

TABS

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CONTENTS

Editorial : Changes in London	2
Changes in Toronto	3
Autumn Lecture Programme	3
A Notable Jubilee	4
The Conference of Adaptable Theatres—by Disley Jones	5
Correspondence	15
An American Adaptable Theatre	16
Stages in America—by Percy Corry	18
Book Review—by Elidir Davies	32

Changes in London

That curious feature of our theatre work, the hire stock of property fittings, will by now have left the West End for Kennington. While those who know and love this odd collection will regret its departure, we cannot **but recognise the logic** of it. Many a visitor has nearly taken fright at what appeared to be an old fittings or curiosity shop and failed to discern the stage and television lighting engineers hidden behind.

By the end of October the premises at No. 29 King Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2. will be converted into a compact reception and demonstration area for all enquiries wherein our customers can discuss all their lighting problems and order any equipment both sale or hire. No longer will the customer be expected to show redoubtable stamina and navigational skill along an endless confusion of passages and staircases. Those who wish to select "props" can still do so from classified albums of large photographs or visit the hire stores at Kennington where the stock can be seen. The Sales stores and its counter service for Cinemoid will also be removed to Kennington, an area easier of access than Covent Garden for those who like to collect their own goods by car.

Kennington is quite a Strand Electric township for sited there are also the recently extended Lantern Works and the new Electronics and Transformer Works. The Switchboard Works however remains at Gunnersbury.

Changes in Toronto

Our Canadian Company, Strand Electric Limited has now moved to larger premises at 261, Davenport Road, Toronto 5. (Telephone 9255108) where there will be a demonstration theatre and other greatly improved facilities.

Autumn Lecture Programme

Demonstration Theatre, 29 King Street, London, W.C.2.

The demonstrations will all take place at 7 p.m. (doors open 6.40 p.m.) and admission is free but by ticket available on receipt of application with **stamped addressed envelope to the above.**

Monday October 30th.

"Lighting the Scene"

Recorded lantern slide version with opportunity to ask questions afterwards.

Friday October 27th and Friday November 3rd.

Technical lecture in two parts (not bookable separately) with slides and demonstrations by Frederick Bentham and L. W. Leggett. The lectures will also include demonstrations of some entirely new dimmer setups and control systems.

Friday November 17th.

"Stage Lighting 1961"

Talk by Frederick Bentham with demonstrations.

Note: Demonstrations to private parties, of not less than 24 in number, can be given by prior arrangement, but only after November 17th.

Recorded Lectures

Recorded Lecture No. 1. "Lighting the Scene"

Recorded Lecture No. 2. "Planning and Lighting the Stage"

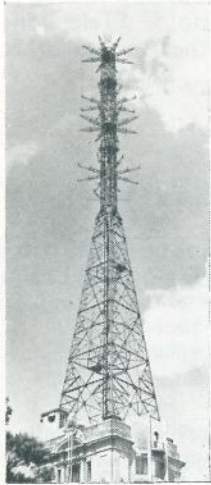
Recorded Lecture No. 3.* "Stages and their Lighting"

(Stephen Joseph, Percy Corry and Frederick Bentham talking together).

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.

*In preparation, to be available early 1962.

A NOTABLE JUBILEE



The Radio Show, which has just closed in London, reminds one that it is exactly 25 years since Alexandra Palace went on the air. To the BBC belongs the credit for the first regular high definition television transmission in the world. Anyone who remembers the earlier thirty line low definition system will know what a vast step forward 1936 represented technically. But the adventure was not by any means purely technical, for the BBC pioneers launched into a variety of types of programme at Alexandra Palace where most of today's programmes had their exciting birth.

The strand Electric direct operated dimmer switchboards used in the two studios at Alexandra Palace gave very crude control compared with the instruments of today.

It is probably fair to claim that the rise of the Lighting Supervisor to his present key position under the "Hands Off" techniques is largely attributable to the present day Strand lighting controls which enable modern camera development to be exploited to the full. The arrival of Commercial Television increased the demand for these Strand Control Systems which are now used exclusively by all the independent programme companies in the U.K. and by many of the Studios abroad including the latest NWDR Studios in Hamburg.

ADAPTABLE STAGES AND INFLEXIBLE MINDS!

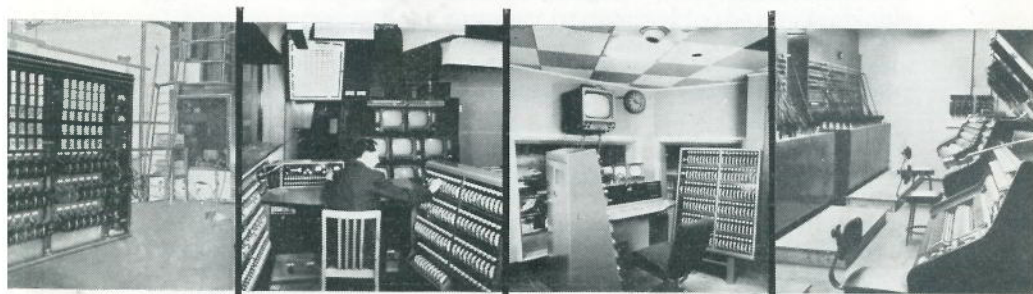
by Disley Jones

Mr. Disley Jones, the designer, made a provocative contribution to the last day of this conference which prompted your editor to invite these impressions and reflections on the event.*

It is naturally difficult to report on a Conference like that of the A.B.T.T. without some mixed feelings and conflicting loyalties. In the first place one has to do homage to the small band of enthusiasts who succeeded in organising the whole thing in the small space of time permitted—no mean feat. But at the same time, the lack of thought and preparation was only too evident and lamentable. Above all else, for an International Conference, there was a recurring element of parochialism which I think would have been eliminated if there had been time for some sort of internal airing of views beforehand. This meant that most of the foreign delegates witnessed long stretches of tennis play between rival Laputans who had unhappily not had the chance of serving a few volleys at each other before. **It might be said that some of our German friends were inclined to remain a little aloof and smug over such little affrays, their attitude towards open staging being somewhat on the lines of the Soviet attitude to non-classical ballet—“ We know about it, we've tried it, and nobody wants it.”** I fear that, in any case, there is little likelihood of their returning to Germany with any new gospels to spread. They have some very substantial reasons for remaining smug, albeit retaining my personal envy and admiration.

To return to the planning of procedure, the greatest fault here was in the grouping of the papers. What relevance and comparative interest there was proved to be purely fortuitous. Few juxtapositions hit it off quite so well as that of Mr. Michael Scott and Mr. Eric Jordan, the former with long and harrowing tales of his battles with the Dublin authorities, laced with one or two delicious anecdotes, the latter by comparison with his opposite numbers in Dublin, a bastion of understanding. But in most instances the arrangement of the papers made for uneven and unsatisfactory discussion. The placing of Mr. de Gaetani with his exposition on the Loeb Theatre, whilst possibly making an appropriately polite gesture to one of the most far travelling delegates, was to my mind a fatal mistake and the resultant discussion uninspired as there was nothing to set the theatre in question against. In fact, of course, all the papers relating to actual examples should have been grouped together. The time lag between Mr. Gaetani and Herr Brundig with a somewhat over-powering exposition of his theatres, including that at Kassel, was

* The AITT third biennial congress sponsored by the Association of British Theatre Technicians held at the National Film Theatre, South Bank, London, from June 25 to 30, to discuss "The Planning of Adaptable Theatres with special reference to Civic Theatres and to Theatres under 1,000 capacity."



BBC Alexandra Palace

BBC Television Centre

ATV Elstree

CFTO—TV Canada

far too great. Herr Brundig incidentally was, apart from Mr. Herbert Marshall, the only person to produce some really stimulating illustrations. I must confess to being bored with snaps of light battens and a recurring sepia sort of picture which illustrated the worst facets of the Stratford, Ontario, Theatre. Likewise, speakers like Mr. Wood and Mr. Kenny should have been placed on the first afternoon. The differing attitudes *towards* the theatre would have proved much more profitable if grouped together. One wishes, of course, that we could now see the whole thing done again in the light of experience. Let us hope that others will profit by our mistakes, and that if we have another chance we will do it better and bigger.



