demonstrate, where possible, various remote control dimmer systems available now or under development and show how these can be welded together to form an expressive instrument. The new forms of dimmer include the Silicon Controlled Rectifier (S.C.R.) and the latest control system known as K.T.V. which features the shift **method of panel size reduction and punched-card** memory. A brief note on this latter appears elsewhere in this issue of TABS and **these lectures will form an opportunity to see it in action.** It must be emphasised, however, that *these are technical lectures* and it is necessary both to have some technical knowledge and to attend the two lectures in order to derive any benefit from them.

* * *

Recorded Lectures

We have been very gratified at the success of the first recorded lecture dealing with " Lighting the Scene ", and this has had a great reception in many parts of the world. In this connection we reproduce below a letter from Mr. Elsworthy of Tiverton, Devon, which recently appeared in *Amateur Stage*.

> ". . . My society has just had on loan Strand Electric's recorded lecture on stage lighting with colour slides. We found it extremely valuable and it has prompted us to enquire if there are other similar forms of lectures available on other aspects of stage work, i.e. production, make-up, acting, scenic design, etc."

To this the Editor of *Amateur Stage* replied that he did not know of any similar lectures but hoped that others would be stimulated to emulate Strand Electric's enterprise.

We have written to *Amateur Stage* to point out that a second recorded lecture is available and this lecture will be given its première in October in our demonstration theatre. It is not a gala, but Messrs. Corry and Bentham, who take part in it will in fact be there to answer in person any questions arising. The first lecture was created more or less on the spur of the moment and dealt with " lighting the scene " because the setting for our full-scale demonstration of that name happened to be standing on the stage at that time. Obviously it is logical to begin with the hall first and the basic lighting installation before considering the lighting of any particular production. The new lecture deals with these things; the plan and section, scenery suspension, the lighting units—how they are put together and some of the effects to be obtained from them on the stage before any particular setting arrives. Most of the slides are in colour and have

been specially made for the lecture. The lecture lasts one hour and fifteen minutes, the range being wider than the previous one and the two speakers conduct the proceedings in an informal off-the-cuff manner. Due to the clash at times of these two lively personalities entertainment is mingled with instruction as befits the subject.

Both recorded lectures are supplied free of charge together with a suitable number of supplementary leaflets to distribute among the audience. Bookings must be well in advance and a registration fee of one guinea made out to " The Actors' Orphanage " must be sent in when a date has been settled for the lecture. *Without this fee the lecture will not be dispatched.* The previous lecture has raised a goodly sum on behalf of the Orphanage and we hope the new one will carry on this good work. Normally the lecture is sent out in a box complete with set of slides in correct order and a standard tape which runs at 3½ i.p.s. A descriptive pamphlet is available with hints as to presentation and technical notes. Where a suitable 35-mm. slide projector is not available or tape reproducer is not available, we can sometimes arrange to loan one at extra charge. A further arrangement where the size of audience justifies it and where the audience is not too remote, involves sending an engineer from Head Office or from a Branch to run the lecture and answer questions afterwards. In this case he will usually bring his own equipment, though the detail can be arranged. One thing we do not like and that is home-made 35-mm. projectors without a blower and heat-absorbing glasses; these tend to burn the slides where long explanation makes it necessary for the slide to remain in the field for an appreciable time. Therefore we must insist that ***the projector used is a modern type with blower and heat-absorbing glass.***

* * *

Strand Electric in Canada

Leslie Yeo, the manager of our new Canadian branch at Toronto, is a real man of the theatre and is well known in Canadian entertainment circles. His London Theatre Company, which he first brought to Canada in 1951, provided the Maritimes with six successive winters of sustained professional theatre of an extremely high calibre. Ontario also saw his company in the summer of 1954 and 1955.

Leslie Yeo can look back upon a lifetime spent in all departments of the theatre. As an actor he has appeared in almost 800 professional stage and television plays and still occasionally finds time to make a film or appear on C.B.C. television. Last year he was appointed professional director for the Temple Players in Toronto. He is now a Canadian citizen.

SPOTLIGHT ON CANADA

by Leslie Yeo

Impresarios in Canada are unique. They don't have ulcers. They don't have any business either. That's why they don't have ulcers. They have nightmares though. I used to experience them regularly. They always followed the same pattern. I would find myself sitting at a table poring over a map of Canada. Outside the door I could faintly hear the hungry snarls of fourteen professional actors and actresses all grimly brandishing lucrative six-month contracts that bore my signature. I would look at the map. Then I would reach for the *Encyclopædia Americana.*

" Canada," I would read, " is the second largest country on earth." I would lick my lips. Then I would read on. " Its population is seventeen million—some of them living as far as three thousand miles apart." I would reach for the strychnine. Then I would wake up.

To say that there is absolutely no theatre industry in Canada would not be true. To say that it is an under-developed one is something no Canadian would deny. Two things have stunted its growth—geography and the invention of television. The latter may yet prove a blessing. Experience in other countries has tended to show that the 21 inch screen creates an appetite for live drama.

Canada has one of the most efficient television networks in the world. By microwave, the same programme is now seen simultaneously by viewers from the extreme eastern tip of Newfoundland to Vancouver Island over three thousand miles to the west. Live coverage of the recent Royal visit was a tremendous achievement, both technically and artistically. England has a high respect for Canadian television technicians and performers.

Even television, and the almost prohibitive travel costs necessary to reach the scattered population, could not prevent the outstanding success of Canada's annual Shakespearean Festival at Stratford, Ontario, which last year attracted an audience of almost a quarter of a million. Vancouver now has a summer festival of the arts, and largely French-speaking Montreal shows signs of becoming Canada's leading live entertainment centre. In Toronto the Crest Theatre has now been firmly entrenched for several years and celebrated the opening of its seventh consecutive season with the installation of a new Strand Electric remote control switchboard. The subsidised National Ballet and Royal Opera companies have developed an incredibly high artistic standard and international acclaim in a remarkably short space of time. But much of Canada has yet to see professional entertainment within its own community.

It is not surprising that many eyebrows shot skywards when Strand Electric moved recently into this land of economic plenty and theatrical famine. But a young and vigorous country like Canada has

been quick to work out its own artistic salvation. Where professional feet fear to tread, the amateur movement flourishes, culminating each year in a week-long festival of plays selected previously in open competition.

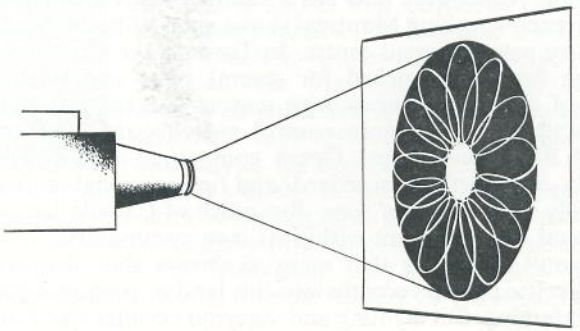
Disturbed by the lack of playhouses, the education authorities have wisely provided almost all high schools with an auditorium and a stage. Some of them are as good as many of England's professional theatres.

With this constant local theatrical activity, more and more drama enthusiasts are becoming dissatisfied with the limitations of a mere row of footlights and three overhead battens. Strand Electric's demonstration theatre at the fashionable corner of Yonge and Bloor Streets in Toronto is a rendezvous for those anxious to improve the standard of their productions. In the not too distant future, the high school auditorium will not only look like a professional playhouse and be used as one: it will be equipped like one as well.

* * *

CHROMOTROPE

This device was mentioned in Charles Bristow's section about *Flying Dutchman* in TABS. It appears that a number of readers have no idea what a chromotrope is. It is no novelty but rather, a visitor from the past. In the days of magic lanterns there were various attempts to provide animation in a world without moving pictures. Slides in wooden frames had two glasses, one fixed and the other moving. Sometimes a finger trigger rocked the moving glass to and fro with the result that the blacksmith hammered away or Granny rocked in her chair. In the chromotrope slides the second glasses are made to rotate through rack and pinion from a handle. Two coloured patterns intertwine in a kaleidoscope fashion—the centre appearing to advance or receed from the viewers according to directions of rotation. In the present application the centre was blanked out and was occupied by the ship, the chromotrope receding or advancing movement appearing on the surrounding stage, wings and borders.



