

TABS

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Spring Lecture Programme

These lectures will be given at our Head Office Demonstration Theatre, 29 King Street, Covent Garden, W.C.2, and will begin at 7 p.m. precisely. The doors of the Head Office showrooms will be opened at 6.30 p.m. (30 minutes before each demonstration). The new layout and arrangements will make it easy for members of the audience to try for themselves all the common pieces of equipment, "Cinemoid" colours, etc., before taking their places in the theatre.

Admission to demonstrations is free, but tickets are necessary and can be obtained by sending a stamped addressed envelope to 29 King Street.

As the capacity of the theatre is limited to 100 (60 for Colour Music demonstrations), it is important that **tickets are returned for re-issue** if it is found that **they cannot be used** for any reason. It is realised that booking so far ahead it is not uncommon to find other engagements intervening as the date approaches.

Tuesday, January 23rd, 7 p.m.

"Lighting the Scene"

Recorded Lecture No. 1. Discussion afterwards to be conducted by Brian Legge.

Wednesday, January 31st, 7 p.m.

"Colour Music"

Demonstrated with the music of Sibelius, Cesar Franck, Bach, Moussorgsky and Tchaikowsky, by Frederick Bentham and Paul Weston.

Thursday, February 8th, 7 p.m.

(Repeat of "Colour Music" Demonstration of January 31st.)

Thursday, February 22nd, 7 p.m.

"Lighting Stages"

Recorded Lecture No. 3. Stephen Joseph, Percy Corry and Frederick Bentham (Premiere of Recorded Lecture No. 3).

Wednesday, March 14th, 7 p.m.

"Planning Today for Tomorrow's Theatres"

Lecture by Percy Corry.

Wednesday, March 21st, 7 p.m.

"The Development of Lighting Equipment in the Theatre"
Technical lecture by Frederick Bentham and R. A. McKenzie.

Thursday, March 29th, 7 p.m.

"Optical Effects"

Grand Jamboree staged by members of the Technical Department and the experts from Hire Department.

Saturday, April 14th, 2.30 p.m.

Saturday afternoon course on Stage Lighting

A talk and demonstration in two parts dealing with the principles of the subject. The first half will deal with lighting equipment and its use. Tea and biscuits will then be provided and the second half will be devoted to dimmers and control and the lighting rehearsal. The course will be conducted by Frederick Bentham and members of the Technical Department.

Wednesday, April 25th, 7 p.m.

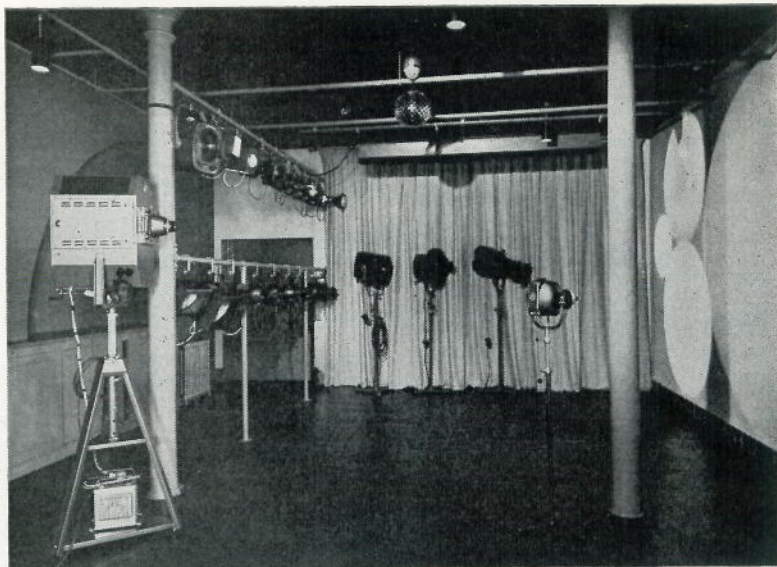
"Lighting Stages"

A repeat of Recorded Lecture No. 3. Discussion afterwards will be conducted by Brian Legge.