(Left) Jean Mourier president of the International Association of Theatre Technicians. (Right) Norman Marshall, chairman of the conference.

But what have we learnt from all this mass of information which was collected together, however muddled its presentation? I can only attempt to correlate some of the impressions left on my mind.

Monday

The introductory speeches of Messrs. Peter Hall and Michel St. Denis did not prove to be quite as stimulating as one would have hoped. One was left only with the old sad feeling that a little self-criticism would be worth a ton of enthusiasm from Mr. Hall, and one felt an unfortunate tendency in his speech towards an awareness of reportage, which in fact it got, with the all too familiar emphasis on the obvious. How refreshing, if instead of running on about the

origins of naturalism in the theatre via Ibsen, he had told us why, after several disastrous attempts at pseudo-Beerbohm direction at Stratford-on-Avon, he personally had decided to reject such approaches. Alas that this skirting of essentials became a key-note of the Conference, the constant fear of attacking individuals or of revealing personal weakness; an all too obvious theatre neurosis. One bold stroke of self-analysis on Mr. Hall's part to set an example for others would have proved invaluable. M. St. Denis seemed to take over in this somewhat subdued key and the volatile sense of humour for which he is renowned was below par. How-



Michel Saint-Denis; "The theatre must be more than just an entertainment. We must make it one of the necessities of life."

ever, it is always refreshing to re-encounter a man who has all the merits of a fanatic with few of the faults, because it is of such people with their lack of sensationalism but devotion to art and work that one has some hope of the theatre being perpetuated. At this point, it would have been splendid to hear Mr. Kenny's cloud-cuckoo paper, followed by Mr. Wood on the difficulties of open-staging (how embarrassed he appeared to be by them!) and for

my money topped off with a short defence of "verismo" by Franco Zeffereilli! That would have been a day and half—but I digress. I hesitate to elaborate on the criticisms of Mr. Kenny's paper I made at the Conference, but again, like Mr. Hall, when he did speak on Wednesday morning, we heard only about what he would like to do, if he could, with a built-in cover-up for his inability to design costumes, but if he had been placed on the first day we would at least have earlier got the important dissension established between the two chief opposing factors of the theatre, and, given someone of equal stature like Zeffereilli, the whole dreary argument might have been aired and put away for later reference.

Instead we had a somewhat academic paper from Dr. Southern followed by Mr. de Gaetani reading a paper for Mr. Robert Chapman on the Loeb Theatre. As I have already stated, this particular paper really should have come much later, when Mr. de Gaetani's "Hoover Salesmanship" delivery would have proved more stimulating. As it was, he had to sell his wares to an audience which at that point had hardly thought of buying. Mr. Percy Corry got up simply to tell us that he wouldn't have bought it at any cost, let alone for the \$2 million quoted. So the first day was rounded off with a somewhat desultory discussion, but with the tone set too much for personal assertion.

Tuesday

The second day at least brought together a good handful of comparable papers on theatre plans under the unequalled chairmanship of Mr. Alfred Emmet. Mr. Branson, obviously a man of many parts, gave us a lucid and engrossing study of the development of his plans for the Questors Theatre, adventurous, experimental, yet touched with the sweet voice of reason, and in its small way coming nearest to solution of any of the English papers presented. Mr. Miller's community theatres in America certainly seemed dull by comparison. These two gentlemen were followed by Mr. Moro with the Nottingham plans which I had eagerly awaited, having had grapevine news of their merit. I propose to say no more than that I have the greatest doubts about them, I can only hope to be proved wrong. In the afternoon Herr Theil took us on a dispiriting tour of how things are better ordered in Germany. Dispiriting that is, because such information seems to me to fall constantly on stony ground. Partly because in Britain at the moment, there is absolutely no governing body to endorse something so simple as the German basic specifications for building theatres. Served only by a useless,

"Search for true theatre?" — Sean Keeny (centre), Stephen Joseph (left), and Derek Martinus (right), in conversation.



unenterprising corpse called an Arts Council which has never lifted a finger for fear of amputation, we have no Government department to undertake anything so essential.

Then came the nightmare of Mr. English and the Cannon Hill theatre, or so it seems to me, for this was the next most frightening experience to the Loeb of the whole week. After some thought on the matter, I can only assume that Mr. English's interest in the theatre is as esoteric as his opening jovial remark that the heart of the English theatre lies in the provinces. This misguided and muddled thought was a prevailing one throughout the Conference. I hasten to add, a typical product of the unfortunate inferiority complex from which provincial groups and amateurs constantly suffer. I can only see in his plans a gigantic aristocratic and autocratic revenge on the theatre in general, serving no truly altruistic purpose whatsoever in spite of his theories on education, and I can only hope that he will seriously revise his ideas on the evidence of such buildings as that at Kassel before it is too late. The most unforgivable assertion to my mind was that of its use for lyric theatre, when on his own admission, in reply to a suitably angry young architect named Peter Morgan, no real thought had been given to acoustics or accommodation for traditional scenic equipment. Mr. Morgan, incidentally, was the only person to seriously question the possibility of good acoustics in adaptable theatres in general and raised the much overlooked difference between the frequencies of a 120-piece orchestra and the human voice. He also contributed a few appropriately sharp comments concerning architectural shapes dominating theatre planning.

It was the manifestation of Mr. English which later in my own paper caused me to remark on the general lack of a sense of worldliness in theatre planning. Building theatres today with no regard for the theatrical traffic of tomorrow can only be compared with certain aspects of current policy on British highways. Perhaps he, in company with others, sees as the only future for the theatre that of the community, as in America, but it is surely short-sighted and pretty insular to make no provision for others. I can only see this community development as exemplified by the Loeb as a withdrawal and a sign of defeat. Whilst protagonists of this view maintain that they are integrating the theatre into the life of the community, what they fail to see is that by failing to resolve the problems of Union demands and becoming amateur or semi-professional or what you will, they are themselves widening the gap. This particularly touchy subject of Amateur and Professional was indeed brought up by Mr. de Gaetani, who feared the use of the word amateur as a derogatory term, but implied that no importance should be attached to whether a theatre was amateur or professional in the course of A.B.T.T. procedure. The subject was superficially resolved by Mr. Herbert Marshall, who made the usual and accepted definitions between love and money. For myself, I feel that there always has and always

will be a feeling of armed neutrality on this matter, as both factions continually make despicable use of the other's weaknesses. Mr. Hall in his opening speech referred to the private war that goes on between all theatre people, a war of which we are all well aware. The distressing fact to me is that people take this for granted and furthermore capitalise on it. If ever an art needed rationalising it is that of the theatre, instead of which anyone who happens to come along is given all ears.

