

TABS

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

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TABS EDITORIAL OFFICE		Phone: Temple Bar 4444 (16 lines)
Southern Hire Stores		271, Kennington Lane, London, S.E.11
Manchester		313/7, Oldham Road, Manchester
		Phone: Collyhurst 2736
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		346, Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow
		Phone: Glasgow, Douglas 6431.
Dublin		30, Upper Abbey Street, Dublin
		Phone: Dublin 47078
Bristol		56, Fouracre Cres., Downend, Bristol
		Phone: Bristol 651460
Darlington		3 Kemble Green North, Newton Aycliffe,
		near Darlington.
Australia		Strand Electric (Australia) Pty. Ltd.
		212, Graham St., Port Melbourne
		Phone: 64-1267
Canada		Strand Electric Limited,
		755, Yonge St., Toronto 5
		Phone: Walnut 5-5108

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EDITORIAL

Autumn Lecture Programme Demonstration Theatre, 29 King Street, W.C.2

The demonstrations with one exception begin at 6.30 p.m. (doors open 6.15 p.m.) and admission is free but by ticket available on receipt of **stamped addressed envelope to Head Office.**

Friday, October 14th at 6.30 p.m.

"Stage Lighting 1960"

Talk with demonstrations by Frederick Bentham.

Friday, October 28th at 6.30 p.m.

"John Wyckham on Lighting"

Our guest speaker will deal with the technique of lighting the stage from his very wide experience. To enjoy the lecture fully, one should be familiar with the equipment itself and the lecture of October 14th will form a useful preparation.

*Thursday, November 10th and Thursday, November 17th
at 6.30 p.m. (2 parts)*

"Dimmers and Lighting Control for Theatre and Television"

Technical lecture in two parts with slides and demonstrations by Frederick Bentham and L. W. Leggett.

Monday, November 28th at 6.30 p.m.

"Planning and Equipping the Stage"

Lecture with slides by P. Corry.

Tuesday, December 6th at 7.30 p.m.

"Stage Lighting 1960"

Talk with demonstrations by Frederick Bentham.

Note: All the above lectures this season are given live and not from recordings but owing to pressure of work no lectures or demonstrations can be given to private parties this autumn.

Northern Lectures

Mr. Corry will be lecturing in Stockport on October 10th, Preston on October 19th and in Bridlington December 2nd to 4th. Those interested should apply to Manchester Branch.

Lectures in Canada

Demonstration Theatre, 755 Yonge St., Toronto.

Friday, November 18th at 6 p.m.

"Stage Lighting"

Lecture with slides and demonstrations by Philip Rose.

Recorded Lectures complete with colour slides and tape:

No. 1. "Lighting the Scene"

No. 2. "Planning and Lighting the Stage"

are also available. Tickets for the lecture and full details of the recorded lectures may be had on application to Strand Electric Limited, 755 Yonge Street, Toronto.

Lectures in Australia

It is unfortunate that by the time TABS is published in Australia, the first series of lectures—somewhat on the lines of those at Head Office, will be over. There seems a big difficulty in making TABS, which is arranged to coincide with our amateur theatre season and therefore is published in September, December and April, line up with the Australian season which obviously functions at its height during our summer. The Melbourne Branch have equipped a theatre by arrangement with a Council of Adult Education and this theatre is available from time to time for use as a demonstration theatre. It will also be available, with its complete Strand lighting and choke control board, for theatrical production. In this it differs from the London demonstration theatre and in some ways this can be regarded as an improvement, since the facilities of a full working theatre can be provided. The lectures covered so far are "Planning and Lighting the Stage", a Special Meeting for Professional Engineers, "The Producers Aspect of Lighting", "Lighting the Scene", "Special Effects on the Stage", and "Omnibus Section" and "Question Night". The theatre opened at 7 p.m. each evening and the proceedings started at 7.30 p.m. Anyone interested should keep in touch with the Melbourne Branch for information about further lectures. Whenever possible we will publish this information in TABS as well.

Recorded Lectures

- Recorded Lecture No. 1. "Lighting the Scene"
Recorded Lecture No. 2. "Planning and Lighting the Stage"

These "do it yourself" lectures are supplied complete with a set of 60 (approximately) slides, mostly in colour and a recorded tape lasting 60 minutes. They are issued free of charge, but are booked subject to a registration fee of one guinea made payable to the Actors' Orphanage Fund. Full details on application. They are also available in Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Model Theatre

We apologise to Mr. Anthony Parker for crediting in our last issue his interesting book on *Build Your Own Model Theatre* to another author. Quite how this happened we are unable to account. At the same time we would like to point out that we were unduly pessimistic in our reference to the possibility of obtaining model theatre equipment. It was indicated that we in Strand did not make the stuff and implied therefore that the enthusiast had better go and make his own or give up the whole business. In fact as we well know, for it was described in TABS a few years ago, Mr. Robert Stanbury at Oak Tree, Jordans, Beaconsfield, Bucks, makes the most excellent miniature equipment to provide scale stage lighting.



A Lighting Supervisor's station at B.B.C. Television Centre: Strand lighting control to left and right of operator with Master desk centre and Mimic diagram of studio outlets overhead.

Television

Since our last issue the new B.B.C. Television Centre at White City has opened. At present Studio No. 3 (8,000 sq. ft.) is in operation and most B.B.C. drama programmes now come from there. The current Anthony Trollope serial and the recent Rudolf Cartier production of *The Devil's General* are examples. The Strand Electric contract for the five studios comprising the first stage includes the supply of lighting controls, patch panels together with all the 2 kW. and 500 watt. pole-operated Fresnel spots and such specialist lanterns as the Patt. 152 (see page 26), the Patt. 93, etc. It is particularly exciting for us to take part in this project as our association with the B.B.C. goes back to Alexandra Palace in 1936. This began again after the war at their studios at Riverside and elsewhere.

At the same time we have been wiring and equipping Studio 5 at Wembley (14,000 sq. ft.), sometimes claimed as the world's largest. It was for this company, Associated Rediffusion, that we made our first lighting control for independent television and in the ensuing five years we have provided every commercial studio in this country with its control and associated equipment.



Fig. 1. General view of stage and set in open position under working lights, taken from stalls right. The stage lighting remains exposed and is not masked. The walls of the stage (including the painted back wall) and the fly gallery can be seen.

“OLIVER” at the NEW THEATRE

Peter Coe's production of *Oliver* by Lionel Bart, together with Sean Kenny's setting provides us with a fascinating subject. Thanks to Mr. Donald Albery, who presents the musical, we were able to spend a morning with our photographer at the New Theatre, London. This is a show all of whose departments are inextricably intermingled. Who better to describe the creation of the remarkable set than Sean Kenny himself. While Mr. Kenny talked to us about *Oliver*, with his co-operation we recorded him. This was then transferred to the printed page with the minimum of editing.

The lighting is by John Wyckham, who comes to this field via stage management. He was technical director at Sadler's Wells till 1958 and since then has lit several productions at Stratford-on-Avon and many other plays, particularly for Peter Hall, elsewhere.

As our member of the audience we have chosen K. R. Ackerman, who is a keen theatre-goer and has the advantage of being a qualified illuminating engineer but not in this field.

DESIGNING “OLIVER”

by Sean Kenny

Writing about *Oliver* I perhaps had better say what I feel about stage design itself and how I think it relates to the theatre, scripts, authors, directors, and so on. I think the standard of stage design in England and even internationally is very low at the moment and the reason is because there is too much decoration. Stage design seems to be something that is planted on the stage and more often than not it is quite separate from the play and does nothing to push it across nor to help the audience understand anything about it. I think stage design should be something very exciting and could indeed be an important part of the theatre, as important as direction and acting, rather than this separate decorative art—almost an outside thing that is brought in at the end—a boxing up or a fancy paper hanging—in front of which people act, move, play or sing. I think it belongs and it is one of the important things.