THE THEATRE IN LEICESTER

The Report of the Leicester Theatre Committee condensed by ***Richard Leacroft,*** *A.R.I.B.A.*

The Leicester Theatre Committee formed in 1956 in an ineffectual effort to save the city's Theatre Royal for use as a civic theatre, continued in being after the demolition with the intention of working towards the re-establishment of professional theatre in their city. Without a theatre to which they could invite a company the situation appeared hopeless, until they were introduced to the possibilities of Theatre in the Round, and were able to invite the Studio Theatre Company to perform several seasons of plays in the different halls which could be made available. In January 1959 the Leicester City Council decided to investigate the possibilities of providing a Civic Theatre, and the Theatre Committee were asked to prepare a report setting out their proposals for the theatre in Leicester, which are summarised here in the belief that they may be of general interest to readers of TABS.*

Until six years ago Leicester supported three professional theatres (the Opera house, now derelict, and the Theatre Royal and the Palace, both demolished), a level of theatrical activity corresponding to the national average for a city of this size and status. That Leicester is not indifferent to good quality theatrical enterprises is suggested by the House Full notices every evening at the Theatre in the Round presentation of Racine's *Phèdre*, and the fact that the best patronised of their other productions were " classics ". The committee realise that the City could well do with a new opera house seating some 1,500, but they maintain that a theatre of this size would be too large for a permanent company performing plays; while a theatre suitable for such a company would be too small and technically inadequate for the demands of musical and operatic shows, which can be very expensive to stage. Whilst not indifferent to the claims of these more spectacular forms of theatre, their arguments are confined to the simpler needs of a playhouse.

They suggest there is a need for a permanent company of good quality, well rehearsed and directed, performing each play once-nightly for a fortnight. This decision to stretch the available audience over at least a fortnight for each production is one of the determinants in considering the seating capacity of the auditorium. Another is the estimated capital and current costs of the theatre; on a combination of economic, demographic and artistic grounds they suggest the capacity of a permanent theatre in Leicester should be between 450 and 800.

The theatre needs a central site, where it may be seen by as many passers-by as possible, it must be easily accessible and have car-

* Copies of the full illustrated report are available, price 2*s.* 6*d.* post free within the United Kingdom, from the Secretary of the Theatre Committee, Vaughan College, Leicester.

parking facilities within reasonable distance. There must be room on the site not only for auditorium, stage and technical and administrative functions, but also for such audience amenities as a bar, coffee-room, concourses, etc. Theatre-going should be a pleasurable social activity, and the theatre should become a frequent place of resort not merely for seeing plays.

When consideration was given to the type of auditorium and stage a choice was presented which has important financial and artistic implications. First there is the familiar *proscenium-arch* or *picture-frame* theatre where the audience sits in one space, looking through a hole in a wall at the actors, who perform in a further space beyond. Secondly there is the form known as the *open-stage* theatre where audience and actors are in the same space together, with no curtain or picture-frame separating them. The open-stage may take several forms: three-sided (Fig. 1*a*); theatre in the round (Fig. 1*b*); or end staging (Fig. 1*c*). The fullest development of the open-stage is the *flexible* theatre in which any of these forms can be created, according to their suitability for any particular play.

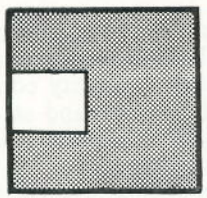


Fig. 1*a*

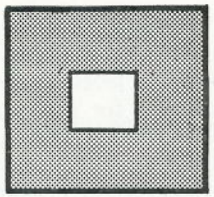


Fig. 1*b*

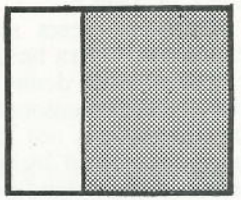


Fig. 1*c*

The picture-frame theatre has the attraction of familiarity, and is decidedly superior where spectacle is an important ingredient or the main attraction of the performance. Artistically its disadvantage is that the actor is in a separate world relatively remote from his audience, especially those in the cheaper seats. As cinema and television can now offer scenic spectacle and realism better than the theatre, the committee feel it would be wise if the latter were to stop competing where it cannot win and re-emphasise its strong point of advantage over these new media—the impact of the live actor upon his audience. Economically the disadvantage of the picture-frame theatre is its relatively high cost, both initially and currently. Much more than the visible part of the stage is required; additional areas are necessary for the movement, flying, storage, manufacture and maintenance of scenery. These are costly items: the provision of the fly-tower, machinery and fire-curtain alone accounted for some 10% of the total cost of the Belgrade theatre, Coventry. The construction of scenery requires a large workshop, paint-frame and storage space; items which are quite inadequately provided at the Belgrade, their proper provision would have considerably increased the total cost of the building.*

* See: Civic Theatre Design, by Richard Leacroft; Dobson, 1949.

This type of theatre also entails a good deal of current expenditure—on materials for scenery and on wages for scenic staff: about 10% of total expenditure goes on these items. To pay for these extra initial and current costs, a correspondingly large audience—and auditorium—are required, nearer the 800 than the 450 mentioned above.

How does the open-stage theatre compare? This has the disadvantage of being relatively unfamiliar. Audiences at Theatre in the Round performances in Leicester have had a chance of seeing one form of open-staging; some disliked it by comparison with the "conventional" theatre, while a surprisingly large proportion favoured it. The proximity of the actor to his audience makes great demands upon him, for even the most distant member of the audience is almost as close to him as the nearer members in a picture-frame theatre, but the greater intimacy can be artistically very rewarding. Economically, the open-stage has decided advantages: the high costs associated with scenery are greatly reduced, but perhaps the greatest economic advantage is that many existing halls are suitable for adaptation to this form, whilst few are suitable for adaptation to picture-frame theatres.

There are several reasons for this. First, the picture-frame theatre requires a larger area for its two separate units—auditorium and stage with scenic facilities. Second, whatever form of actor-audience relationship is envisaged, it is an obvious necessity—not always in practice observed—that all members of the audience should see the stage adequately. In this respect the relationship of the two picture-frame units is considerably restricted by the need to arrange the seating so that the audience can see through the limiting frame of the picture. This necessitates an arrangement of audience in rows one behind another down the length of the hall, and the stepping required to afford an adequate view of the stage usually becomes too great for the height of the existing hall, or in relation to existing entrances and exits: more often than not this problem is not squarely faced resulting in inadequate sight-lines. Freed from the restrictions of the picture-frame, the ideal actor-audience relationship of the open-stage is considerably easier to achieve; and, since the audience may be "wrapped around" the stage more people may be seated at each level closer to the stage, with a considerable saving in the rise of seating. Thirdly, the front rows of a picture-frame theatre must be further from the stage than the front rows of an open-stage theatre, and, as has already been noted, the back rows are further from the stage owing to the seating pattern imposed by the picture-frame. Thus a really adequate open-stage theatre can be provided, with conditions closely approximating to the ideal for actors and audience, in an existing hall, which would only permit a most inadequate picture-frame conversion. At the same time far more adequate provision can be made for such back-stage facilities as are required in an open-stage, without the necessity of providing the additional stage construction outside the hall which is usually

necessary to enable picture-frame scenery to be handled efficiently—in far too many conversions to so-called civic theatres the stage facilities are hopelessly inadequate.

The committee would like to see a new Civic Theatre built on the site reserved within the new Civic Centre, and they suggest that this could have a picture-frame or an open-stage, but they would prefer a more ambitious form of flexible theatre embodying both. As this site would not be available on present estimates for some four to five years—to which may be added a building programme of at least two years—the committee suggests that it may be better to make an immediate adaptation of an existing building. They therefore proposed a two-phase scheme, of which the first phase is the conversion of an existing hall to an *open-stage flexible theatre*. This they maintain, would have several advantages, in that it could be more immediately available, and would be cheaper to establish, maintain and staff. It would also be useful for non-theatrical purposes: conferences, chamber-concerts, fashion-shows and similar activities, providing additional income from afternoon and Sunday lettings, and would mean that the City owned a useful multi-purpose hall if this theatre were later replaced by another and larger one.

It is also claimed that such a *flexible* theatre would be unique in Britain, and Leicester would be pioneering an exciting new form. In five years or so this theatre would have had a chance to prove itself. If by then it can be shown that Leicester has responded well to this experimental period of professional drama, it may then seem desirable to construct the new and larger theatre on the Civic Centre site.