Wednesday

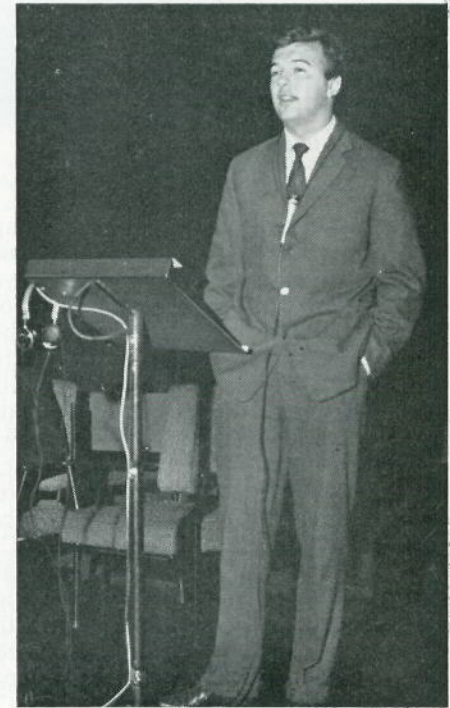
How apparent this weakness is was made abundantly clear by the advent of Mr. Kenny at the beginning of the Wednesday session. It is while listening to a speaker like Mr. Kenny that one begins to wonder why certain people work in the theatre at all when what they are so obviously seeking can be found in other ways of life. The British theatre is so full of renegades and neurotics, lost causes and vaulting ambitions that I can only feel acute embarrassment when they are shown in public. Mr. Kenny's search for true theatre in an empty space with actors in dark uniforms indicates a state of neurosis only comparable with an actor friend of mine who would sit up night after night listening to Music Concrète because he felt that eventually he would understand the words of the wordless songs that had been created with the use of inanimate objects. Needless to say, it was not long before he committed suicide. Mr. Kenny is guilty of a much worse kind of *felo-de-se* because he would drag so many others and our theatres with him. I don't consider his "Bombs in Proscenium Theatres" either clever or funny. Mental anarchy is considerably more dangerous than physical violence. Yet it is only when people actually throw the bombs that we lock them up. Mr. Kenny's diatribe was followed rather inappropriately by papers on lighting by Messrs. Pilbrow and Bentham, the good old rival firms. Mr. Pilbrow started his paper off with a few snaps of the Lake District, rather dark ones, which gave at least one distinguished person a chance to slip away, and went on to give us a fairly concise picture of the non-development of theatre lighting equipment. Mr. Bentham (still smarting from one or two cracks against his electronic boards made by Mr. Hall on the Monday morning) took the stand with his own particular brand of bonhomie and enlarged (unintentionally) on this singular lack of progress. I think it was a great pity that we had to wait until the evening for a much better act entitled "From Gas Light to Electricity", a quite brilliant sketch which he performed for us in his own little theatre in King Street, and worthy of inclusion in any West End revue. Unfortunately, the interpreters were left floundering for some time trying to explain to foreign delegates the truly great black-out line, "I leave it to you, Ladies and Gentlemen, to decide which is Brand X." Mr. Bentham also showed us how, if you put enough light on it, you can make a black curtain white, accompanied by suitably religious organ music. Needless to say, this whole entertainment was rapturously received

by supporters and back-benchers alike, along with the drinks provided and proved a light relief only equalled by the showing one afternoon of my favourite Marx Brothers excerpt from *A Night at the Opera*, with Harpo running up the backcloth. On the serious side, however, Mr. Bentham had much to say about architects and their lack of interest in lighting equipment, and one or two quite obvious points about the difficulties of lighting Theatre in the Round were well illustrated. Mr. Peter Wood, who was not to know that Mr. Bentham had made these points, merely emphasised them in practical terms with reference to Ontario the next day. It was an alarming and peculiar feature of this entire conference that few of the speakers bothered to put in an appearance apart from reading their papers, so that several points were quite unnecessarily duplicated.

The Wednesday afternoon session turned out to be the aforementioned and interesting duo of Messrs. Michael Scott and Eric

Peter Hall—"If cinemas were run like most theatres, they would go out of business."

Jordan. The redoubtable Mr. Scott disclosed the simple and conventional plans for rebuilding the Abbey, albeit arrived at with much difficulty, incorporating a new "Peacock" theatre. The Abbey does not appear to have any thought at the moment of forsaking its reputation for good old box set realism. The difficulties with authorities in Dublin, however, made a good foil for Mr. Jordan, who gave us a nicely illustrated lecture on the horrors of asphyxiation and panic. To Mr. Jordan fell the distinction of arousing a hitherto somewhat dormant German interest and before long we were in the thick of an illuminating if somewhat morbid discussion on safety regulations. This discussion was adjourned and resumed the following afternoon for a time, light relief being provided by the appearance of a "Fire Case", one small black suitcase which Mr. Gaetani had presented to Mr. Jordan some months previously for consultation, appraisal and contribution. Unfortunately, Mr. Jordan had not





An international conversation about Fire regulations? M. L. Amy and Dr. G. Dederbock.



Charles Bristow and Eric Jordan—an LCC plan for Sadler's Wells?



A group of members of the ABTT—Left to Right: Dorothea Alexander, Gordon Hewlett, Francis Reid and Dr. Richard Southern.

appeared to have got the message and it had rested in his office un-inspected and unwanted until that week, when it had been transferred to the hands of an equally mystified French Safety Officer. I fear the exact significance of the whole thing escaped me and many other people. I am a little worried, however, as to where the little black case is now or whether it has been forced to lead a life of its own somewhere, yet another lost cause in the history of the theatre, but I suspect that it will turn up to surprise someone else at the next Biennial Conference. I look forward to its reappearance, little symbol that it is. Mr. Jordan, however, did make it abundantly clear how important safety precautions are, but I fear kept himself covered by announcing his "unofficial" capacity at the outset. Why was he unofficial? Why hadn't the L.C.C. endowed him with the responsibility of taking a practical stand and even given him something tangible to offer us? It was all, alas, a little too much out of the textbook. Who, I ask, *is* going to take a stand about this whole matter here, and first of all make Theatre Fire and Safety Precautions (a) one complete country-wide department, and (b) bring some sort of intelligent application to them? What is this nonsense of leaving such matters to local authorities? Why can a little theatre in Aldeburgh have bars of uncaged Patt. 23's strung across the heads of the audience, whilst at Hammersmith a special permit is required to temporarily install two such lamps in relatively safe positions? There was a great deal of skirmishing around this subject, but little was achieved other than bringing the matter into the open for further observation. Dr. Peter Goff from Hamburg contributed a few further grisly details, but then made it abundantly clear that in Germany at least they do everything possible to facilitate performance rather than impede it.

Thursday

Thursday started off with Mr. Peter Wood. I have already made one or two references to his contribution and I have little more to say than that it was refreshing to hear at this juncture the opinions of someone who had to work in a theatre, and who was able to offer a few pertinent criticisms of arena theatre in the light of his experiences at Ontario. He was followed by the dauntless Mr. Stephen Joseph, who brought a more reasoned exposition of arena stage than most of his colleagues have done to my knowledge. At any rate, he left me fervently hoping that he would get his theatre, because it appeared to me that he had taken the trouble to find out exactly *why* he wanted it; an unusual procedure it seemed to me in the light of other examples. Also he was more unassuming as regards his own work and more self-critical in the way that I would have liked to have heard others speak. Mr. Derek Martinus, who followed later in the morning, was far too partisan about the Pembroke Theatre, Croydon. Whereas one must have every sympathy for the difficulties under which experimental groups like that at the Pembroke work, it seems nothing short of blind devotion to refer to the results as "intimate and inviting", nor does it seem either useful or intelligent to harangue the fire authorities too much. Having myself been practically crushed to death in an attempt to reach the bar in that theatre I can well understand their concern. At that point, scrabbling through the impedimenta of illusion across the "stage", I remember musing on how far we had come from the sacredness of the Kabuki bamboo platform and again wondering how much thought the arena protagonists are giving to this basic theatre relationship—the distinction between stage and audience. Bastard

art though the theatre be, I am constantly dismayed to hear identifications with football stadiums, circuses, churches, anything in fact rather than the unique implication of the simple word "stage". If a building is to be used for such a variety of purposes, then the German identification of "Multiple Hall" seems to be an ideal one, but a theatre remains in my mind as a building in which comedy, drama and opera or lyric drama are performed. A circus belongs in a tent or in the glorious atmosphere of buildings such as the "Medrano" or the "Cirque d'Hiver" and although arena productions have been staged in the "Medrano", they are to my mind as aesthetically out of place there as in a proscenium theatre. The present tendency to absorb from all sources in order to create a new theatre might well be governed by a little more selective thinking and a more considered precept as to what "theatre" means. The present condemnation of traditional principles might well lead to disastrous conclusions unless there is an underlying philosophy of approach, and it seems little use talking and talking about new buildings and new forms unless the psychology of the potential audience is taken into account. It is surely a well-known fact that theatre appreciation rises and falls with the temperament of the nations concerned. I shall again be called fatalistic, but I do not believe that you can force anyone to do anything, and I am not even sure that you can educate people into the theatre. All arts are spiritual or aesthetic needs, determined by the peoples themselves, and one would do well to examine, for instance, the enormous upward trend in musical appreciation in Britain over the last twenty years, as opposed to the decline in drama, before coming to a summary conclusion that it is only a new form that is lacking.

Thursday continued with Herr Brundig, sandwiched between Messrs. Joseph and Martinus, who could hardly have left any doubt in anyone's mind that the Germans still believe in impressing their public into submission. Although it is apparent that there is little adventure in the State Theatre of Western Germany and that new writing is at present subjected to a salon existence, the fact remains that they are holding an audience for the stock international repertory of old and new plays. This might be accounted for in part by the sheer impressiveness of some of the new buildings. It is an interesting fact that audiences will flock to a new building regardless of what they see there. Certain dance companies have found vast audiences in the Festival Hall in London and transferred to empty houses in the West End.