When I was first given the script of *Oliver* I was excited about it because I had read the book many times and I had seen the marvellous film full of atmosphere which David Lean made. To try and get some of this atmosphere on the stage was a wonderful challenge and a problem. This was especially so in a musical because obviously one just could not have heavy dramatic sets brought on—left there and then all flown away while the curtain dropped in front. *Oliver* had to run like a film because the choreography and movement had to run easily on the stage. My sets must help the flow of the play, and give the feeling of Dickensian London which needed to surround this musical. Lastly, and I think probably most important of all, they must not get in the way of the production.

I began the designs for *Oliver* by reading again the book *Oliver Twist* and, as I read, trying to sketch out here and there different parts of the scenes which Dickens himself described. Some of these scenes in the book were obviously not included in the musical, but I just did it anyway as an exercise and to try and steep myself in some way in the old London of Dickens. Eventually, after about probably 150 sketches or so, I had the feeling in my hand of how Dickensian London felt and smelt and almost could walk there. The people too—I thought I could understand a bit more. Then I went back to the script and looked at the scenes required for Lionel Bart's musical.

Obviously he could not put all Dickens' scenes into the musical, but what was there had to hold and suggest the whole of this marvellous world of London at that time. I began with the thieves kitchen. It had not to be just a thieves kitchen it had also to be the poor, underfed, poverty-stricken, dilapidated, wooden, musty, smoky, cobwebby place or places that surrounded and were in London at that time. It had to be more than just the one thing because it had to give the feeling of the play, of the music, of the

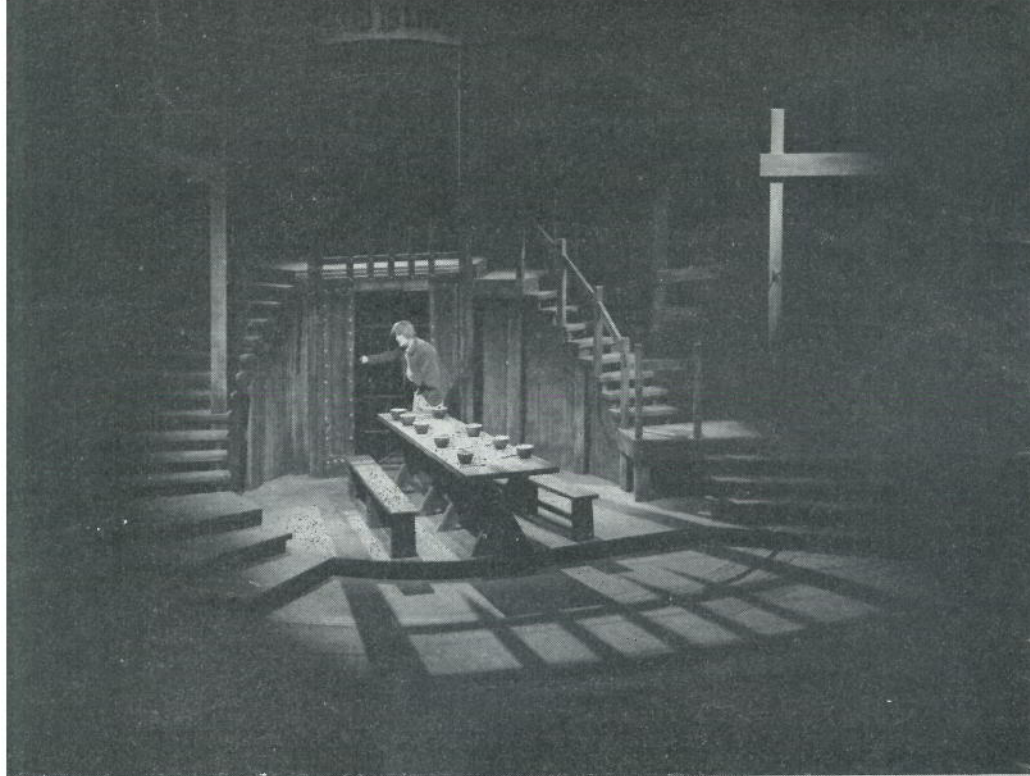


Fig. 2. Opening scene in the workhouse. This and subsequent scenes are taken from audience left in Dress Circle. Camera position and lens is not altered, the changes in the other photos are due solely to use of revolves and lighting. Supplementary pieces are also dropped in but do not mask and one remains aware of the dim vista of the whole stage at all times.

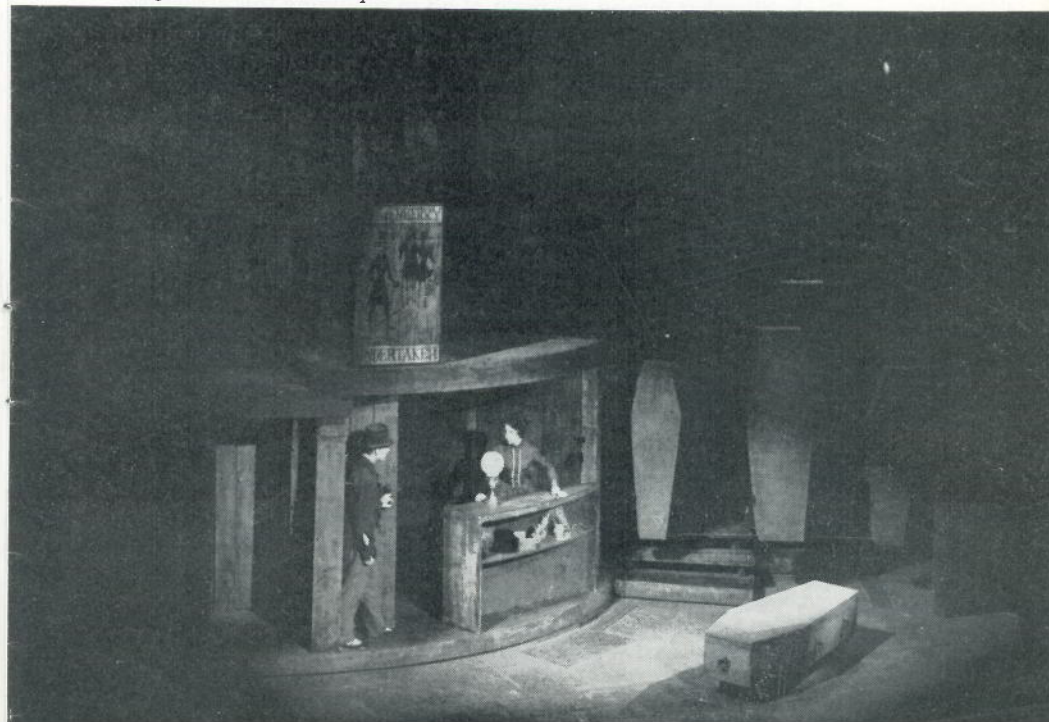
people, and so on. Therefore I had to begin to exaggerate my original sketches and even take as a lump of material as many as twelve or fourteen of them. Then try to take items out of each one and fit them into this now condensed form of Dickensian London.

I think there were about twelve scenes required and this meant I had twelve opportunities of making a whole world on the stage. Not yet—not even yet did I consider how it would work on the stage itself; it was more important to me at this time to work on the appearance or the feeling of it. Having worked all these separate scenes out—the thieves kitchen, the undertaker's, the streets of London and so on; having worked all these into a condensed form I began to put them one after the other in the order of the scenes and to see now how I could work them into a theatre and put them on the stage. This was the most difficult part because obviously this whole world, this marvellous thing I had just gone wild on, had not been related to the stage yet and to try and put it there was very difficult. So I began now with what we call "the model stage"—to make models of each little piece and to see how I could fit them



Fig. 3. Open stage lit as it appears to the audience.

Fig. 4. Undertaker's shop.



all together into one great thing which would be standing there and yet by moving one piece of it or taking a piece away or bringing a piece nearer, you would get a different focus or a different concentration on a part of the set.