The flexible open-stage theatre designed for the committee is here shown in two stages of its development. The photographs of the prototype model illustrate a method which may be applied equally to new or existing buildings. By the addition or removal of pre-fabricated stage units built over the seat stepping in front of a light-framed balcony—into which can readily be inserted a great variety of differently painted and constructed panels: doors, windows, etc.—at least four different types of theatre can be achieved in the one hall. To the basic theatre in the round (Fig. 2), can be added end-staging (Fig. 3) with or without built-up fire-proof scenery on the stage, a three-sided platform stage (Fig. 4), and a compromise stage part way between an end-stage and a three-sided stage (Fig. 5). Other variations are of course possible, and all these stages are suitable for modern presentations, although shown here in their additional guise of a Græco-Roman theatre, and an Early and Late Elizabethan playhouse.

Of the various buildings available for adaptation they suggest the Corn Exchange. This typical rectangular ballroom lends itself readily to open-stage conversion (Fig. 6). The existing orchestral stage providing useful back-stage facilities, whilst the dressing rooms serve their original function, so too do the public cloakrooms,

and the existing gallery converts to a small bar and offices. Part of the auditorium is designed in the form of a gallery to permit movement below of the audience to the new and existing entrances and exits. Adaptation of the existing ceiling permits a wide variety of

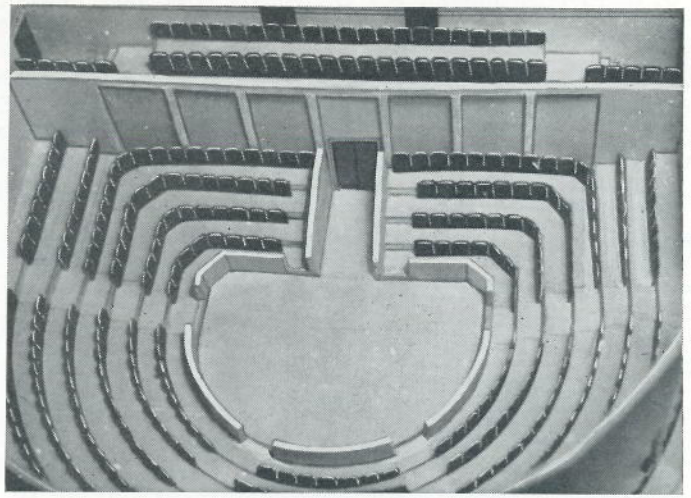


Fig. 2. *Prototype flexible open-stage theatre arranged as "Theatre in the round".*

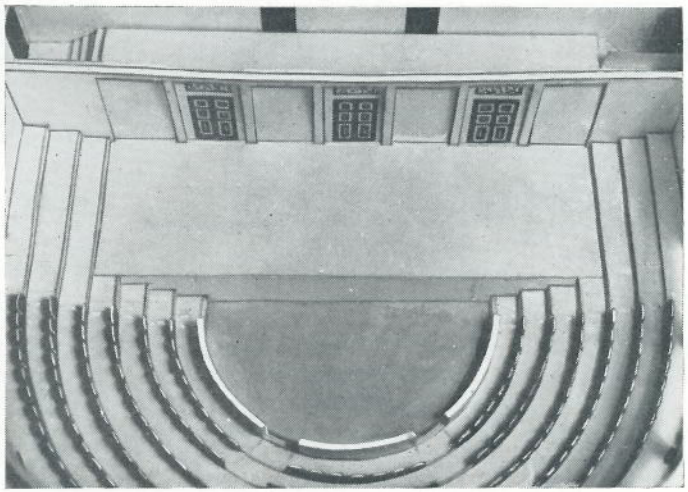


Fig. 3. *Open stage theatre with end stage, arranged as Græco-Roman theatre.*

stage lighting positions all readily accessible from the roof space, additional positions are also provided at gallery level in the electrician's control room and elsewhere, and around the perimeter of an adjustable fitting hanging over the acting areas. This is designed

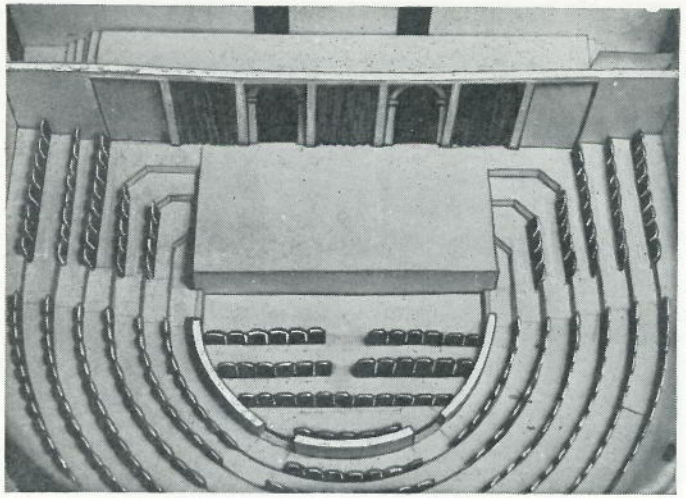


Fig. 4. *Open stage theatre with 3-sided platform stage arranged as an early Elizabethan theatre.*

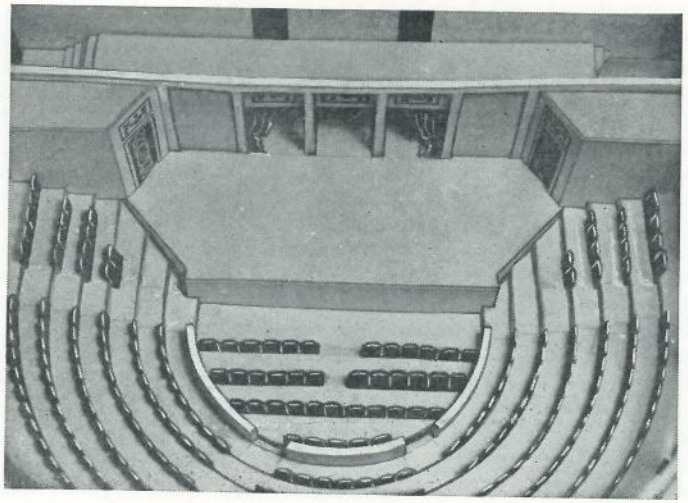


Fig. 5. *Variation on the 3-side platform stage. Here arranged as a late Shakespearean theatre.*

as a sounding board to reinforce the actors' voices in the areas behind them, and includes loud-speakers for those sound effects which must come from the acting area. In addition it may be illuminated in such a way that it provides colour and interest before the performance, and helps to create something of the theatrical excitement previously created by the illuminated curtain of the picture-frame.

A degree of scenic illusion is considered to be an essential part even of an open-stage production, and the views of the Corn Exchange Theatre in use (pls. I to IV.) illustrate some of the various possibilities which include the use of fire-resisting scenic units, and scenic backgrounds projected on a screen behind the removable upper balcony.

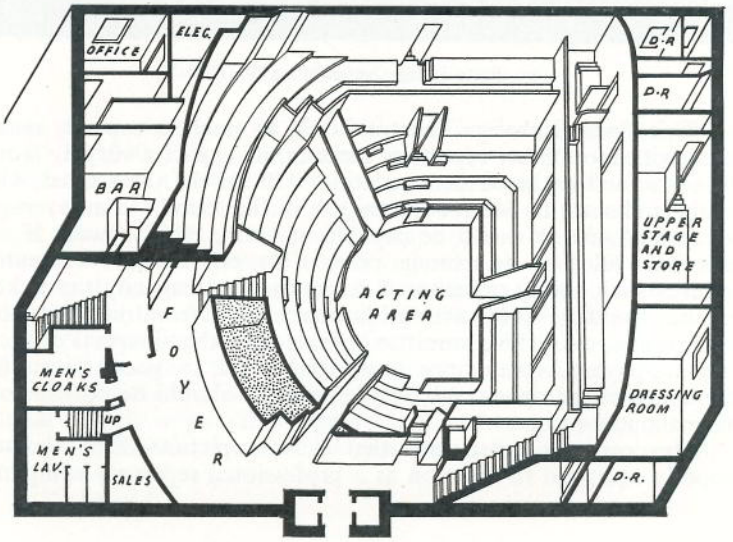


Fig. 6

This adaptation is artistically preferable to the prototype scheme, in that it permits a greater variety of entrances to the acting areas for the actors, and better facilities of approach and exit for the audience. The scheme envisages a complete reshaping of the existing interior with theatrical decoration, technical equipment and acoustics carefully considered; these points being extremely important in an open-stage theatre, where the special conditions of actor-audience relationship, and the creation of a truly theatrical atmosphere, require very careful consideration.*

* For illustrations and details of existing open-stage theatres see " The Open Stage ", R. Leacroft, *Architectural Review*, April 1959.