Friday

Friday produced a miscellany of speakers commencing with Mr. Ian Albery, who very lucidly put forward a lot of truisms concerning theatre finances and audience attendance. I contributed my own plea for more rational thinking and there were some very interesting papers of a more technical nature from Messrs. Goodwin, Ackerman and Leblanc on Sound, Temporary Seating and Lighting respectively. They were followed by a particularly interesting and nicely

illustrated paper on the Indian Theatre by Mr. Herbert Marshall. Mr. Marshall was unique in being able to present a case where one man (himself) had been able to avert a series of disastrous errors in planning, not through architectural ability but rather through sheer all-round unbiased theatrical knowledge. Also he brought a note of worldliness to the proceedings, as also did Mr. Cuttler from South Africa, pin-pointing, however unintentionally, the obvious fact that new nations and régimes always tend to exploit cultural advantages for propaganda purposes and that the psychological conditions of such régimes generate a need. Mr. Marshall referred several times during the course of the conference to the Aklopkov Realist Theatre in Moscow and also to his own early "Unity Theatre" work on such productions as *Waiting for Lefty*. He did not tell us how vital a part the Aklopkov Theatre is playing in the Soviet today, if indeed it is still in existence. He certainly would not appear to have altered the Indian ideas of theatre relationships in spite of his theories regarding audience integration. Apron or not, the Indian, like his Japanese counterpart, would seem to be holding out for a very positive distinction between actor and spectator.

From these notes and observations, I think it should be apparent that this Conference was rather more than worth-while. Judged only as a springboard for discussion and further enquiry it would amply have served a purpose. Twenty-eight papers were read and some sixty speakers took part. Ill-reported by the Press, ill-attended by the profession, it was nevertheless for those of us who sat it out, an encouraging, rewarding and above all else—stimulating experience.

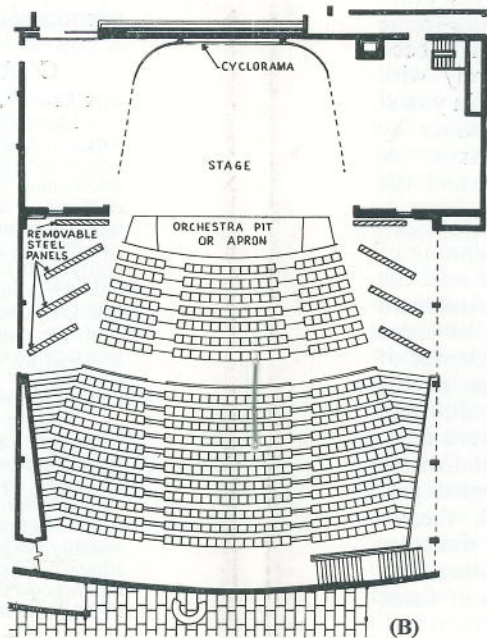
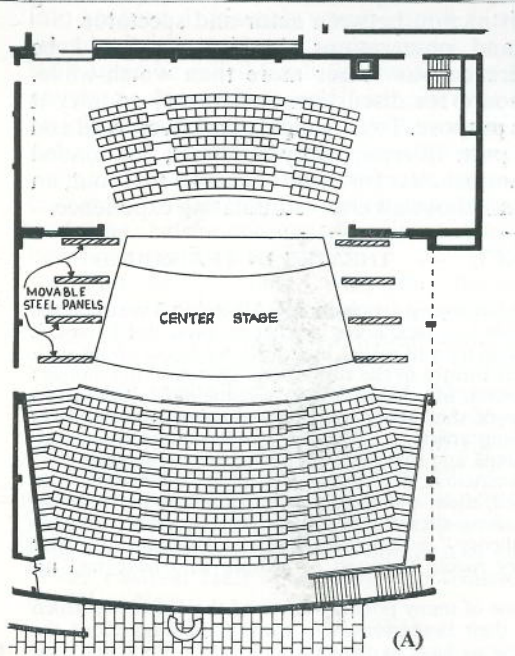
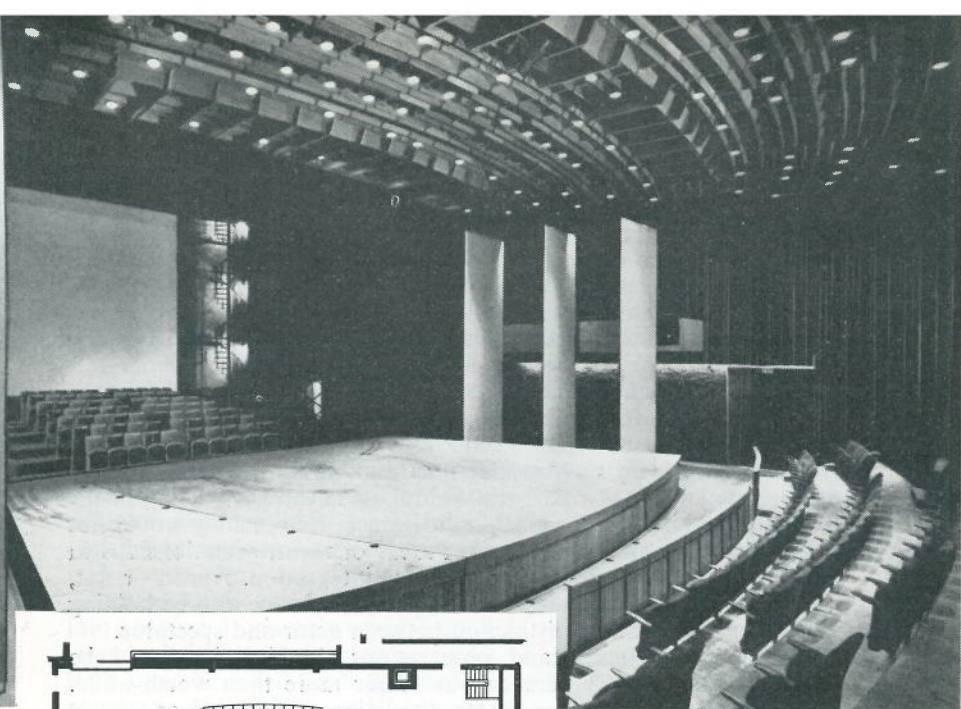
CORRESPONDENCE — THEATRE IN THE ROUND

THE EDITOR, DEAR SIR,

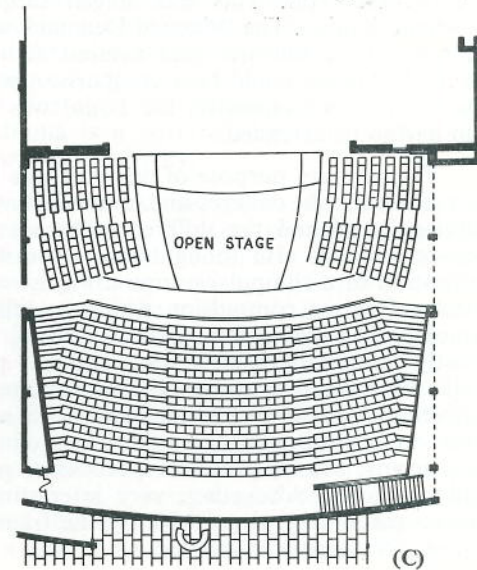
I was very glad to see the interesting article by Ian Albery on Theatre in the Round. And it is, perhaps, unfair to pick holes in what he says. But I think it very important that we should all try and realise how little we know about such uncommon forms of staging as theatre in the round, and recognise the dangers of drawing theoretical conclusions. Mr. Albery says: "... the difficulties of this type of acting should dispose of the theory that arena staging is particularly suitable for amateurs and young artists. . . ." and I wonder whose the theory really is. It is no *theory* that arena and theatre in the round are particularly suitable for young people and amateurs; it is blatant, absolute, unalterable, undeniable, unquestionable, tested, tried, and proven *fact*. Schools and colleges all over the country have been using these forms of staging for years; so have amateur groups. The only "theory" is that these forms of staging are *difficult* for amateur groups—a theory much discussed by people who have had no experience of them.