I began this work very very slowly and very carefully, because this was the creative stage of the whole business. After a while it would begin to get technical so this was the time to be careful and I worked it slowly and from these little models there began to emerge some sort of shape. I began to lose corners here and there because I found these exact corners or beams in some other part of the set—in some other little scene. In this way I began to tie them all together and I began first of all with two revolving stages side by side. I thought by using two I could turn them and each one would match in a different way. But after a while I found two revolves probably should not be used because we had always a very symmetrical picture; also the eye was tied if both were moving at the same time, and was inclined to dance from one side of the stage to the other. I therefore decided that one revolve was better and that it should be a big one. On to this main revolve I now began to build—not a set really because I don't think this is a set, really it is a sort of building. It is an abstract building in which all these Dickens people could live, work and play, be poor in or be hungry or whatever. I did not think about it as a set, I always thought more about the back of it rather than always looking at the front, and I wanted to see what was round the back because here was this circle, to me “this wooden O” which was the whole world of Dickens.

Probably what moved me most of all in moulding this structure was the boy Oliver Twist himself, and how he felt about this world, this world of these terrible people and these kind people. I think now I began to look at it through his eyes. Therefore the staircases and the beams and the doorways and the ordinary things of the streets began to enlarge themselves and grow bigger; the staircases would be more weepy, more winding or more steep and the walls probably taller and the doors maybe a little bit higher so that I was now beginning to dwarf the boy Oliver Twist; to make him sort of alone and probably unhappy or lost in London. Now the people and costume colouring began to come into shape and to relate to these different pieces.

Basically the shape was an abstract building and the wooden staircases of old London were important so that the main colour would be basically a wood colour. The costumes would have to stand out from this wood colour and would therefore be straightforward primary colours wherever possible. It was impossible to think of the realistic dress of that time because, in a musical, it was important to exaggerate here and there and to pick out with colours where one could. Even in this sad story of Oliver Twist there was a certain amount of gaiety among the desperation for living which poor people have.



Fig. 5. Fagin's kitchen.

Probably the staircases are the basic foundation of this set—it was built round them and wherever one looked there was always a winding staircase and it was always going somewhere. That somewhere always happened to be another scene which followed and the staircase ran from one scene to another. I could see people being chased over these staircases, especially Oliver, and I thought of lots of places for him to hide, because I thought as he would think at this time. I wanted places to hide and places to run round and it became now not a toy so much as a child's dream of this world. This building became something which a child's imagination could create.

At this point the lighting had to be borne in mind because it was a very important part of this set. I could see now very well how this set could be lit, I did not want to fill in doorways or windows—the normal things one does. I wanted to leave them open so one could see through scenes into the next scene which might or might not follow, but at least one could see through beyond the playing scene to the outside. I worked on the models with some lighting and tried to find out the best way to help the lighting here. Of course, during all this at various times Peter Coe the director and Lionel Bart the author came into the picture. Many suggestions, many

ideas and many changes occurred in the running and in the style of direction which the director had in mind. These again necessitated some changes on my part, but I never really changed the basic idea or shape, it was always just technical details.

There followed the working drawing stage, and this was where the technical side began, getting this thing I had designed on to a stage and on to a stage in a practical way so it would work. Surrounding this main revolve now there had grown four legs or side elements and I wanted three of these to move round the main revolve, so that they would at times, as if selected by a camera, track forward and come into focus—come into the light so that scenes would then be played on them, or at other times they could match up and marry into the main set. The working drawings were made very carefully from the now finished model and taken to the workshops for prices and the beginning of the end started. While the building was beginning, the colours and costumes had to be gone into and I now concentrated on the colour of things and, as I have already mentioned, the fact that it was a musical meant that one could not have the blacks and the greys and the dull drab colours of that period of London. Just as the music lifted part of the story, one had to lift part of the visual appearance with extra colour and especially to harmonise colours and to play down the lower characters and to play up the more major roles. Then came the last week, the lighting, the direction and the choreography, the whole lot came together as one. The show opened and it seemed to work very well.

This last sentence suggests that either Mr. Kenny has a great gift for understatement or that he caught sight of the end of the recording tape. Editor.

ILLUMINATING “OLIVER”

by John Wyckham

From the first moment I set eyes on Sean Kenny's model of the setting for this production it was clear that here was something both original and exciting; a lighting designer's dream, and at the same time a tremendous challenge.

The decision, regretted by some, to go “the whole hog” and leave the entire stage completely unmasked was, I think, the right one. As soon as it was confirmed that the New Theatre was to be *Oliver's* West End home it became abundantly clear to all of us executively connected with the production that the proportions of this particular stage were ideal and certain architectural features, like the stairways up to the exit doors upstage P.S. and O.P., would very much help the background of the set.

At first I felt somewhat overwhelmed at the realisation that here was a set that could be lit from almost any angle and with as many lanterns as the theatre switchboard could accommodate. However, since I was also production manager for this show, I soon discovered that my first reactions were seriously at fault.

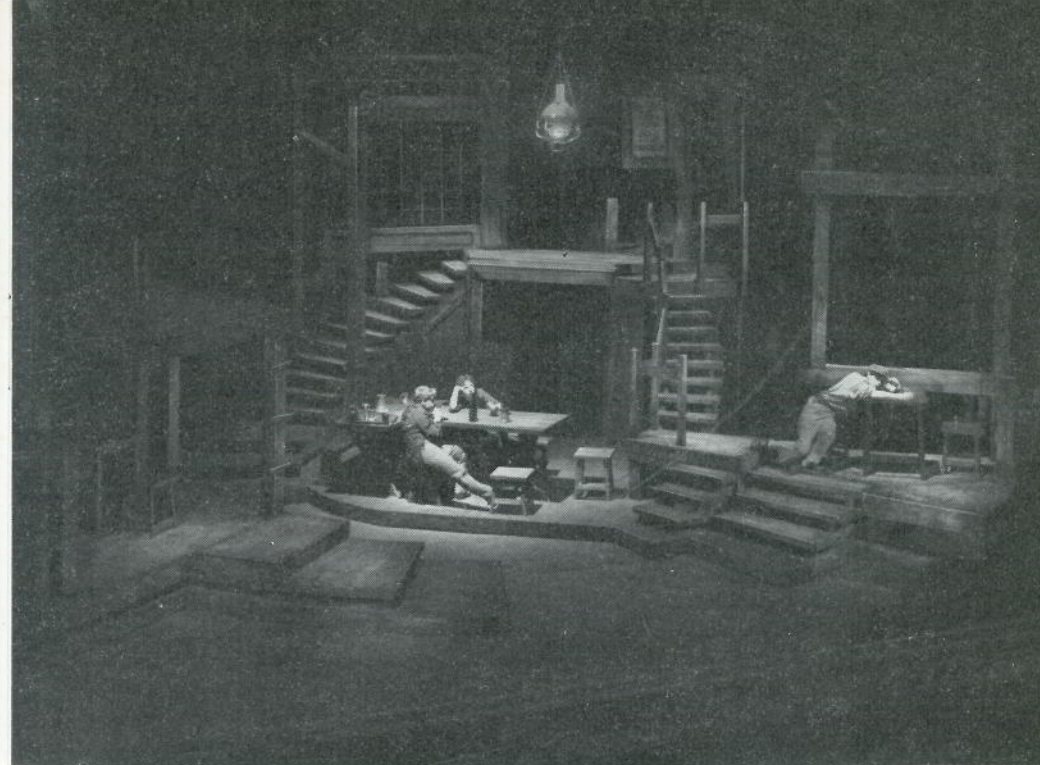


Fig. 6. “Three Cripples” tavern scene which opens second act.

To begin with, every hanging piece of scenery, with the exception of the “Three Cripples” window and the “Workhouse” gateway, was hung on spot lines and at all angles across the grid worked out to the nearest inch so as to coincide with the multitude of positions of the revolve and motorised trucks on the stage below. In fact “London Bridge” took up no less than 12 ft. of grid space up and downstage, and was nearly 22 ft. long. Consequently there was very little choice of position for spot bars and other overhead electrical equipment.

The siting of booms, ladders, and flyrail lanterns was not as difficult as it might have been, since I had had experience of “open-stage” work some eighteen months previously when lighting *The Shadow of Heroes* at the Piccadilly Theatre. Nevertheless, great care had to be taken to ensure that no lantern, when lit, would detract the audience attention from the action on the stage. Various stage obstructions such as fire appliances, exit doors, etc., made the siting of the booms a trifle awkward, particularly since these had to be placed as far offstage as possible out of the way of the artistes constantly dashing on and off stage in the big ensembles, to say nothing of Fagin's ragamuffins who seemed to be here, there and everywhere during the entire performance.