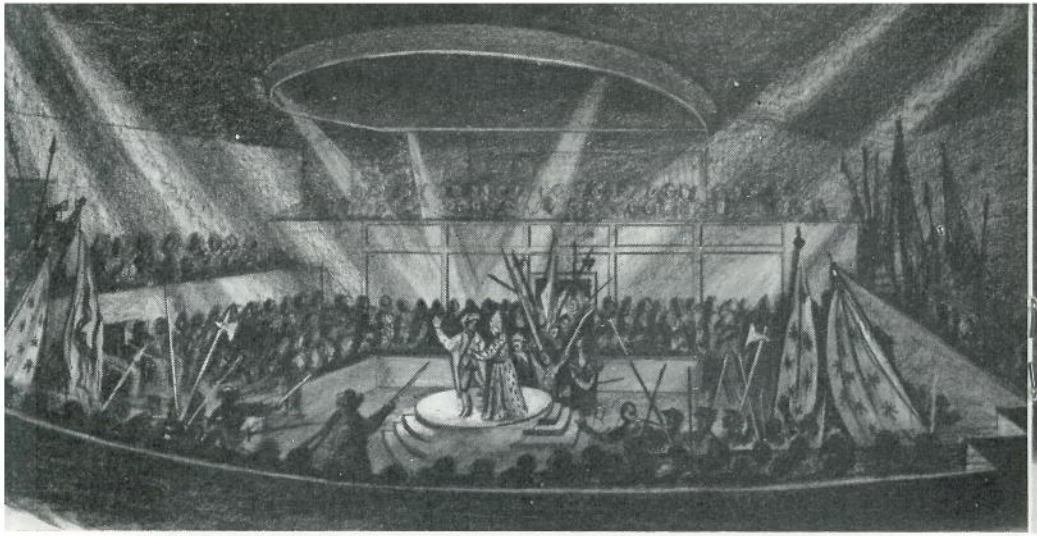


Plate I. *Fig. 2 plan in action.*

This Corn Exchange Theatre would be small in capacity compared with most other repertory theatres, its capacity varying from 400 seats for the three-sided variation, 450 for the three-sided, 410 for the end-stage to 540 for the theatre in the round. At an average capacity of 450, it would be capable of taking £630 a week if all seats were filled, at an average price of 3*s.* 6*d.* a seat. No theatre achieves such 100% capacity; if it ran at 70% capacity the ticket income would be £441, with additional income from refreshments, programmes, etc. The committee consider that the prospects of such a theatre paying its way, once it was established, are good. Given the economies of the open-stage, good standards should be possible on this estimated income.

The committee estimate that a new picture-frame theatre properly equipped to function as a professional repertory company

Plate II. *Fig. 3 plan in action. No scenery.*

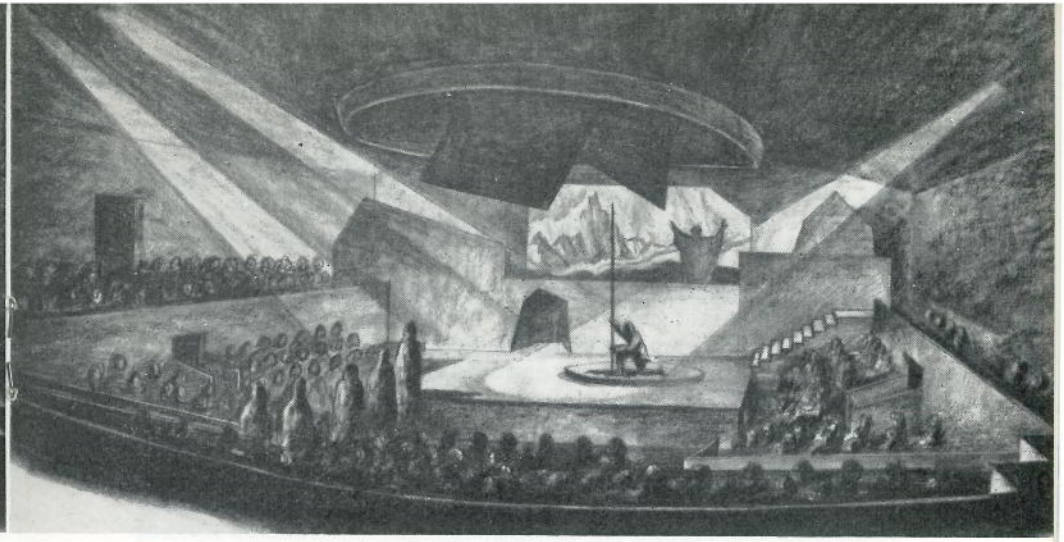
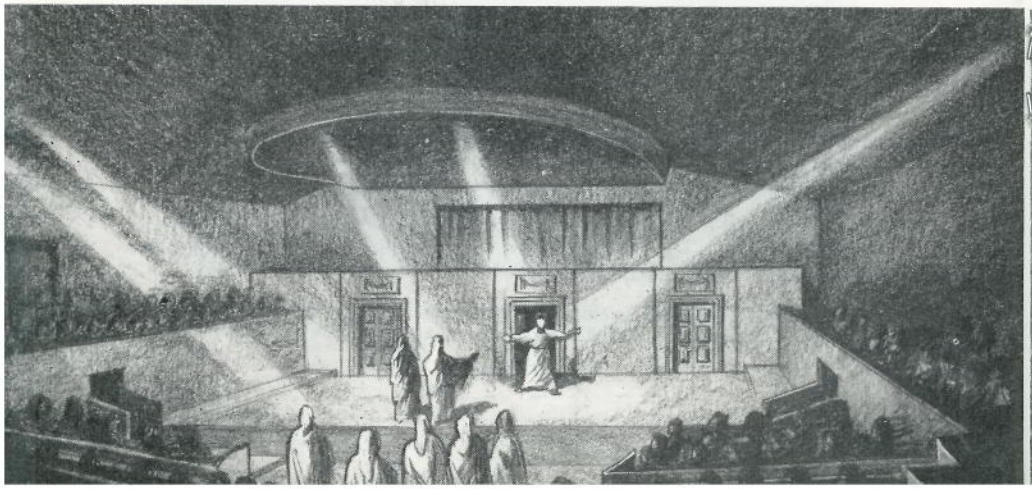
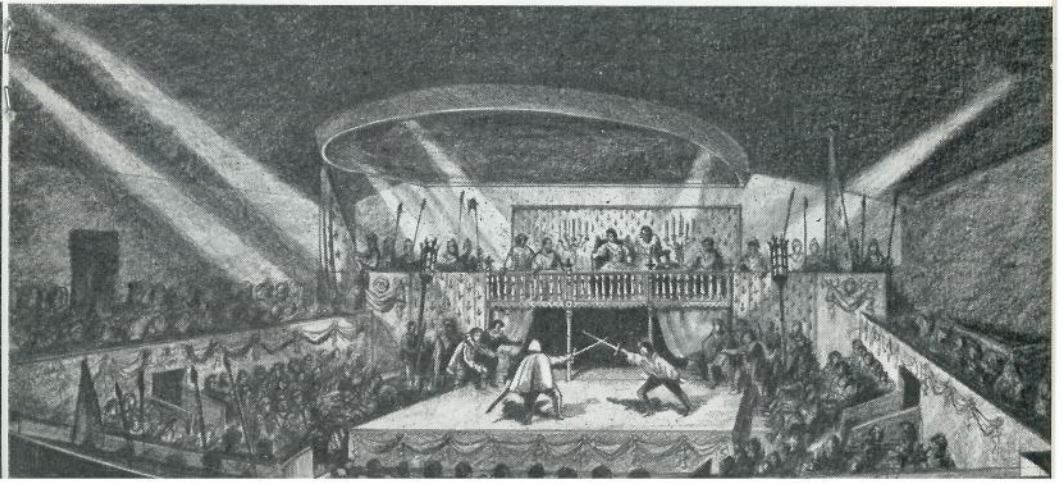


Plate III. *Fig. 3 plan in action with scenery.*

would cost in the region of £300,000, and the Corn Exchange project about £35,000. They recommend that the capital necessary to establish a new theatre should come partly from public and partly from private sources. They suggest that the City's contribution might take the form of erecting or adapting the building, whilst the contributions from private sources should be used in equipping and furnishing the theatre, and in meeting the running costs of the first weeks of the theatre's existence. The theatre should be run by a Board representing a non-profit-distributing Theatre Company to whom the theatre could be leased at a nominal rent, and it is hoped that the City Council would be prepared to assist the theatre by an annual subsidy or guarantee against loss in the early years, when an audience for the theatre in Leicester was once again being created.