Theatre in the round is one of many possible forms of theatre, all of which have their opportunities and their limitations. We know something about the proscenium arch theatre because we have so many examples of it—good and bad, large and small. We shall know more about other forms when we have them. And we *must* build them, and build them boldly. We shall not learn much about theatre in the round while the only companies working in this form make use of roughly adapted premises; nor if we build a theatre with a "flexible proscenium" (this will teach us something about a theatre with a flexible proscenium, though—and a good thing too!). My plea is—let us stop theorising and put these matters to the test.

Yours faithfully, STEPHEN JOSEPH,
Director of the Studio Theatre Company.



AN AMERICAN ADAPTABLE THEATRE



The Leob Centre, Harvard University, designed by Hugh Stubbins and George Izenour to provide three different theatre forms—(a) Centre Stage, (b) Picture Frame Stage, (c) Open Stage.

STAGES IN AMERICA

by Percy Corry

During the Spring of 1961, Frederick Bentham and I travelled something like 10,000 miles by air, sea and land (incidentally including the penitential subways of New York), in order to study the planning and equipment of stages in U.S.A. and Canada. One must avoid the usual temptation to talk with glib authority about some particular country or continent after a few weeks of hurried visits to selected centres. The impressions and opinions which follow must, of course, be judged in relation to the necessarily restricted field of survey. Although visits were made to New York City, Flushing, Scarsdale, Binghamton, Ithaca (all in New York State), to Boston, Chicago, Western Springs, Buffalo, Toronto, Stratford (Ontario) and other places in those areas, we were, in fact, scratching a relatively slight surface of the brave new world.

Our main concern was not with the professional theatre, but playgoing visits were paid to such theatres both on and "Off-Broadway". Broadway contributed a vastly amusing and very successful comedy of pungent satire on the selection of presidential candidates. The East Side supplied two striking contrasts. One was a centre-stage presentation of *Under Milk Wood*, sparsely attended, efficiently acted but lacking sufficient understanding of Welsh humour and temperament at the "Circle in the Square". The other was an impressive *Hamlet* presented in an orthodox picture-frame theatre, with a Stratford/Aldwych type of apron over what had been the orchestra pit. This was staged simply and effectively with excellent lighting. The Prince of Denmark was really young in years: he was also a sensitive and assured actor. This performance by Donald Madden could bear comparison with the great Hamlets of the theatre: consequently, the house was packed nightly and the run had to be extended.

The primary purpose of our visit was to study the planning of stages in schools, colleges and community theatres, and to note the similarities of and the differences between British and American practice. It was also thought that there might, perhaps, be some indication of a compulsive urge towards some particular change of theatre form, a compulsion which is difficult to discover in this country. The stages that were inspected, twenty-five in all, were mostly comparatively new. Two amateur performances were seen. Talks were given to students of architecture and drama at Cornell University. There were discussions with numerous interested persons: architects, lighting engineers, producers (directors), theatre technicians, actors, professors, students, public relations directors and playgoers. Altogether, very interesting, very exhausting, but always made very pleasurable by the friendly helpfulness of those whose assistance was sought.



Stratford, Ontario Festival Theatre, with visitors Bentham and Corry.

The outstanding difference between American and British amateur practice is probably due to a difference of attitude towards drama in educational establishments. Drama, speech training and theatre practice are curriculum subjects in many American schools and colleges. It was stated that about 4,000 students graduate each year with Drama as a major subject. In this country, now that Manchester has followed Bristol, there are drama courses at two universities. Otherwise, drama is a part of Eng. Lit., with stage presentation a variable spare-time activity.

The American courses are not designed specifically to train students for employment in the theatre. They are obviously intended to be part of a general education in the liberal arts. Those students who wish to do so are able to specialise and may ultimately gravitate to the theatre or to the teaching of others. Possibly Britain is not so very different in basic intention, but in America the practice is established and organised. This fact has its influence on the problems of planning and equipping the stages in the schools and colleges. It is accepted that stages must be in theatres, not in assembly halls. They are often referred to not as theatres but as auditoriums, which is realistic as they are also used for music and lectures. Present Canadian practice appears to be a compromise between that of Britain and America. There, the new multi-purpose hall may continue to appear instead of a theatre. At one school visited in Toronto,

there was what was recklessly proclaimed to be a "Gymnatorium", whose dual purpose will be obvious. We were informed that a "Cafetorium" is planned! A "Gymnafetorium" would seem to be a natural progression.

In only two of the American auditoriums (old ones, of course) were there flat floors. In all others, the floors were raked or stepped and the seating was of theatre-type, liberally spaced. Also, with only one or two exceptions, the stages had very good wing space, depths varying from 28 ft. to 50 ft. (we are accused of extravagance when we appeal for a minimum of 24 ft.!), stage towers with counter-weighted lines, workshops, and lighting equipment which would make most English professional repertory companies green with envy. In other words, *theatres* are provided in schools and colleges with more than adequate facilities, instead of the restricted stages in unsuitable halls which are almost universal over here. Curiously, one heard of occasional demands being made in some American schools for multi-purpose halls with flat floors!

With only three exceptions, all the auditoriums visited had proscenium stages, mostly with aprons of a depth which varied from 4 ft. to about 16 ft. Most of the newest stages had lifts, each of which could be used to create orchestra pit, extension of auditorium floor, or apron of variable height.

One outstanding difference is the provision in the American schools of scenery and costume workshops, and dressing rooms. These, of course, would be unique in England. The workshop space adjoining the theatre at the Colden Center, Queens College, is something like 60 ft. x 90 ft. exclusive of the scenery dock and painting shop. Such facilities were not unusual.

Although there are in America many theatres designed for open staging and for variable (or flexible) staging, the educational theatre appears, in the main, to continue to demand the proscenium stage, with facilities for creating an apron-stage when required. In a number of cases, theatre is occasionally presented "in the round" by using portable tiered seating on the stage, with the proscenium curtains closed. As the stages are usually very large this appears to meet the needs.

Most of the stages have cyclorama cloths and/or gauzes fitted to curved tracks so that the acting area can be almost completely enclosed, back and sides, when required. The cycloramas can be flown away when not needed.

The lighting equipment as already suggested is very much more elaborate than on any of the equivalent stages in Britain. The F.O.H. spots were rarely fewer than 12 and often more. The acting areas were invariably lit mainly by soft-edge spots, although battens (borderlights) were, in some cases, supplied in addition to two or

three spot bars. The No. 1 Spot Bar would usually have from 12 to 24 lanterns fitted.

The American systems of control vary basically from those we employ. There is a preference for large-wattage transformer dimmers to control groups of circuits instead of our dimmer-per-circuit systems. None of the schools had a control of the modest simplicity of our Junior boards. As Frederick Bentham will, sooner or later in TABS, deal separately with the comparison of control systems it is not necessary to pursue this point here. During the visit to Toronto he explained these differences to the S.M.P.T.E. conference (convention) of film and television technicians assembled from all parts of North America.

It is not necessary, or even desirable, to describe all the stages and auditoriums inspected. Most conformed to a general pattern, but there are several which should be dealt with in some detail.

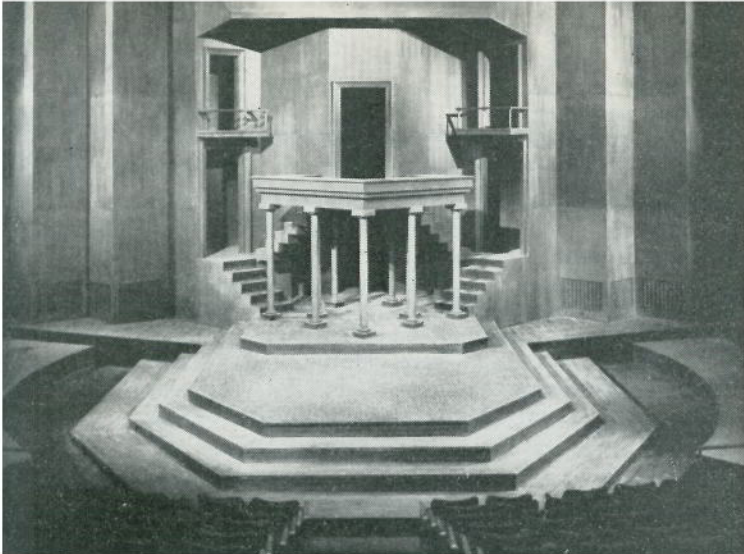
Festival Theatre, Stratford, Ontario

This theatre has been considerably publicised. It is illustrated once more for the benefit of those who may not be familiar with this interesting adaptation of the Elizabethan method to neo-Elizabethan techniques.