Although it may appear that I have started this article in the middle, in point of fact it was not until I had studied thoroughly all possible positions for placing the electrical equipment that I was able to approach the production from an artistic viewpoint and decide just how I was going to "light" it.

May I digress briefly at this point to say that when lighting any theatrical production I consider there are two prime considerations. The first is to study the theatre switchboard and its method of control, and the second is to investigate thoroughly all practical positions for siting equipment. In point of fact there is a third consideration which no doubt my colleagues will consider of equal importance, and that is the depth of the management's pocket! However, that need not concern us at present.

The study of the switchboard is extremely important and I made several visits to the control desk at the back of the New Theatre stalls before deciding upon the type of cues which I would use in this particular case. And here I must pay tribute to the magnificent co-operation I received from the chief electrician, Bill Bruce, and his assistant, Paddy Lynch, during the production period and the enthusiastic way in which they endured our "all-night" lighting session. Their operation of the switchboard on the opening night was masterly and has remained so at each subsequent performance.

Thus, having studied the theatre and the lighting control, it was time to turn my attention to the production itself and to Sean Kenny's brilliant setting. The Dickensian feeling and atmosphere clearly had to be established and maintained, however freely the book of the show had been adapted from the original. Here, then, was my next big problem. How much gloom would the West End audience and critics take in what was to be essentially a musical comedy, and how much light would I have to use to light faces without losing the sombre atmosphere required in most of the scenes.

Several late nights were spent in my workshop at home with the scale model of the set until I had a complete plan of the exact position of the revolve and motorised trucks, together with the flying pieces, for each one of the twenty scenes in the show. I then worked out a rough layout for each of these scenes, trying to place the lanterns according to the mood of the scene, the time of day, the direction of the main light source, and the purely visual needs of that particular scene. At the end of this phase in the proceedings I had used, on paper, about 240 lanterns and would have required a control of about 190 dimmer ways.

For the next two nights I worked on a compromise layout, reducing the actual number of lanterns to 160 on 124 dimmer ways, and trying to decide which lantern could be made to cover two, three, or even four scenes. This was perhaps the most difficult part of the whole task. I feel sure that my colleagues will back me up when I say that "the correct lantern hung in the correct position will cut hours off the time of actual lighting rehearsals and plotting"; and if any advice was to be sought at this juncture, I would say "know your



Fig. 7. London Bridge at night. Moving drum ripples are used to suggest the nearness to water but do not appear in the photograph.

equipment and its capabilities!" Any old lantern hung vaguely above the actor, and equally vaguely set in his direction, will not light a production; unless of course you are one of those who favours the "lighting by accident" school!

For those interested in facts it might be worth noting that I used twelve different types of lantern in this production and these included Patts., 23N, 23W, 43, 49, 50, 52, 53, 73, 76, 123, 143 and 243, plus "S" type groundrows (three-colour) and certain special effects. I think that with the possible exception of the Patt. 76 (Acting Area) every other lantern was used because of its particular merits and no other type could replace it. By this I do not mean that a later Mark of the same type of lantern would not do (i.e. a Patt. 58 might well replace a Patt. 50). Several barndoor shutters were used on the Patt. 143s and Patt. 243s, not so much to kill the ghost effect as to prevent direct light from catching the eyes of the audience in the front stalls.

Finally, having studied the control system, selected the quantity and type of lanterns and resolved the mammoth problem of siting them, I came to the choice of colours. Here again Mr. Kenny gave me a magnificent canvas to work upon as his set contained many of the colours associated with the painters of Dickensian London—the

browns and yellows, ambers and sepias, and just sufficient blue to highlight the setting in the night scenes.

Against this somewhat sombre background he presented the colourful costumes of the market scenes, the pastel shades of the Brownlow household, the grimy rags and tatters of Fagin and his boys and the brilliant red of Nancy's dress. These costumes all took light extremely well and helped to keep the artists apparently well lit whilst the background remained suitably atmospheric.

I would prefer not to discuss here in detail my reasons for choosing certain colour combinations since these were selected as much by intuition as from experience. Basically, I used 3, 45, 50 and 51, selecting them with a careful eye on the dramatic possibilities of the "Three Cripples" tavern scene opening the second act, and the "London Bridge" final sequence.

As many of you know, the quality and tone of light from let us say a Patt. 143 lantern with a piece of No. 3 straw in it differs very considerably from the light from a Patt. 43 with the same in it. For this reason alone it would take far too much space to explain how I reached my apparently haphazard arrangement and mixtures of colour both additive and subtractive.

The plotting of the actual lighting cues—some 65 in number—was an extremely restful affair, taking place in a silent theatre throughout one night when most people were in their beds. This is undoubtedly the best time for light plotting, when it can be arranged conveniently, as it rules out any necessity for shouting above the sound of the auditorium vacuum cleaner, or the master carpenter hammering and sawing; furthermore one does not get interrupted with telephone calls at 3.0 a.m.!

I resisted the temptation to put in cues simply for the sake of it, since, speaking personally, I hate to see lights bobbing up and down when the attention should be on the actor and the scene. I wince whenever a stage manager proudly boasts that he has 237 cues in his show. With the possible exception of modern ballet or high-speed revue this usually means that the lighting director got the fidgets—a trap which I myself have fallen into on more than one occasion.

In the final stages of rehearsal actors and costumes, words and music, settings and lights came rapidly together. The teamwork was simply splendid and each problem was dealt with enthusiastically and quickly. How easily, and how often, the reverse occurs. Peter Coe, the director, brilliantly sustained everyone's interest and patiently guided us all through a labyrinth of minor snags. To me personally he was extremely helpful, and where it was not always possible to get the light onto the actor he obligingly moved his actor into the light. This sort of co-operation makes sense, and it was in such an atmosphere that *Oliver* was produced.

At the time of writing the production is playing to packed houses and looks like doing so for a very long time to come. I feel greatly honoured at having been asked to light this piece. A very exciting experience which I shall long remember.

SEEING "OLIVER"

by K. R. Ackerman

If the editor expected intelligent and analytical criticism of the production when he invited me to contribute, then I am afraid he is going to be disappointed, for so involved was I in the theatrical performance that when the heroine, Nancy, came to take her bow at the conclusion of the last act after having been cruelly done to death, I involuntarily gave a deep sigh of relief at her remarkable resurrection.

This production was visually the most satisfying I have seen in a good many years of regular theatre-going. Most impressive of all was the ingenuity of the set which, by the re-arrangement of a small number of basic structures, most aptly portrayed a bewildering number of different settings with a remarkable rendering, not of the actuality of the scenes, but of their atmosphere. What was most refreshing too was the structural solidity and apparent permanence of these settings. The action was able to take place freely on different planes and linking stairs without the audience having to undergo the usual trauma of concern for the safety of the cast. It is, therefore, not surprising to learn that Mr. Kenny is an architect.

Although *Oliver* is a musical, it is the atmosphere of Dickensian London and not the music which remains in the memory. Some scenes, particularly that of the junketings in the tavern with its russets, reds and golds, and almost tangible fog, could have come straight off the canvas of Hogarth, despite the fact that he painted a century earlier. It is interesting to quote from Hogarth's own writings, "I wished to compose pictures on canvas similar to representations on the stage." For one member of the audience at least, Messrs. Coe, Kenny and Wyckham have created compositions similar to those on canvas. The lighting made a considerable contribution to the excellent pictorial effect. The lighting changes were innumerable but always subtle, and I marvel at the dexterity of the operator who controlled the lighting console without faltering on a two preset control desk without piston ("memory") action. The patterns of light were always most effective and these were certainly not easy sets to light.