Plate IV. *Fig. 4 plan in action* (*Elizabethan style*).

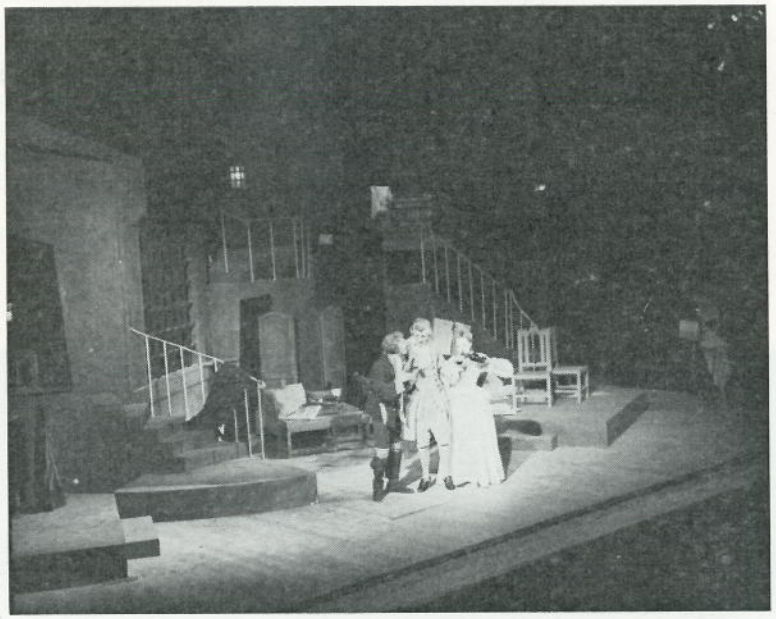




MY IMPRESSIONS OF THE MERMAID THEATRE

by G. E. Calthrop

On arrival at the Mermaid Theatre my first feeling was one of surprise, and a pleasant surprise at that. I had not been to the site while building operations were in progress and had only a vague idea of its whereabouts, and the snaking descent through the lanes below St. Paul's held echoes of the war and conjured up unwelcome memories of dust, rubble and destruction. There stood the same warehouses, patched up perhaps or rebuilt, but still blotting out the sky, and behind them somewhere the dark river still moved silently on its way to the docks and the sea. Sitting in the car chatting with my companion and dressed for the opening night I had an odd sense of unreality as though somehow a cog had slipped. Then quite suddenly we were in a stream of cars and taxis and there was the low building sitting secure and cosy, its solid rather stubby red columns unobtrusively welcoming the crowd round the entrance as though the whole thing was a party.



" Lock up Your Daughters " at the Mermaid Theatre. The unlit background to this shot is in fact the wall of the theatre.

Once inside, surprise again. A vast foyer, cool and inviting, with room to move about in comfort and talk with one's friends without having the toes crushed into the ground, ribs bruised, and tempers frayed. There had been an earlier performance with an opening ceremony by the Lord Mayor and the audience was still in the theatre; so, relaxed and peaceful, we stood about in groups or strolled round at will. It was a fine night and the spirit of adventure was in the air.

From the foyer a wide staircase on the right leads up to a balcony and quite a lot of people anxious for their first view of the auditorium were already up there watching the scene below when the doors opened to let the first audience out. Yet there was no confusion or crowding, no jostling and no discomfort. A tribute surely to the designers of the theatre. " If it's only as good inside as it is out," I thought, " we're in for a pleasant evening." Good temper is a solid asset in an audience and they had had the foresight to see that we went in with feathers unruffled.

The auditorium is built like an amphitheatre with the stage at one end so that on entering one's eye is led down the tiers of scarlet-upholstered and very comfortable seats to the stage already set. No curtain and no footlights divide the audience from the players, and one has a pleasant feeling of being part of the whole thing and not merely someone who has paid to be entertained.

There are no wings, and the scenery is arranged in units round the revolve with the orchestra in the middle so that the actors move quite naturally from one scene to the next in sight of the audience. This gives continuity to the action and there are none of those anxious moments when one hears the shuffle of stagehands' feet and the crack of cleats being thrown behind a billowing curtain and wonders whether the change will be made in time. It also, I imagine, saves a good deal in salaries, as the actors can move the props and furniture at will. Indeed in the current play I was fascinated to descry the Nubian servitor who had appeared at the beginning of the play complete with embroidered coat and feathered turban sitting up in one of the window embrasures pulling for dear life on the winch that works the turntable.

The theatre is not a large one; it seats about 500 and I had earlier been puzzled as to how the designers had found space for the complicated machinery of a revolve. Part of the building appears to have been adapted from an old warehouse, the bricked-up windows still show on the south side and it was a charming sight to see this small figure like a quick bright bird perched on a ledge in the grey stonework.

Altogether a rewarding evening. And a proud one for Bernard Miles who has worked so tirelessly to accomplish his ambition, and for all those who have devoted their time and talent to making his dream come true.

THE MERMAID FROM A LITTLE USED ASPECT

by Frederick Bentham

The preceding article by Mrs. Calthrop will conjure up the feeling of enthusiasm, excitement and admiration felt by all for Bernard Miles's unique adventure in the City. It is impossible to overestimate the amount of drive, exhortation, cunning strategy, hard work and all the rest expended in the noble cause—a theatre at last in " the City ".

At Holme-on-Spalding Moor, at Ealing, at Leicester, a doctor, a director (in tea I think) and a select band of enthusiasts fight and wheedle their way to the completed theatre building. Holme-on-Spalding Moor is a village (not a folk song), Ealing is a London suburb, Leicester is an industrial city—is it not strange that the same battle to raise the means for a theatre goes on in the village on the one hand and in the wealthiest square mile in these Isles. There is money—much money—to spend and probably to waste on office buildings; as anyone can see, provided they have learnt to distinguish today's office blocks from technical college blocks, factories and other buildings.

Elsewhere in this issue of TABS, we learn of the active theatre in Norway (pop. $3\frac{1}{2}$ million) where geography and climate would seem to provide sterner discouragement for the theatre—than even television. But does it, and is television the real cause of the apathy for theatre building in Britain?

I think the principal causes are: (*a*) the lack of a childrens theatre; (*b*) the amateur movement; (*c*) the growth of the legend that the play and the players are the thing.

This is intended to be a provocative article and I hope others will write and give their theories, but I hope they will not write that all is well while the spirit that produced the Mermaid exists. To say this is to say that only from war and poverty do noble things arise.

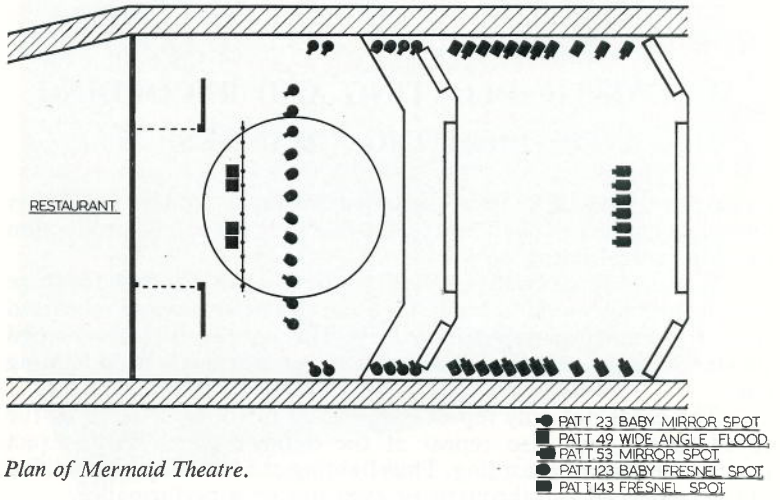
Taking (*a*), how are the bulk of the children to get a taste of going to the professional theatre?—a taste that develops into a love which sees cinema and television for what they really are. Where are the childrens plays—seldom does the professional theatre provide anything other than *Peter Pan* and *Where the Rainbow Ends*, and then only for a few weeks at Christmas.

(*b*) A large section of the amateur movement is so wrapped up in itself that it is the only theatre it knows or wants to know. We in Strand Electric should be the last to decry the amateur movement; it is a wonderful thing, the like of which may not be found anywhere else. But it must be related to a professional theatre to set a standard. The professional painter—the professional musician, the professional artist is the man who believes so much in this thing as to give up his life for it. There is too much regard for the amateur and the dilettante approach in this country.