The primary purpose of this theatre is to present a Shakespearean Festival each year. The 1961 season was from June 19th to September 23rd. The theatre has 2,258 seats and the attendances, since the venture started in a tent in 1953, have varied from 77 to 98 per cent of capacity. The audiences travel from all parts of America to this small city with a population of only 20,000 and during a season something like 30,000 overnight guests are accommodated, most of them in private homes. Five new motels have been built since Shakespeare and his devotees put Stratford firmly on the

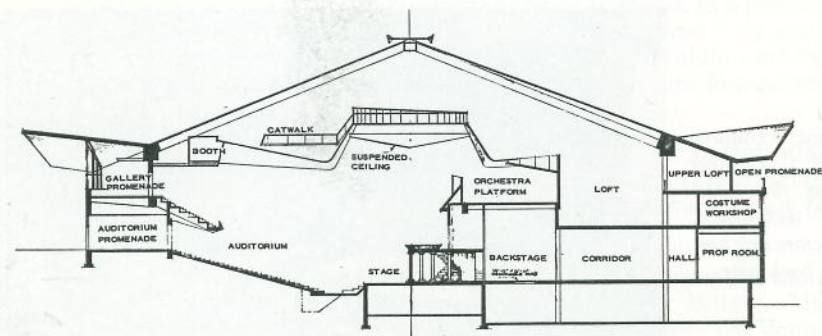
*Stratford, Ontario
Festival Theatre,
view of the 2,258
seat auditorium.
Note actors exit
tunnels to backstage.*





View of the stage of the permanent Stratford, Ontario Festival Theatre. Designed by Tanya Moiseiwitsch, it is an open stage possessing eight acting levels, trap door in centre, with the audience sitting on three sides.

theatrical map: in short, the venture is a tremendous success. How far the success is due to the physical characteristics of the theatre is problematic. The theatre is certainly excellent for its particular purpose. It has been planned with expert practical knowledge of theatre work and there is little to criticise. The sight lines from each end of the semi-circular auditorium are not ideal, but they are better than from the end seats of many theatres. Of necessity, practically all the lighting is from the perimeter, close to the ceiling. The positioning of the lanterns in relation to the access cat-walk causes needless difficulties in maintenance and adjustment. As the lighting was not set for a production it was not possible to judge to what extent the beams of light could cause discomfort to people in the front rows. It is probable that some such discomfort is unavoidable, at times, although there is a wide moat around the stage which helps.



Longitudinal section of Stratford, Ontario Theatre.

The great virtue of the theatre is that the very large audience have a good view of most of the stage and the maximum distance from the stage is 65 ft., the same, near enough, as with only 500 seats at the Mermaid Theatre, London. Even in the empty theatre it was possible to stand on-stage and get the stimulating "feel" of the place from an actor's point of view.

Much of the success of the theatre is undoubtedly due to the policy of employing star actors and experienced theatre personnel, and to the use of expertly designed costumes, richly impressive in colour and texture. The wardrobe is packed with the gorgeous costumes of past seasons, and there was a liberal stock of colourful banners and props. Obviously, the productions have no lack of pictorial quality. From the start, Tyrone Guthrie influenced this scheme very considerably, as one may judge by reading between the lines of his over-modest account in *A Life in the Theatre*.

Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, Minneapolis

It is interesting to learn that the Twin Cities of Minneapolis and St. Paul are to build the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, intended to be opened in 1963. Although this theatre is generally similar to Stratford, Ontario, it breaks entirely new ground in adopting an asymmetric form, so planned in the hope that a booking preference for seats in the centre block, experienced at Stratford, will be discouraged. Hope may spring eternal but habit dies hard: and the focal point on the centre line may well prove irresistible. However, as none of the 1,400 in the audience will be more than 58 ft. from the stage, the general vision should be good from any part of the house.

It will be mechanically changed into a picture-frame playhouse, when required. It is intended to establish a resident repertory company, presenting both classical and modern plays and Sir Tyrone is reported to be willing to commit himself to the theatre for its first three years. America's gain is our loss, but with U.S.A. only a constantly diminishing seven hours' flight away, it may not be altogether a dead loss.

Theatre of Western Springs

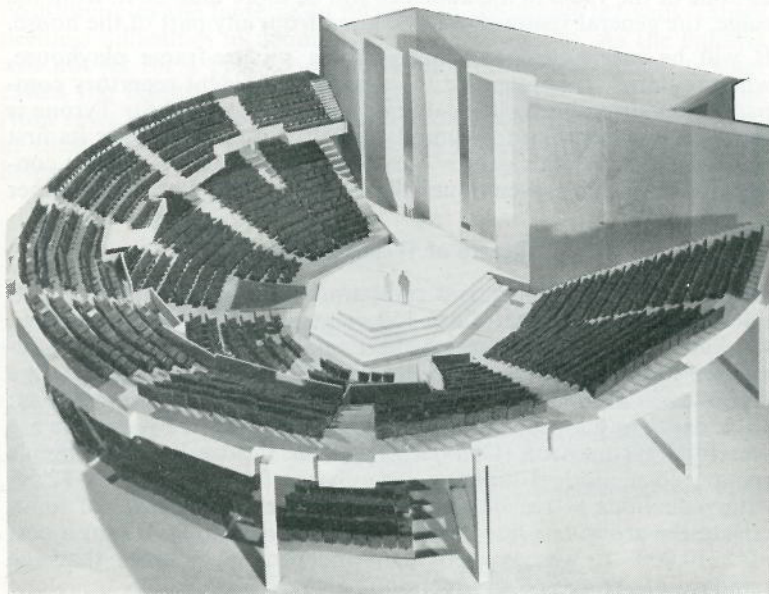
Western Springs, Illinois, is a comparatively small community outside Chicago. The Theatre has 150 members and 2,000 subscribers. It is an amateur group which, in England, would qualify for admission to the Little Theatre Guild. Until this year productions were presented in a hired hall with a stage of familiar British limitations: 16 ft. depth and a proscenium opening of only 20 ft. Five shows are presented each season (October/May): the theatre has a children's group and a resident director. The charge for admission is \$2.50, with reductions to season subscribers. After several years of fundraising the group has now built a new theatre seating 417, at a cost of \$210,000. It was learned from independent sources that the standard of acting and production is high.

This is one of a number of theatres in which the open stage design of James Hull Miller is incorporated. Miller is anti-proscenium, but unlike most of those who share his desire for a change of theatre form, his approach is positive. He does not take refuge from uncertainty in a demand for "adaptable" stages. He claims, quite definitely, the freedom of a "space" stage within the auditorium, and by use of scenic units and projected backgrounds, he creates a pictorial stage without the frame. Lighting makes an essential contribution and the stage and auditorium are planned accordingly. The stage provides opportunity for a new and freer design approach to the form of stage settings but it does not preclude an orthodox "realistic" approach, if desired.

The Western Springs Theatre is without proscenium and fly-tower. The stage is 55 ft. wide and 29 ft. deep on the centre line. Ceiling panels are fitted to provide apertures for the lighting equipment, curtains, etc., and access for adjustment and maintenance is by catwalks above the panels.

A special feature of Miller's design is the provision for projecting scenic backgrounds by means of a version of the Linnebach type of lantern, but either with or without this type of projection, the whole design gives considerable flexibility in production. Also, it has the advantage of being economical in cost. The cost of the

Model of the Tyrone Guthrie Theatre, to be built at Minneapolis, U.S.A. Photograph by courtesy of Saturday Review, New York.



"Dark of the Moon" as presented in the Western Springs, Chicago Community Theatre.