I would question the wisdom of the decision to make no attempt to mask the light sources for, although the spaciousness achieved by the elimination of borders was indeed effective, the light from the lanterns tended to be a source of distraction to the audience, particularly those who had paid the most, i.e. the front rows of the stalls. Even if borders or some other form of camouflage was impracticable, "hoods" or "barndoors" which prevented the light from the lanterns falling on the audience, would have been advisable. This technique of showing all the machinery appears to be fashionable at the moment and is to be seen also at the Mermaid Theatre.

It seems to me to be more appropriate to an arena stage, where masking would look like clutter and where settings tend to be stylised rather than representational. But, as in theatrical design so in architecture, and today the New Brutalism is flaunted in many modern buildings.

Just to add one other drop of acid so that the introductory passages should not prove too cloying; why is a greater use not made of soft-edged spots, for nothing is more distracting than to see a hard white circle on the chest of an actor as he stalks into the wings?

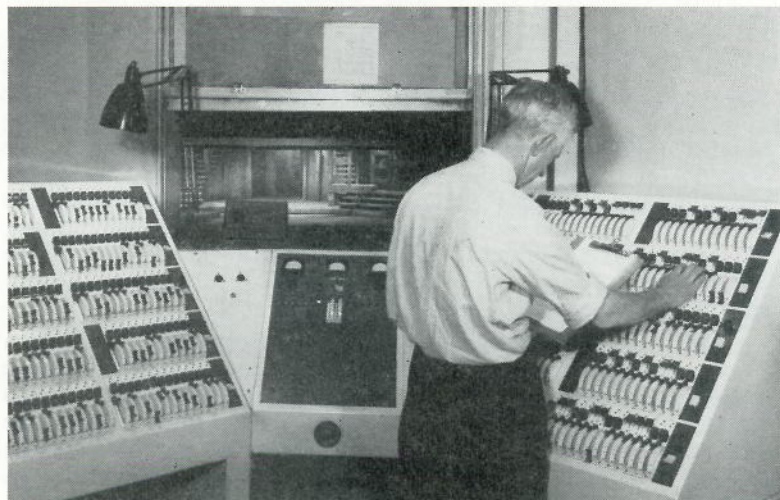


Fig. 8. Bill Bruce at the Strand preset switchboard in the New Theatre, London. (Only one man operates the 134 dimmers on the board.)

* * *

"Free from his Fetters Grim"



Further to our article in the last issue of TABS, we are happy to relate that after diligent searching it has been found possible to house the new lighting control console at the back of the stalls in the Savoy Theatre. To find a suitable space has been very difficult, but we are certain the end is well worth the effort.

THEATRE IN THE ROUND

The two articles on the subject which follow are reprinted by kind permission of *The Prompter*, the journal of the Southampton Theatre Guild.

"Missing Bodies" and "Alas, Poor Fred"

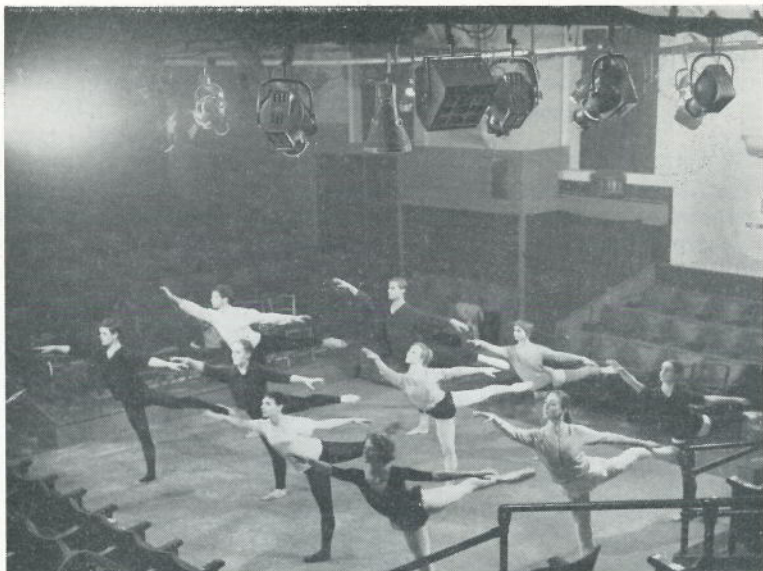
by K. A. Eaton

The Studio Theatre Company Limited, assisted by the Arts Council, was formed to experiment with theatre in the round, to present new plays and encourage young playwrights and to take drama to theatreless towns. The Company hopes to foster so keen a desire for theatre in the round that local authorities will respond to the pressure exercised upon them by enthusiastic townsfolk and will build permanent theatres specially adapted for this form of presentation.

In Southampton they adapted the Chantry Hall so well that we forgot how essentially rectangular it is. Well built, folding rostrums gave us an auditorium area reminiscent in structure of the Central Hall, but the seating capacity of 250 with an acting area covered by rose coloured carpet provided that intimate atmosphere which is essential to this form of dramatic presentation.

Friendliness seems to be the special hallmark of this Company and we were met on entering the hall with offers of hot coffee and cakes. There was never any doubt at all about the willing co-operation between audience and players, but in a presentation where the audience is all lined up for your interested inspection long before the actors appear, I could not fail to notice that, had the representatives of the University, the Theatre Guild and the teaching profession been compelled to leave, the hall would have been remarkably empty. To make a fair judgment of the success of this presentation one must remember that a coterie audience bears little resemblance to the crowds that flock to see *Cinderella on Ice*—another form of theatre in the round. Moreover the crusading spirit, while very laudable, is rather off-putting to youngsters who just want an evening's fun.

The Saturday evening show consisted of two one-act plays, *Memento Mori* by David Campion who played the part of the old man against Barry Boys' young man, and *Alas, Poor Fred* by James Saunders, where the players were a husband and wife with a "past". In the first play we had no scenery or props at all; the ruined house, its crumbling walls, neglected garden and self-locking cupboard were all figments of our imaginations as the two husbands sought a last resting place for the latest wife now permanently "gone away". The miming was excellent. I should like to have conducted a questionnaire to know how successful it was with an audience brought up on plays set against a background of realistic scenery. The second play was staged in a far more conventional manner in the sitting room of Mr. and Mrs. Pringle. It was played at an incredibly slow pace and this technique was very successful; I doubt if it would have been possible behind a proscenium arch, but sitting with them in the intimacy of their private room, the humour of the situations unfolded with a lingering depth which the audience thoroughly enjoyed.



An example of "Theatre in the Round" from Croydon.
Photograph by courtesy Associated Newspapers Ltd.

Unfortunately I felt that the play was somewhat over-written and sagged too much in the middle; but surely that fact only makes more remarkable the success of the actor's slow playing, for the very slightest break in concentration is instantly detectable.

There is no doubt at all that this is a most interesting experiment and everyone present must have wished the Company well, but at its present stage of development, the Studio Theatre Company poses more questions than it is able to answer. How far could future audiences be trained to use their imaginations to make scenery unnecessary? Does it really offer enough scope for the creation of a new type of theatre and the necessary incentive to encourage Borough Councils to build special theatres for it? Could it ever attract large audiences of ordinary play-goers who might make it a really paying proposition? Probably that would depend upon the ability of such companies to produce stars of the right kind of magnitude, for one can well guess the teenagers' bliss at finding a Johnnie Ray so intimately on view. If its appeal remains more intellectual than popular, does it offer a really good workshop to young writers?

My own view—and one cannot offer anything more than a personal opinion—is that the proscenium arch theatre with its long established methods will never be entirely superseded, but there should be an increasing part to be played by theatre in the round.

I hope that Borough Councils will see their way to providing rostrums which could convert the "all-purpose hall"—which so

appeals to the thrifty mind—into such theatres and I look forward to seeing these contrived theatres used by some of our more enterprising schools for spectacular productions which I know them to be quite capable of producing.

We all give the Studio Company our heartfelt admiration and good wishes while they struggle on a shoe-string budget to gain enthusiastic acceptance of the idea of theatre in the round. They have stirred us to new ideas and earned our gratitude. Can we not do better than that? They offer something which is a serious suggestion for enlarging the scope of theatre in our time. I suggest that we must be awake to these new possibilities and not too ready to let the difficulties swamp any urge which is expressed by some of our more *avant-garde* members. Theatre in the round is at least as old as the Greeks. Maybe it has something for Southampton's tomorrows.