As regards (*c*) no one in his senses would deny that the play's the thing or that the actor and his art is of the essence of the theatre. However, there is such insistence on this—the obvious—that the other aspects of the theatre recede. Apart from anything else it is bad strategy at a time like this to stress that the only need is for a few bare boards surrounded by two or three rows of seats and a good play and good players will do all the rest. As in this life one usually gets less than one asks for, this is altogether too basic.

What I admire about the Norwegian Travelling Theatre is not that the actors are tough and will go any distance and perform anywhere; but that they do this and expect conditions to improve as suitable buildings spring up. Unfortunately, among the most vocal of our theatre enthusiasts there is a tendency to regard a new theatre building as a concrete prison within which the life of the theatre will be stifled beneath proscenium, fire curtain, plush or contemporary décor. To these the Mermaid extends a bogus allure and encouragement. The walls are bare—hurrah! no décor. There is no proscenium —what a glorious stimulant to intimate staging.

To my mind the Mermaid is no more intimate for its lack of proscenium than any other theatre of the same seating capacity would be. The site and funds could not have carried a proscenium even if desired, but this makes no difference to my thesis. The intimacy is as great or as little as afforded by a single stepped floor without balconies in a rectangular hall, with the stage across the narrow axis. The well stepped floor gives intimate contact because one can see without obstruction, but this gain is countered by the long, narrow hall. You have a sense of intimacy in the tenth row perhaps, but certainly no further.



Plan of Mermaid Theatre.

This is where the centre stage folk take over but that is another story and certainly Tyrone Guthrie put up a strong case for it as worked out at Stratford, Ontario, on television recently.

Has the Mermaid open-stage acted as a stimulus to production? Again to me, except for the opening and the final curtain (rather a cheat, the latter, because the revolve is used), the rest could have equally arisen on any proscenium stage not cramped in width.

Is the staging simple? Certainly not from the lighting point of view. The 54-dimmer-way choke board is being worked all out and, as can be seen by all, the lighting layout is extensive.

When in addition to the revolve, a cyclorama is used perhaps with projected scenery, then we are back in intent if not structurally to the aims of the proscenium stage. In my view, if the aims of the open stage are to be carried out, action and speed is all, and lighting should be set for beauty and visibility and not changed at all. Yet how few will be content with this; first, lighting changes creep in, then more and more elaborate props, bigger set pieces and so on.

Do not let it be thought that I am a purist. I merely consider it humbug to eschew scenery as a feature in stage design and then let it creep back in makeshift—for creep back it will!

My fear is that the simple-stage people will set such low standards for the buildings and equipment that even less money will become available. Theatres ought to be fine buildings giving employment to all crafts to beautify and not just bare walls and everything on a shoestring. If Norway can—why not us?

* * *

AUTOMATIC PLOTTING AND RECORDING OF LIGHTING CHANGES

On April 29th, 1959, there was demonstrated to 110 Television lighting engineers in our Theatre, the first fully automatic production lighting control in the world.

This, the Strand system K.T.V. control, is suitable both for stage lighting and television lighting. Lighting can be set-up and rehearsed using the dimmer and switch controls. This lighting is then recorded on standard Hollerith punched cards to repeat exactly each lighting cue.

The cards not only repeat each cue to the dimmer levels at the speeds preset but also repeat at the dimmer controls the exact state at the time of recording. Thus lighting can instantly be modified during rehearsal run-throughs or even during a performance.

The system also attempts to solve the problem posed by very large dimmer installations (200 or more ways) by limiting the number of dimmer controls on the desk. This has been done by what is known as " Shift ".

The main advantages with System K.T.V. are that a small desk can control a large number of dimmers, and all cues are complete in themselves, however small; i.e. if only one dimmer is moved from half to full, the state of all other dimmers and blackouts, etc., are at the same time recorded. This allows the operator to return to a cue, midway in the show, without having to add or subtract cues to get the identical overall lighting.

Because the switchboard controls, as well as the lighting are always set on play-back, modification to cues large or small is always possible, thus enabling rehearsal chaos and second thoughts easily to be catered for.

Strand system K.T.V. is an exercise in the ultimate for stage lighting control. It is of course expensive compared to other Strand systems and economics may intervene but for theatres requiring perfection—here it is.

THE THEATRE GOES NORTH

by Karl Eilert Wiik

(*Touring Director Norwegian State Travelling Theatre*)

Part I—The Theatre in Norway

Even if the name The Norwegian State Travelling Theatre perhaps sounds a bit cold and official to foreign ears, the theatre has been created, if I may be allowed to express myself in a rather pompous manner, with the aim of being a messenger of art and human understanding to the greater part of a country of some 3·5 million inhabitants living in a far-stretched and weatherbeaten country. With its 125,000 square miles, the area of Norway is more than twice that of England. The mean population density is only 25 to the square mile in contrast to England's 700. Towns are few and most of them are small. In many districts, particularly in North Norway, a day's journey can separate the few villages which boast a useful community house or meeting hall. Furthermore countless families live completely isolated. Such living conditions create a cleft between town and country and raise serious problems for a modern democracy with its principles of equal opportunities for all.

The task of cultural dissemination in Norway is therefore one requiring an enormous investment of labour and effort.

If you were to come to Norway, you would be heartily welcome to be present at a Riksteater first night. (The Riksteatret is the Norwegian name for our State Travelling Theatre.) But if your choice should be a tour that starts in Kirkenes—the most distant spot on our itinerary and a little town in arctic Norway, only a few miles from the Russian border—you might spend some seven days' full journey by the theatre coach from Oslo to get there. But, having come so far, you should also spend some extra days to follow our Company along the coast of the Arctic Ocean, from one fishing village to another, travelling much of the time by modern coastal express steamers, but partly also in fishing smacks. One day the performance may be given in a modern community centre with a combined cinema and theatre (seating 700), where without much difficulty a London West End production of medium size could be housed, and the next day in a poor little meeting hall where less than 200 can be seated and where the level of stage facilities and actors' dressing-rooms is zero and the temperature only a few degrees above.

Such is the lot of the travelling theatre in Norway. In fact, I doubt whether there are many countries where working conditions are more difficult. But, on the other hand, one must consider what it means for the theatre to reach out to the people living at the extremities of this sparsely-settled land; the fisherman, for example, struggling to make a living off the spray-washed skerries, or the farmer,

working his few acres in a narrow valley under towering peaks.

It is in spots such as these that the players meet the ideal public, original, open, receptive, a public which receives *drama* in breathless silence, and *comedy* with cascades of genuine laughter.

The time is past when country housewives hurried out to take their clothes off the line on hearing that the actors were coming. Typical of the way that folk regard our plays is the incident from a small place on the arctic coast, where one of our companies found itself on May 17th (Norway's Constitution Day). Before our group arrived, and without even consulting the actors, the local committee had advertised the fact that the players would participate in the day's programme. The leading actor found, to his surprise, that he was scheduled to make the main speech that day. Hamlet's words about actors have in fact become a reality: " Let the players be well used, for they are the abstract and brief chronicles of the time."

True indeed, but are they well used? Perhaps not always to the extent they ought to be; but after ten years of Riksteater activity in Norway the public have been made to understand ever better that their natural sympathy and goodwill for the actors must be actively supported by better stages and dressing rooms and with greater care during the organisation of the local arrangements, etc. And it is just in this field—the efforts to create the best possible working conditions for travelling actors—that we have reached remarkable results. But, on the other hand, this would of course not have happened if the theatre and its actors did not have something of value to offer its public, both in light comedy and serious drama.

A thousand years or so have gone since the wild Norsemen invaded the British coasts. I do not know what our punishment for the deeds of the Vikings has been. Possibly having to watch the American picture of *The Vikings* or perhaps that for some five hundred years (1315–1814) we were a "province" of Denmark and then up to 1905, we were united with Sweden. Under such conditions cultural life cannot be expected to flower, and this period was indeed hard to get through. We gradually lost our original language which today can be heard only in Iceland, where it is the mother tongue. From 1600 or so *Danish* was the written language in Norway, but it did not fit well with the dialects the people spoke. But nevertheless, from this developed the new regular Norwegian, which orthographically was close to Danish up to the beginning of this century.

We claim Ludvig Holberg as our first great Norwegian playwright. In Denmark and the rest of the world he is regarded as Danish, but as he was born in Bergen he is ours! Holberg, along with Henrik Ibsen and Björnstjerne Björnson, is given place of honour on the front of our National Theatre and inside it too.