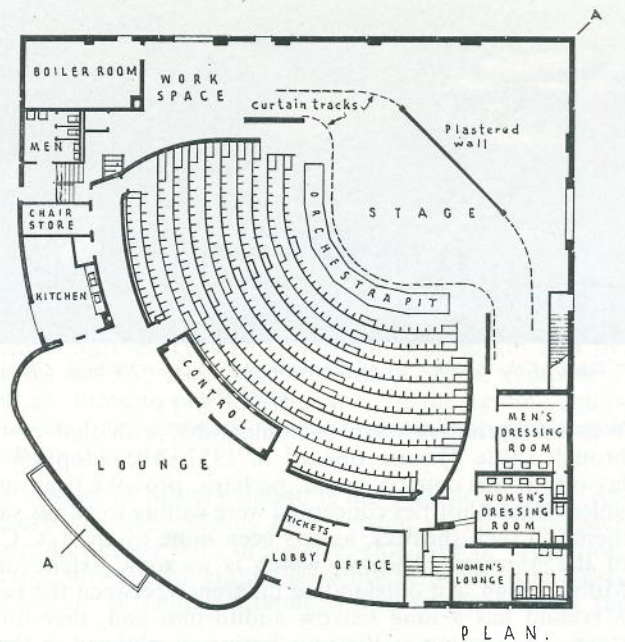
Western Springs Theatre is comparable with that of the Middlesbrough Little Theatre opened in 1957. The adoption of a similar lay-out in this country could, perhaps, provoke licensing difficulties unless the authorities concerned were willing to adjust safety requirements to such theatres, as has been done by the L.C.C. in the case of the Mermaid Theatre, which is to some extent similar to the Miller design. An outstanding difference between the two is that the Mermaid has a long narrow auditorium and, therefore, a narrow stage. The seating at Western Springs is planned in the segment of a circle in a wide auditorium, with a wide stage. The last row of seats is only 40 ft. from the stage (compared with the 75 ft. at the Mermaid), although the rows are, in fact, 38 in. deep, which is generous by our standards.

The Loeb Theatre, Harvard

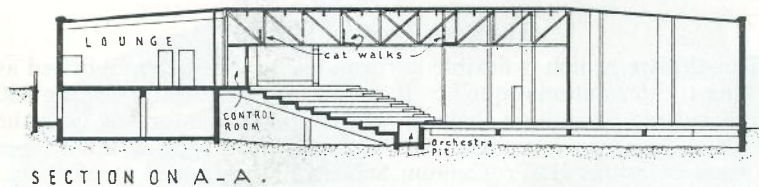
This theatre, which is flexible in form, has been widely publicised as "the theater automatique".* It is an attractive theatre seating 500 and costing \$2 million, half of which, we were informed, was the cost of the stage equipment. It was designed to provide three types of presentation: (1) Proscenium Stage. (2) Three-sided Open Stage, and (3) Centre Stage. The seven front rows of seats are arranged in two blocks which, by means of ingenious electro-mechanical devices, can be swivelled to the sides of a lift which may be raised to form an open stage, or the seats may be further rotated to face the rear seats at stage level with an acting area between. Unfortunately, the machinery could not be seen in operation as the movable seats had been pushed up-stage to enable the auditorium to be adapted to a tentative compromise arrangement representing a Greek theatre, and a rehearsal was in progress.

The proscenium stage was equipped with 40 *single* suspension lines which may be varied in position and are operated by motor-

* "Architectural Forum", October 1961, published by Time Inc.



Plan and Section, Western Springs Community Theatre, with seating for 415.



driven winches, individually or in groups, synchronised for push-button control. The number of lines available appeared to be inadequate since many of them were more or less permanently in use and it seemed probable that for a spectacular show in proscenium stage style, greater efficiency would have been obtained from a conventional 3 or 4 line per counterweight grid.

The lighting equipment is quite lavish and is remotely controlled, with pre-set facilities.

It is over-enthusiastic journalism to describe the theatre as "automatic": there is a considerable degree of power-assisted

labour and there are interesting adaptations of remote control techniques. One had the impression, however, that to justify the engineering elaboration, the theatre should be used by an adventurous resident company under imaginative direction. Harvard does not include Drama as a curriculum subject and the theatre is used by varied groups of students for extra-mural activity.

In striking contrast to the engineering ingenuity of the main theatre is a small studio with simple lighting equipment, limited seating and no raised stage. It was stated that this studio is used by the students quite considerably and, at times, quite boisterously.

There are, of course, excellent workshops, dressing rooms and other theatre facilities. It is a most impressive creation.

The Charles Colden Center, Queen's College, Flushing, N.Y.

This is a recently erected block of buildings for use by the Department of Speech, Drama and Music. It is an extensive building which includes a large concert hall seating over 2,000 people and a theatre seating 500. There are also an outdoor Greek type theatre, large sound-proof rehearsal rooms for orchestras, radio and television studios, workshops for scenery and costumes, dressing rooms and a section devoted to speech therapy. This Center could well provide the pattern for a college operating within an urban community and sharing its social life.

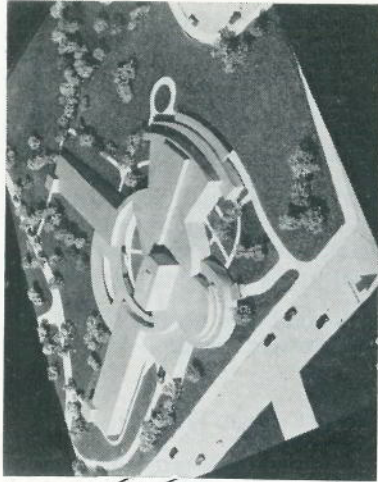
The delightful concert hall, with excellent acoustics, will bring first-class orchestras and concert artists to the people of Flushing. It has a large open stage with a fore-stage lift, but at present they are in the not unusual position of finding it difficult to light the orchestra properly in the down-stage area because the architect has provided too few apertures in the auditorium ceiling.

The Theatre has a large proscenium stage, with fly-tower, counterweighted lines, comprehensive lighting and sound equipment and cyclorama cloth on curved track. The fore-stage is removable (by hand) but it is thought that it will be made into a permanent apron.

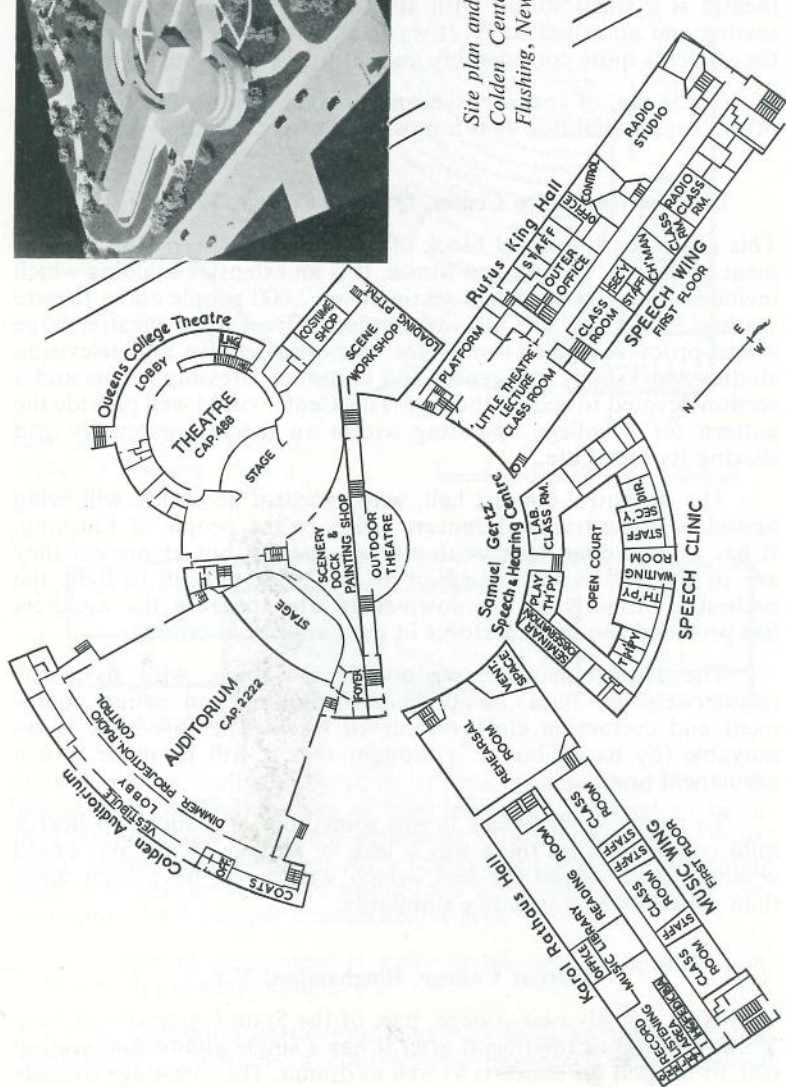
To admiring Britishers it was something of a shock to hear a mild complaint that there was a lack of storage space. We would willingly have settled for less, which would still have been more than generous by our native standards.