Strindberg's "Miss Julia"

Joy Steele

My first reaction to "Theatre in the Round" presentation was that here is a medium which makes very exacting demands on the actors. The audience is so close to them, almost on the set with them, that any possibility of a prompt is quite out of the question. The actor is not permitted even that split-second blank look when the next line momentarily eludes him. This audience awareness works both ways, of course. If a muffing of lines is not lost upon the audience, then neither are any subtleties of facial expression—the gleam in an eye, tears on Miss Julia's lovely, almost Oriental face, Jean's calculating stare. Also, an ordinary conversational tone can be used which gives an atmosphere of intimacy and participation.

For the audience, "Theatre in the Round" is comparable to "smellies" in the cinema. We were able to smell Jean's kidney supper which Kristin had saved for him; we caught a whiff of Julia's cigarettes.

I realised why seats in the front row were cheaper than all the others when a very large table was placed right in front of me! My reaction, when Julia knelt on the floor to examine the dead bird, was to bend down and look under the table to see what was happening. In spite of this disadvantage, I was glad I was in the front row, because I was able to see minute details of well-kept finger nails, smooth skin and a twitching muscle at the corner of a mouth which might have been missed in the more expensive seats. It was like watching someone asleep in a railway carriage when one is able to observe the smallest detail of dress and features and see the almost imperceptible quivering of the nostrils with each breath.

On the whole I found "Theatre in the Round" a fascinating experience and, though it has limitations, it has great possibilities.

THE ROYALTY THEATRE

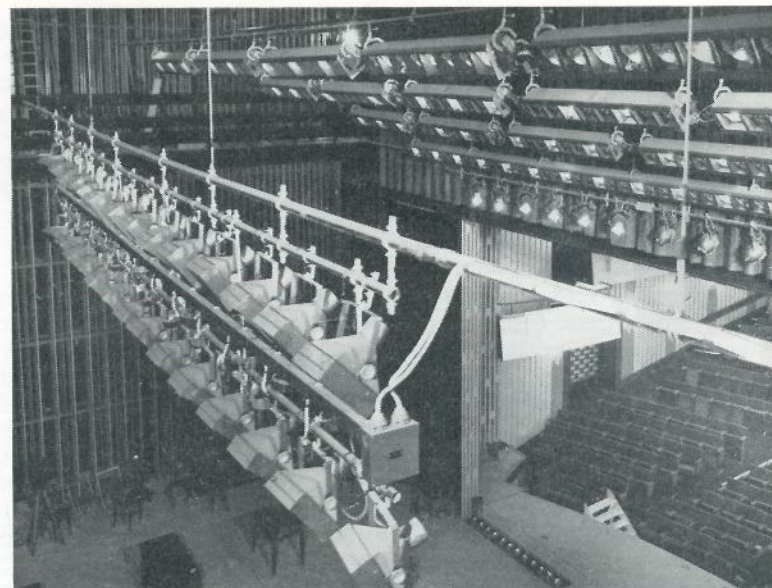
The opening of a brand new professional theatre in London's West End is surely a matter for rejoicing. Your editor attended the first night and is pleased to report in spite of the ominous warning "good viewing" given to his wife by a cloak-room attendant the evening was indeed a stimulating theatrical occasion.

A lot of trouble has been taken and money spent to provide London with a bang up-to-date theatre. Yet all is not as well as it should be. It is not because the theatre bears the "stigma" of an auditorium designed round a proscenium type of stage. True, this is enough to give the apostles of "vital theatre" a fit of hysterics, but in fact there is plenty of room for more than one proscenium stage of 1960 as compared with the previous latest West End model of 1931. What niggles at the Royalty is more subtle—a reference in the publicity to fluorescent lighting in the dressing rooms gives a hint to what has been missing—the guiding hand of the man of the theatre. Compare the photograph of the permanent stage lighting equipment (flooding beyond the No. 1 bar) with that, also by Strand, used by Mr. Joe Davis to light *The Visit*. The former is what West End theatres expect to own and the latter is more or less what today's productions demand.

Out front the right equipment has been installed but the positions are questionable. In part this is the result of traps the one-tier house always sets, and in this case, also, a ceiling position could not be provided to give a steeper angle for spot beams. At the sides of the auditorium (stage box area) there is a shortage of permanent positions and it is not difficult to visualise the usual makeshifts appearing.

The proscenium opening can be enlarged or reduced in width by moving-walls in front of the house tabs. Real imagination is here—to avoid the sense of let-down when tabs rise to reveal acres of false pros. Unfortunately, the perch lighting is not carried by these proscenium walls and also the walls are much too light in colour. This means that although there is a very nice recess behind these moving proscenium walls which could have carried the lanterns, the lanterns are in fact mounted in a more orthodox perch position well off-stage. The sides of the auditorium are not much help either, since the lighting positions, at any rate at present, are severely restricted.

What arises out of this, of course, is the question, "Whose fault is it that there are these targets for criticism?" I said earlier that what was needed was the guidance of a man of the theatre, but this guidance is by no means easily provided. Men of the theatre have a way of seeing the theatre through their eyes alone, and their ideas would cater for their particular techniques to the detriment of those requirements of others. In the "progressive" or "vital" theatre, call it what you will, there is no shortage of people to come forward and take your plan in hand, but when it comes to a practical non-experimental working theatre, the problem is rather different.



Royalty Theatre London, views from the flyrail.

(Top) Permanent stage lighting. (Bottom) Special rig for "The Visit."



Granted that architects sometimes—though not in this case—go completely mad when confronted with a building devoted to entertainment, it is nevertheless very different to know where to send them for advice. This problem exists in other countries, and, for example, the New Sydney Opera House may well be an architectural masterpiece as far as the exterior and dramatic impact is concerned, but the international opera house and theatre requirements for a building of this size and importance, *may* find themselves, *certainly will* in the eyes of this particular writer, severely pinched for space, because of the wonders of the building which confines them.

Where should architects go for advice? Well some of them come to the Strand Electric and in respect of the school and amateur stage, we can claim to have done a very good “our best” for our clients. Publications such as *Stage Planning*, the writings in TABS and the experience of our representatives have strengthened the hands of those who have pioneered a type of stage and equipment which enables good work to be done no matter how limited the funds available. In other forms of entertainment such as television and in certain buildings such as the Festival Hall, it has been possible for our few active and very vocal fighters to play a leading part in the formulation of practical working arrangements. Unfortunately, being associated with lighting, these gentlemen will of necessity come in rather too late to be of any great influence. They can only then act to provide a compromise. Further, this advice to some may be considered tainted, though we do pride ourselves on objective rather than subjective service in this respect.

No, the truth of the matter is that what is lacking is some formulation of the basic requirements for a normal practical working theatre. In America the Greater New York chapter of ANTA has a “Board of Standards and Planning for the Living Theatre”. On this board of standards are to be found names representing various walks of the theatre including people well known in stage lighting. The credit for this is probably due to the fact that the Chairman is Jo Mielziner, the designer and the Vice-Chairman is Ed Kook, who is as well known as a theatre enthusiast as he is as the head of a firm supplying stage lighting. This committee has provided a check-list for use when planning a living theatre, also suggestions for minimum lighting equipment in Broadway theatres (where there is normally none).

Surely in any theatre there should be a *minimum* lighting equipment which would enable a show to be put on without the acquisition of any further lighting. Officially, the installation which went into the Royalty Theatre and which is similar to that in most West End theatres provides this facility. Unfortunately, this suits the style of the 1930s when a spot batten and flood battens could be considered as adequate if not very exciting minimum lighting, but today something to give localised lighting in preference to all this flooding is absolutely essential.