Unlike Sweden, whose theatrical traditions go as far back as to the end of the Middle Ages and where they had their Royal Theatre already in the middle of the 18th century, and Denmark at about the same time, Norway has nothing to compare to the long and unbroken theatrical traditions of these two countries. The first

and faltering steps of the Norwegian theatre were in fact taken in the beginning of the 19th century by actor managers of Swedish and Danish origin. Before that time comedies were occasionally given in the Latin schools and among the privileged classes. From time to time a foreign theatre group visited Oslo and the larger towns. Christiania Theatre (the name of the Capital was Christiania most of the Danish period and up to 1924) started in the eighteen-thirties and during the first years the actors were all Danish. Only after years of struggle did Norwegian actors set their feet on the stage. Norway was from a cultural point of view an undeveloped area. From the middle of the century Ibsen directed at another Oslo theatre, but it was at Christiania Theatre that *Peer Gynt* had its première in 1876.

Ibsen has had a tremendous influence on the development of the regular Norwegian language, but at the same time another group has fought to bring it closer to the original Norwegian of the time *before* the Danish influence, a language which oddly enough today is called *new Norwegian*, while the regular Norwegian is called *book-language*. It will please you all to know we are working for a third language, a fusion of the two languages into one, thus making the whole situation less complicated for you and a blessing for the Norwegians as well.

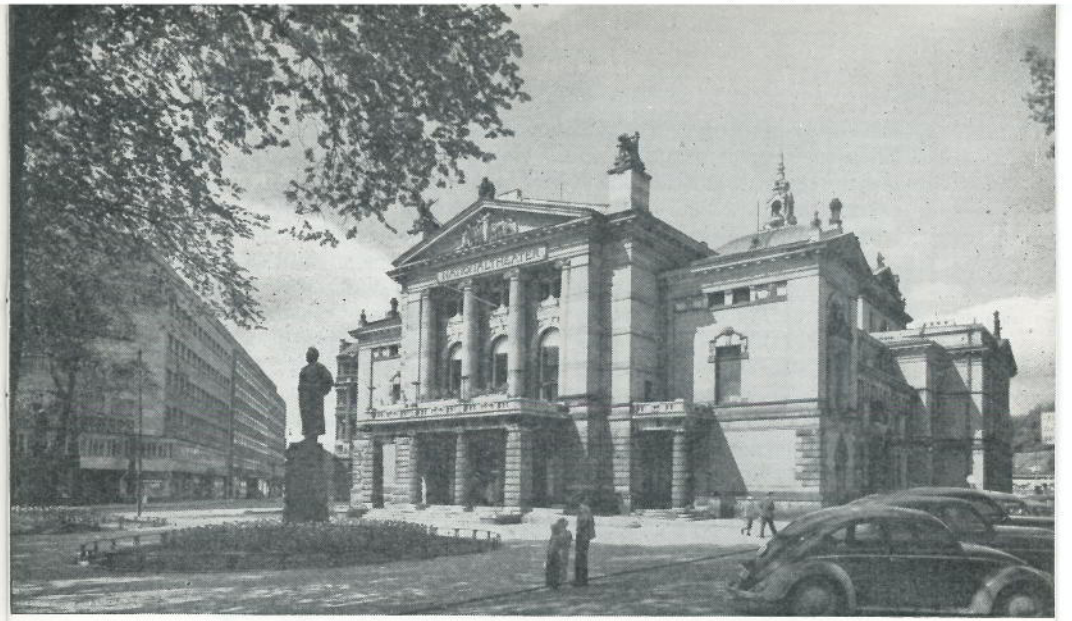
The Christiania Theatre ended in 1899 and was followed by the newly-built National Theatre (seating 1,000) in the same year. We are deeply proud of this theatre (*see photograph*) with its delightful atmosphere and fine standards. There Ibsen and Björnson were and are played, together with the Greek classics, Shakespeare, Molière, Holberg and others, as well as the playwrights of our own days. A Golden Age of the Norwegian theatre had its centre on this stage in the first decades of this century with a number of outstanding actors.

In 1913 a group of fanatical new Norwegian followers created their own theatre. It was born under hissings and cat-calls and was the object of much scorn. Its enemies held it to be without any future, but this theatre had an unshakable belief in its national and artistic mission—it can be compared with the famous Abbey Theatre of Ireland—and has today grown into one of our most important and artistically balanced stages. The Greek classics, Shakespeare, Tchekov, Ibsen, Holberg and so on as well as modern foreign drama and of course the specific new Norwegian plays are performed there.

The Central Theatre (seating 600) is the oldest private theatre. It has been owned by the same family for more than fifty years. Lately it has given mainly comedies and light opera and from this autumn it has been rented by the National Theatre as a second stage.

The New Theatre (seating 700) was started late in the 'twenties and plays both serious and light drama, classic and modern. It also produces modern musicals and classical light opera.

The People's Theatre seats 1,200 and was built in 1930 as a theatre of the Labour movement. For the first twenty years, however



National Theatre, Oslo.

it was run as a cinema and did not open as a theatre until 1952. Although the People's Theatre has given us many valuable performances, for example Ibsen's *Brand* and an excellent performance of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, which gathered some hundred full houses, it has not succeeded in bringing in a new broad group of the public. The reason is probably that this theatre was started twenty years too late and at the time when the class struggle of the earlier part of the century was over. Since February this year the People's Theatre also houses our latest cultural institution—"The Norwegian Opera"—which is State subsidised and gives a hundred performances a year in Oslo as well as touring activities. An amalgamation between the People's Theatre and the New Theatre has just been made. This gives us a large Municipal Theatre with two stages.

This past year has been a time of uncertainty, especially for the Oslo theatres, and it will be most interesting to watch future developments with two stages at both the National Theatre and the recently established Municipal Theatre. Oslo is not a large capital on a European scale. Within its borders it has some 470,000 inhabitants and, with the neighbouring districts from which the Oslo theatres naturally expect to draw their audiences, 600,000 inhabitants in all. Curiously enough, the geographical centre of Oslo is not the city itself, but in the forest some miles away. Still, Oslo has five publicly supported stages with 4,200 seats which ought to be sold every night. There are also two private revue-theatres with some 1,200–1,300 seats. I don't think that any capital in the world has such a large number of theatrical enterprises in relation to the population.

Oslo's five stages are this year given a grant of some £150,000. Half of the amount comes from the State and the other half from

the city of Oslo. The National Theatre and the Norwegian Theatre have in addition some support from the counties of Oslo and Akershus and from the neighbouring municipalities. To a certain extent some private support is also given. The King's personal tribute to the National Theatre is £500 each year.

Of the theatres outside Oslo the most important is the National Stage of Bergen, which opened in 1850 under the name of the Norwegian Theatre, a name which certainly has been well used in the history of our theatre. Its founder was the world-famous violinist, Ole Bull, and on its stage the Norwegian language was heard for the first time. In some ways we may look upon this theatre as the Mother Stage. It has through the past 100 years been of the greatest importance to the cultural growth of that part of the country, and for the Norwegian theatre as a whole. Ibsen worked there as a young man as stage director and " House Poet " and there is no doubt that in those years he had technical experience which was of a fundamental importance to his future work.

Bergen, which is the capital of western Norway, has a population of about 115,000. Its theatre, which seats 538, is to be rebuilt next year and will then hold 900 persons. State and municipal subsidy is now £45,000 a year. The National Stage of Bergen is connected with the yearly Bergen Festival in June which has become an international event of high standard.

Stavanger, world-known for its canned goods and the capital of Rogaland County on the south-west part of Norway, has a permanent theatre, named Rogaland Theatre. The town's population is about 50,000 and its theatre received about £20,000 a year from the city and the State. It has since it opened after the war given a repertory which has been of quite a high standard, and has shown fresh imagination, and this in a town which is known—apart from the canning industries, shipbuilding and shipping—for the strong domination of Mission Schools and sectarian activities. To have a *beach-head of theatre* in this part of Norway is indeed remarkable.