Harpur College, Binghamton, N.Y.

This is an entirely new college, part of the State University of New York, devoted to the liberal arts. It has a single auditorium seating 620, to be used for concerts as well as drama. The fore-stage consists



Site plan and model of the Charles Colclough Center, Queen's College, Flushing, New York.



of four separate lifts which may be operated individually or collectively. The proscenium opening is 36 ft. wide, the stage is 30 ft. deep, plus 8 ft. of permanent apron, plus 16 ft. of lift-forestage: the grid is counterweighted, and there are 130 lighting circuits, controlled by 24 high-wattage transformer dimmers. There are excellent Dressing Rooms, Wardrobe and Workshops. For the musical students there is a large studio, rehearsal rooms, and numerous other facilities, including twelve pianos!

It is intended that this theatre also should contribute to the cultural life of the community as well as to that of the campus.

Cornell University

It was surprising to learn that the Alice Statler Auditorium, in one of the new colleges forming part of Cornell University, seating 920 persons, sumptuously appointed and expensively equipped, has been used for drama only three times in three years. The university's Drama Department cannot afford to rent the theatre for its shows, which are staged in an old auditorium having fewer facilities. Unfortunately, although the Statler auditorium was provided by a benefactor, there was no endowment to meet the running costs. One suspects that there are a number of such theatres which are provided for purposes of prestige rather than to fulfil an actual need.

The Drama Department at Cornell is a lively body, doing excellent work and is at present transforming an existing room into an experimental studio theatre. The large stage and auditorium in the Alice Statler building, despite a few curious planning faults, could, no doubt, have provided the Drama Department with facilities for useful experience in staging its more expansive productions.

Toronto Schools

The school stages seen in Toronto had not the spaciousness of those in America, but on the whole they were rather better than ours. Only the dual purpose auditoriums had flat floors but some of the more recent stages were less well equipped than the best British school stages. Several had restricted wing space and depth. The most impressive school auditorium seen in Canada was that of the Cedar Brae School, not then completed. This is in Scarborough, outside Toronto, and will be comparable with the American auditoriums for size and equipment. Philip Rose, now with Strand Electric Limited, Toronto, will be reporting on this school when it is opened.

The Large Concert Hall/Theatre

Two mammoth auditoriums were inspected in Chicago and Toronto. The MacCormack Convention centre in Chicago is a large exhibition



"Inherit the Wind" staged at Scarsdale High School, New York.

block which includes a quite fabulous Concert Hall/Theatre. The proscenium opening is 90 ft. wide, the stage 50 ft. deep, the grid 90 ft. high, and there is an apron-stage lift which could accommodate a large orchestra. There are 996 stage lighting circuits. That is not a misprint: there are 996 circuits which are patched to 147 dimmer channels, with ten pre-sets. The auditorium seats 5,000. It is quite new and is intended for use by visiting professional companies, as well as by the local orchestra, ballet company and other groups.

Also opened in 1961 is the O'Keefe Centre in Toronto, which includes a similarly elaborate auditorium but seating a mere 3,000! Otherwise, it is equally impressive as to size and equipment. The latter includes an enormous acoustic shell to **enclose performing bands**. The shell is propelled up and down stage **and is flown away** when not in use. It was manufactured by Halls at Brixton in England.

Scarsdale High School

One would like to include references to other school and community auditoriums which were visited, but the last comment must be on a school theatre which was particularly interesting because it was one of the oldest of those seen. This was the theatre at Scarsdale

High School, built in 1929, and seating 1,200 in an auditorium with raked floor and balcony. It has a counterweighted grid, a proscenium opening 39 ft. wide, a stage which is 28 ft. deep and 70 ft. wide, extensive workshops, and in every way most generously equipped.

A company of students from this school's Drama Department toured Thornton Wilder's "Our Town" in Europe during the summer vacation this year. Our visit to three schools in Scarsdale, N.Y., is an extremely pleasant memory.

Conclusions

What are the final impressions, opinions and conclusions? Undoubtedly one must confess to envious approval of the American educational and community theatres. They are so much more functionally satisfactory than ours. In the matter of lighting equipment they are far more lavishly supplied and although one's commercial instinct may prompt approval, actually the impression is that there is, in fact, too much elaboration. In the school theatre, particularly, there is some virtue in placing some restriction on the amount of equipment available, in order to encourage improvisation and to stimulate the imaginative use of a more limited but still flexible installation.

The search for any compelling reasons why the picture frame should be eliminated added little or nothing to opinions already familiar. Most of the stages inspected had prosceniums, and there appeared to be little, if any, objection to them. They were much wider than in England; **most of them being between 36 ft. and 42 ft.** In the Western Springs Theatre there is a definite alternative with much to commend it. In abolishing the proscenium, Miller's planning expands the pictorial possibilities in a freer and more extensive use of scenery and lighting. The editor of TABS has invited him to explain his purpose more fully in the December issue.

In general terms, there is probably little basic difference between American and British development of the non-professional theatre. In one notable respect, however, America is well ahead. Their educational courses in drama include instruction in stage technicalities. In this country there is a sad lack of instructional facilities available to those who wish to become theatre technicians. Apart from that, the main difference lies in the physical aids that are provided. The Americans have moved more rapidly and much more expensively in the direction in which they and we are travelling. They are less encumbered by weighty tradition and canny thrift. When we have caught up a little and the Americans have (perhaps necessarily) curbed their extravagance, our travel along parallel lines will probably be much closer, and that could be beneficial to both.

BOOK REVIEW

Planning the Stage. By Percy Corry.

Pitman 3/-

This is a very useful book for amateurs whose imagination does not extend much beyond presenting theatre on a boxframe or proscenium type stage.

The *live* theatre today is seeking less restrictive conditions and the audience-actor relationship has to be far more intimate. This new book, *Planning the Stage*, might have been written twenty years ago, for there is little to suggest that new ideas and greater freedom of stage pattern are now on the drawing board, if not already executed, abroad and in this country. If a book of this technical nature is written basically as a guide to young theatre designers of the future, why is there no reference to technical guidance which may be derived from the Greek or Elizabethan stage patterns, for we learn much from the past?

As a theatre architect, with experience of designing stage and auditorium and of observing closely their faults and successes, I find myself at variance with many of the author's statistics. For example, 60 ft. should be considered the maximum distance from front of stage to back of house, and clear vision of the whole of the acting area should be possible for each member of the audience. The author's idea of **staggered seating and angles of vision, together with his suggestion of allowing a depth of 2 ft. 6 in. for each row, is out of date**; a far higher standard than this is being set in the re-seating of many of the existing cinemas in this country.

Good stage facilities alone do not necessarily provide good theatrical conditions, and a raised platform whether within a proscenium arch or free-standing can in itself completely destroy the "alive" quality at which the theatre of the future has to aim. Television is today providing the technically perfect production (in a proscenium frame), i.e. the television viewing screen. As this book is dealing with the small theatre, why has detailed consideration not been given to the often better relationship achieved with the stage on the floor and the audience raised? By this I do *not* mean the theatre in the round. I look forward to a second or third book by Mr. Corry to assist in this new field of thought.

ELIDIR DAVIES.*

*Mr. Elidir Davies is the architect of the Mermaid Theatre, Puddledock in the City, famous as London's only professional Open Stage Theatre.