In fact, what is lacking is the professional counterpart to the

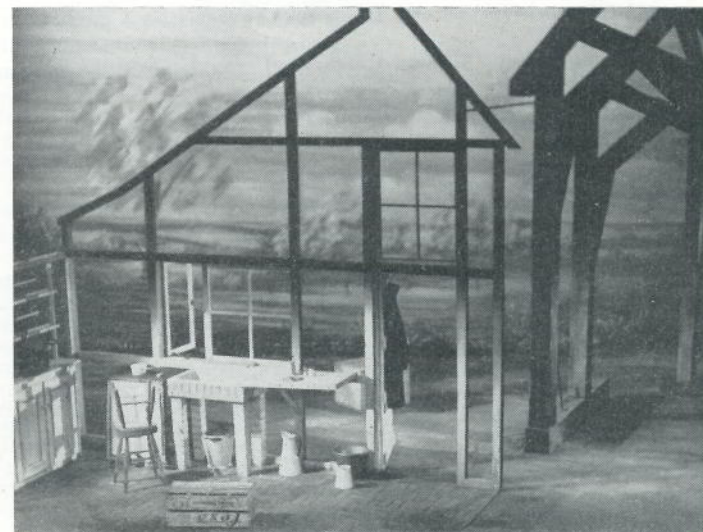
sort of thing that Strand would in any case put in any School or Little Theatre that came their way. It is very difficult to judge a stage lighting installation objectively, but there seems a great opportunity here to get together a committee to see that basic standards are set out for future building or for modernisation of existing buildings. These things are too important to be left to the fads and fancies of the man of the moment or of the traditional *laissez faire* so prevalent in certain circles of the theatre. Also, with all due respect to us in the Strand Electric, it is too important to be left to us alone.

* * *

LIBERACE AND ARNOLD WESKER

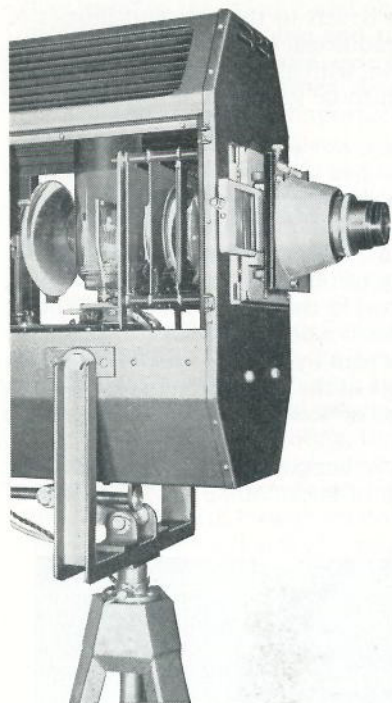
This journalistic title should warn readers of a news item. In fact the trills of the one and the trilogy of the other mark the launching of the new Patt. 152 effects projector. In the case of Liberace, Robert Nesbitt used the 4 kW lamp at the London Palladium to project a series of reproductions of Paris, as seen by famous artists, on a back projection screen which formed part of the décor. The two projectors were cross-faded to give a change of scene before the eyes of the audience.

At the Royal Court two 2 kW lamps are used, each covering just over half the backcloth (width of backcloth, 32 ft.). The join of



Setting for the last play in the Wesker Trilogy. The projected background can be seen behind the formal cutout scenery.

the two halves is not visible, though great care was necessary to ensure this as the slides are not particularly "busy" and show large expanses of sky. The slides are changed between scenes. Jocelyn Herbert painted her scenes as pictures 18 in. square and these were photographed in colour at the same angle as would be used when



front-projected ultimately from the fly galleries at the theatre. Distortion is corrected thereby.

In all, nine separate pairs of slides are used for the trilogy. It is very probable that most of the audience would be unaware that projection was used. The optical system of the Patt. 152 provides a well-defined sharp picture; lack of definition, etc., is entirely governed by the artist's style and taste. In general, one imagines that success in the theatre will come from non-naturalistic projections, whereas in television photographs of real life backgrounds satisfy the realism of the camera better. Incidentally the Patt. 152 was used in the opening programme from the new B.B.C. Television Centre where a number have been supplied for optical effects and background projection.

CORRESPONDENCE

Children's Theatres

THE EDITOR,

DEAR SIR,

Several of your readers, having read Catherine Hollingworth's exciting article on Aberdeen Children's Theatre in your last issue, are under the impression that this is the only Children's Theatre in the country. Without detracting from the pioneer work going on in Aberdeen I should like to point out that there are over forty professional and amateur Children's Theatres in the country. Generally speaking, the professional Theatres are touring companies and the amateur ones are based on a particular locality.

Of this total, only Rhyl and Aberdeen possess Children's Theatre buildings at the moment, but it is difficult to believe that London and Birmingham will be without one for very much longer.

Buildings, whether they are to be Theatres or Child Centres or a combination of both, are badly needed and a step towards meeting this need was taken by the British Children's Theatre Association last Easter when it elected a Work Party to study the requirements of such buildings. This study will take some time to complete, but it will take much longer, I am afraid, to find the money necessary to put the plans to a practical use.

Yours faithfully,

MICHAEL PUGH.

Secretary,

British Children's Theatre Association.

* * *

THE EDITOR,

DEAR SIR,

The very interesting and stimulating article in the last issue of TABS on Children's Theatres, prompted me to wonder if your readers knew of the existence of a Children's Theatre in North Wales.

The Rhyl Children's Theatre Club, formed in 1945, has 200 boys and girls between the ages of 9 and 18; an adult group, the Rhyl Theatre Club; and a newly formed Welsh Theatre Club which presents plays entirely in Welsh.

The present headquarters, the Little Theatre in Abbey Street, seats only 50, but it is a complete theatre in miniature with foyer, canteen and dressing rooms. Plays of all kinds have been presented there, ranging from *Emil and the Detectives* to Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

After fifteen years' existence, often struggling against overwhelming odds, the local education authority has come forward with the offer of an old school which the Club hopes to convert into an up-to-date theatre, seating 200, with a café and all the usual workshops. Total costs of conversion will be in the region of £12,000 and parents and friends of the Club are loaning sums of money, free of interest for ten years.

The local theatre, the Queen's, where the Club have performed their annual pantomime for the past fifteen years, has been closed and so the need for obtaining larger premises has become a race against time.

Apart from the production of plays, weekend drama schools, tours abroad, and record recitals, numerous other activities are arranged by a members' committee. Each Saturday morning "Saturday Theatre" attracts the youngsters not wishing to swell the ranks of the Odeon Cinema Club members. At Saturday Theatre, plays are composed and lessons in make-up, producing, lighting, etc., take place. The Club is a voluntary organisation with parents, teachers and other adults interested in child welfare forming the committee of management. The local education authority make a grant of £81 per annum, all other funds being raised by bazaars, whist drives, etc. As soon as the new theatre becomes a reality the Club should be self-supporting and able to be even more ambitious in its wide programme of interesting young people in the adventure of the theatre.

J. HOLROYD.

The Little Theatre, Rhyl.



Fig. 1. View from stage. Note control room windows at rear. Prompt side is for lighting, other side for future TV video control, etc.

UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES

A Proscenium Stage with a Difference

by Dennis Irving

Most readers of TABS who follow theatrical ventures outside the United Kingdom will be aware of the existence of the Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust, whose initial director, Mr. Hugh Hunt, has just returned to England.

Apart from presentation of various forms of theatrical performances throughout Australia, one of the original aims of the Theatre Trust was to foster education in this field, and the most recent manifestation of this is known as the National Institute of Dramatic Art, which name is in these days naturally condensed to its initials NIDA.

NIDA was established early in 1959 at the University of New South Wales, under the joint auspices of the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the University. At that time, the University was only ten years old, and possessed only one small and poorly equipped building which could be called a theatre. However, a considerable amount of construction was in

progress on the site of an ex-racecourse at Kensington (suburb of Sydney), and amongst the plans was one for an auditorium intended for use as a science lecture theatre, University Great Hall and for similar functions, but not as a theatre.

The founding of NIDA meant that new demands would be made on this building, and modifications were made accordingly. At this stage, it was far too late to think of changing the shape of the auditorium or of the stage. The auditorium (Fig. 1) was planned to seat 995 people, 630 on the stalls level and the rest in the single balcony. The stage opening was 51 ft. and the depth from curtain line to back wall only 21 ft. There was no stage tower and no provision for stage lighting other than overhead auditorium lanterns in fixed wooden panels which formed a ceiling to the stage.