Trondheim is the third town outside Oslo with theatre of its own. The town is one of great historical traditions: here is one of the most beautiful cathedrals of northern Europe, the Cathedral of Nidaros, where the Coronation of our Kings take place. Trondheim also has the oldest theatre building in our country today. It was built early in the last century, but in spite of its charm it does not suit the theatre of today and, besides, it is far too small (about 400). A new theatre has been planned, but it is uncertain when it will be built. The theatre in Trondheim also has a valuable changing repertory with both classical and modern plays. The Company often has as guests outstanding actors in the main parts. These may be Norwegian actors from the theatres in Oslo or Bergen and occasionally a Swedish or a Danish actor. The language barriers in the Scandinavian countries are not great, for we easily understand each other. Also on the stages in other towns you will find from time to time Scandinavian guests, both actors and directors. *(To be concluded.)*

FABULOUS LADY

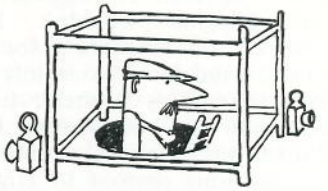
by P. Corry

It may seem to be a grave dereliction of the duty of anyone connected with the theatre to have delayed until July 1959 seeing the box office winner that is proving to be the *Chu Chin Chow* to beat all " Chu Chin Chows ". In truth, the cause of delay was not a need to plan one's visit to London a year ahead: it was in part scepticism, and some apprehension. In the event, they were not altogether unjustified. It proved to be a serious disadvantage to be familiar with the original *Pygmalion*.

" . . . *Shakespeare was a notorious borrower* "

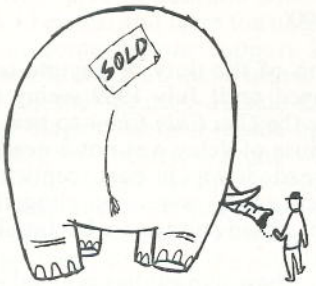
Shaw himself has pointed out that any dramatist (or librettist, I suppose) is entitled to filch the fundamentals of his plot from other story tellers. He admits to doing so himself; and Shakespeare was a notorious borrower. Of course, each transformed a borrowed story into something that only he could have created. *Pygmalion*, which is not without its borrowed ideas, is a brilliant comedy that has become a British classic. When Shaw has been dead long enough for his national popularity to be firmly re-established, it will certainly be one of the plays that must be included in the repertoire of any national theatre that is not exclusively Shakespearean. By that time, perhaps, the National Theatre will be a reality and not merely an adjustable site in London.

Pygmalion has a gallery of richly contrasted, authentic theatrical characters: they are not the caricatures that Shaw is often accused of creating; accused that is, by his less perceptive critics. In *My Fair Lady* the borrowing has not been restricted to the story. Much of the original dialogue is included, augmented by supplementary lines that lack a Shavian sparkle. There is sufficient Shaw, however, to make the additions unimportant, except to one who is handicapped by having twice produced the play, read it often and seen it performed several times on stage and screen. It was no surprise that the best laughs of the evening were provoked by the original Shaw.



" . . . *an adjustable site in London* "

To the non-Shavian, *My Fair Lady* is very good value for money.



" . . . *good value for money* "

It is lavishly staged and costumed: the music is tunefully excellent and the lyrics of the songs are appositely clever and amusing. Possibly the regular addict of the " musical " would be dazzled by the unusual brilliance of most of the dialogue. Altogether, an excellent theatrical entertainment.

To a Shavian, however, this is not a musical based on *Pygmalion*: it is *Pygmalion* dolled up with spectacle, song and dance, which are constantly interfering with the play. Alterations of dialogue and character are constantly obtruding. Having accepted G.B.S. as a posthumous librettist, the adaptors should at least have done him the justice of retaining his real characters throughout. Although Eliza's transportation into the glamorised atmosphere of musical comedy was on the whole quite successful, the substitution of a vulgarism for the classic " Not bloody likely " was quite out of character, rather fatuous and not theatrically effective. Eliza's authentic line is as essential to *Pygmalion* as " To be or not to be " is to *Hamlet*. The Higgins that was seen was too gracious and too stylishly charming, but that was more a fault of interpretation than translation. Pickering, when his lines were not Shaw's had to present a conventional theatrical caricature of the incoherent Poona colonel, instead of the intelligent considerate gentleman that Shaw created as an essential contrast to the explosive egotism of Higgins. The real Higgins wouldn't have tolerated this Pickering for ten minutes and would certainly not have shared his bachelor house with him. The housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce, was regrettably robbed of her delicious reproof to Higgins about his bad language and, even more regrettably, was reduced to a complete nonentity. The original Mrs. P. was a good comedy character. This one was not. Freddie was also curiously neutralised. He was not the amusing Bertie of the period that Shaw presents, and the adaptors were evidently unable to build him up into something else that would justify his effective song in the street scene. Doolittle was quite deliciously non-Doolittle in his enjoyment of a

" . . . *the regular addict* "

little bit of luck, but one regrettably missed the smooth eloquence of the shameless propagandist, relishing his undeserving status. The attempt to apply " musical " padding to the Doolittle matrimonial downfall was a misfire.

One must allow for the unimportance of authenticity in a musical, but there was no obvious or reasonable excuse for the intrusion of a footman and a bevy of parlourmaids into the bachelor ménage run by Mrs. Pearce. They, also, badly misfired.

" . . . *more a fault of interpretation than translation* "

There is no reason why Shaw's work should be treated with reverential awe. He himself had little patience with the Shavian equivalent of bardolatry. But there is nice scope for arguing the ethics of refashioning and augmenting the work of any artist to suit the technique of a different medium. Shaw's work is protected, theoretically, by copyright law and by his executors' sense of the appropriate. Shakespeare is protected by neither and the craftsmen may, without let or hindrance, give the teddy-boy works to an unrecognisable Romeo and Juliet, or hot-up the story of Taming of the Shrew. We could at any time now be presented with *My Dusky Laddie*, the smash-hit musical variation on the colour-bar theme. The bedroom murder could be quite something, with the G.I. Lootenant toonfully declaring " Mona, You'se my Slut " as he strangles his blonde moll, and she gasps in tango tempo " There's been no Hankie-Pankie ". *Danish Blue*, complete with water ballet and hit song " I-feel-yer Drifting " is also a terrifying possibility. No doubt William's poetry will save him from anything worse than association of ideas and story-snatching.

But Shaw is much more vulnerable. Although the " improvers " would probably be perplexed by *Heartbreak House* and deterred by *The Apple Cart*, it is quite likely that some of his earlier plays are already being ravaged. *Pygmalion* has been refashioned with competent craftsmanship and some discretion. But Shaw's executors really must be careful. At all cost they must keep at bay those less discreet and probably less accomplished adaptors who will greedily rush to get into the Shaw-plus market. It is not at all extravagant to suppose that when the seer of Ayot-St. Lawrence first met *My Fair Lady*, he vigorously restored Eliza's missing expletive, in different context. It is absolutely certain that there could be one unholy rumpus on Olympus if some of the would-be adaptors are not effectively restrained. One could imagine the effect of, say, *Bar-Bar Barbara* with its chorus of uniformed tambourinists: and Undershaft

singing " Why do my Missiles Always Miss ". But what would happen on the first night of *General Joan*, with its super-spectacular coronation scene, and its fire effects as the Maid vocalises " I'll be Fried all Night "? If G.B.S. were to get access to Jove's store of thunderbolts, the result could be cataclysmic. Impossible? . . . You Never Can Tell.

" . . . *minority point of view* "

Meantime, *My Fair Lady* continues its triumphant progress, and these carping comments are obviously the result of a minority point of view. At Drury Lane, advance booking is still thought of in terms of anything from six to twelve months, and the spivs are still commercially interested. Obviously, the customers can't be wrong. Or can they? Wasn't it Margot Asquith who asserted that the minority is always right?

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The Queens Theatre

We are sorry that space does not permit us to do more than say how pleased we are to have this theatre back with us. As a completely orthodox rebuilding of a traditional proscenium multi-tier theatre, it obviously lacks the news-value of any other ventures. It is orthodox in spite of anything the contemporary " Shoe-shop " front may suggest. However, it makes a novel contribution to the switchboard " out front *v.* back stage " controversy. Mr. Joe Davis, the lighting director for Tennants, has chosen a stage box position at stalls level. When an audience is present, windows and curtains mask the position both visually and audibly and leave the operator a view—one sided—but a view of the stage none the less. During rehearsals the masking is pushed aside and the operator can be seen by, and can see, the producer and the lighting director in the stalls. He can instantly step out into the stalls to get a better view of the effects he is producing or to speak to either if necessary. What one has to balance in the scales is the gain in intimate contact during production and the one-sided stage view on the one hand against a good view but from the distant position usual in other F.O.H. controls.

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