It was clear that the theatre could never be well suited to the presentation of naturalistic plays in box sets, and it was decided therefore to make a virtue of necessity and to make it as good as possible for the presentation of all other kinds of plays, particularly those whether classical or modern, which need an open stage and a fluid acting area.

Since no proper flying would in any case be possible, a large domed plaster cyclorama was built, 75 ft. wide and curving forward on each side and overhead for 10 ft. The radius of the top curve is 5 ft. (since the total height of the cyclorama was only 24 ft.), and the radius of the side curve is 10 ft. This presented a nice problem where

Fig. 2. Catwalks and bridges above stage. Top of cyclorama on right.



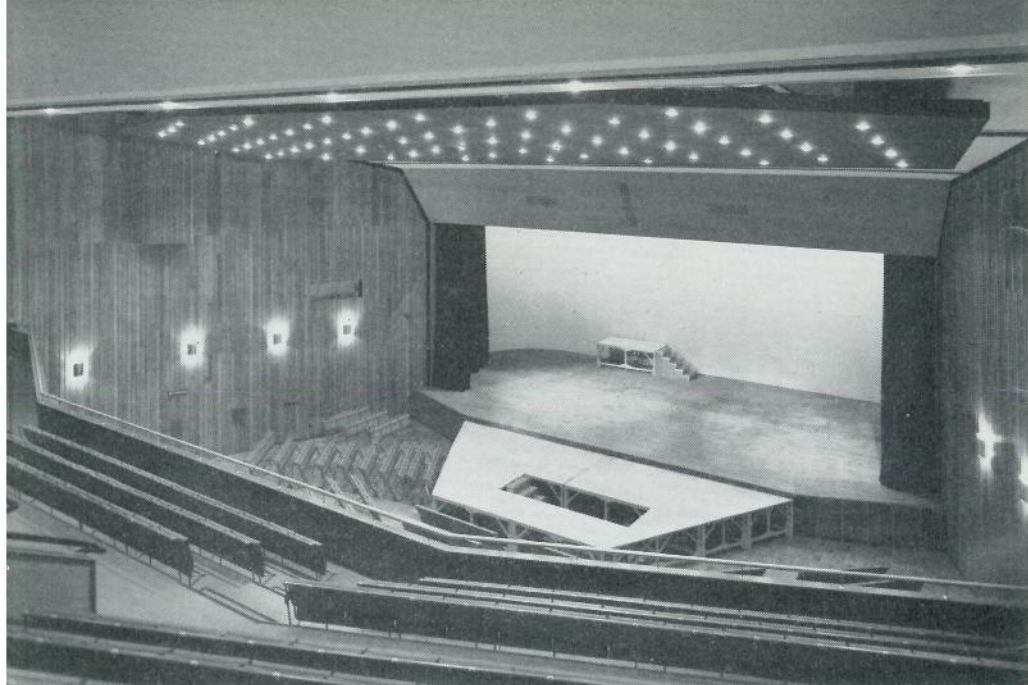


Fig. 3. Lighting operator's view of stage. Temporary forestage in position. House lighting is by mirror-backed 150-watt recessed lamps.

the two curves met in the top corner. Sand was mixed in the paint used on the cyclorama to give texture and depth.

It was considered that borders or ceilings would be merely a bother, and of course the idea of a fixed wooden ceiling had to be abolished. The grid is therefore masked by two permanent catwalks, faced on the front and bottom, which carry lighting for the cyclorama and the downstage area respectively (Fig. 2).

In order to provide more flexibility for various types of performance, and also to present "three quarter round" productions, a temporary forestage is included in the building (Fig. 3). This can be used in

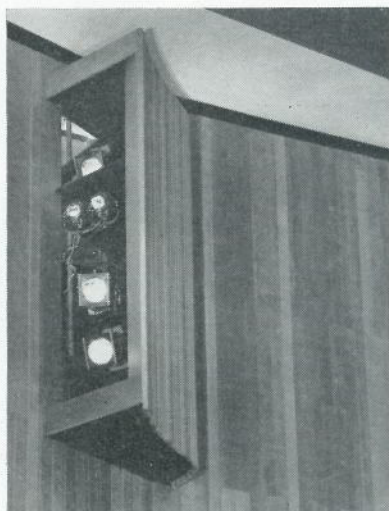


Fig. 4. Prompt side lighting boom—shades of Stratford-on-Avon Memorial Theatre.



Fig. 5. Control room covers have yet to be fitted to rack—the show was more important.

many forms, but the maximum size is 32 ft. wide at the rear, 16 ft. wide at front and 16 ft. deep.

The shallowness of the main stage, together with the relatively large forestage dictate the use of a more than average amount of FOH equipment. There is a boom each side of the auditorium carrying a mixture of Patt. 93 and Patt. 23 Profile Spots (Fig. 4). In addition, there are two dropped sections in the roof, each containing a bridge, from which overhead FOH gear can readily be set. Patt. 93, Pageants and Patt. 76 Acting Areas are employed here (Fig. 2).

No footlights are used, these being to some extent replaced by a number of Patt. 23s set in recesses in the balcony front, although their low angle prevents them being used when the cyclorama is lit for "murky" scenes. They would, however, come into their own for a line up of chorus girls.

It is obvious from the foregoing that the control equipment plays a large part in the effective use of this particular set-up. It was hoped that an electro-mechanical system PR/LM could have been used, with the undoubted advantages of a system having "inertia". Unfortunately, it was not possible to find suitable space for the PR dimmer bank, and so the decision was made to use an SR Preset System.

Due to the intended flexibility of the building as a whole, a cord and jack patch panel is used, which reduces the number of control ways required to 72, but requires some of the dimmers to have

good variable load performance. This is hard to achieve in an economical manner with saturable reactors, even when using pilot reactors, and in this case the problem was solved by fitting all the dimmers over 1kW with tapping switches.* A multi-pole changeover switch enables the house lights to be controlled from the stage dimmer system.

The control desk, patch panel and dimmer rack are all situated in a single room at the rear of the balcony, which, joy of joys, has a *huge* viewing window (Fig. 5). A catwalk in the roof runs from above the control room, past the two auditorium light bridges to the No. 1 stage bridge.

It would be no use giving a list of what equipment is used where, as all is changed around from show to show—indeed, during the opening play the bottom cyclorama lighting was provided by Patt. 76 Acting Areas on their sides!

For students of statistics, here is an inventory of all equipment supplied:

Lanterns

- 16 Strand Patt. 93 Mirror Spots.
- 17 Strand Patt. 58 Pageant Lanterns.
- 14 Strand Patt. 76 Acting Area Lanterns.
- 28 Strand Patt. 23 Baby Mirror Spots.
- 6 Strand Patt. 60M Medium Angle Floods.
- 12 Strand Patt. 60 Wide Angle Floods.
- 4 Reiche & Vogel Horizon Lanterns.
- 6 Strand Patt. 123 Fresnel Spots.

Control

72 channel Strand System SR Preset,* with fifty 1,000-watt untapped reactors, fourteen 2,000-watt reactors with tapping switches and eight 3,000-watt reactors with tapping switches.

There are 100 outlets or groups of paralleled outlets, fed from the dimmer rack by means of a cord and jack patch panel, which incorporates an ammeter for load checks, and changeover switching for house-light dimming facility.

The building opened in May this year with a performance of *Green Pastures*, which gave ample opportunity to use the cyclorama to good effect. A single Patt. 23 with a cloud slide proved to be extremely effective in one particular scene.

In case anyone should doubt the necessity for 72 control ways, our Sydney agent assures us that every one was in use for this play, and adds that the cues were such that only an SR preset board or a console could have handled them reliably.

The lighting and production for *Green Pastures* were carried out by Professor Robert Quentin of NIDA, and our thanks go to him for the background information used in this article.

* *Note:* The Strand transistorised saturable reactor system known as L.C. had not then been introduced.

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