* * *

Improved Demonstration Facilities at Head Office

Ever since our first demonstration theatre was opened in Head Office as far back as March 1933, it has been our pleasure to stage both open and private demonstrations. These provide probably the only means available to people in Britain, with little technical knowledge, regularly to study stage lighting. This coming year the annual technical lectures dealing extensively over two separate evenings with the subject of lighting control are being extended to cover the other aspects of stage lighting, mainly optics and colour. Use of



The new lantern room at 29 King Street.

the word "technical" does not imply that a very high degree of knowledge is necessary but it does mean that there should be some familiarity with the optical systems of stage lighting lanterns and, of course, it means there must be familiarity with such basic things as resistances, current, watts, and all the rest of it. This is the nearest we can get to a graduated course, and all who work in some way in the theatre (amateur or professional) may be expected to derive some instruction and possibly some entertainment from the general lectures, whilst those who come to the lectures labelled "technical" can expect something rather more advanced.

Recent changes at Head Office occasioned by the removal to Kennington of the Hire stock of property fittings has enabled us to improve our facilities. Inevitably in the theatre, lanterns and other equipment are rather out of reach, being set for the particular show in question. A new lantern room adjacent to the theatre makes it possible for visitors to handle and experiment with lanterns themselves whenever they wish.

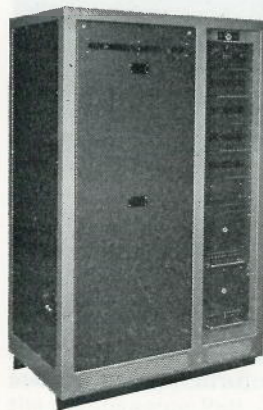
These facilities are available all day during the regular office hours, Monday to Friday inclusive, 9 a.m. to 5.30 p.m. Beneath the showroom there is a consultation area where jobs may be discussed in detail and in comfort. It is partly the aim of the improved demonstration facilities to allow anyone to drop in at any time and and this may conflict with our other aim which is to allow the booking of far more private demonstrations in the theatre itself. We are prepared to give these to groups of a dozen or more provided

it can be established that these are *bona fide* enquiries after truth and not schoolboys on some end of term jamboree.

We do of course realise that those who do not visit the capital very frequently may miss our service in this respect. To overcome this, we do, when the occasion warrants it, send a visiting lecturer and our branches do have facilities, though of a lesser order. For the rest there are our various free booklets, such as *Stage Planning*, and their number is to be added to in the coming year.

Recorded Lectures

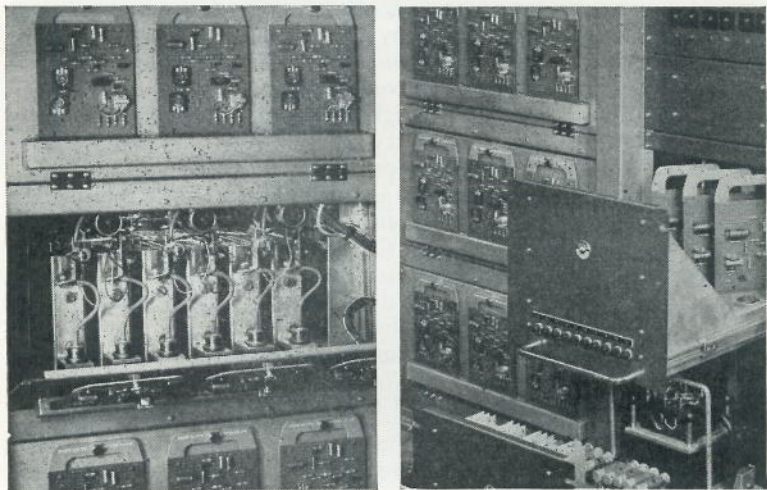
Also very popular are the *recorded lectures* in which a set of sixty or so slides is sent out accompanied by a tape recording. There are full instructions with each lecture as to presentation and also a set of supplementary leaflets to remind the audience of some of the main points raised. These recorded lectures must be booked well in advance because, although there are several copies of each, they travel continually to and fro. The two lectures available so far have been "Lighting the Scene," and "Stage Planning." The latest lecture (Recorded Lecture No. 3, available March 1962) sets out to discuss the problems raised by the insistence of new forms of staging, such as the open stage and theatre in the round—how do you light these, what are the pros and cons, and so on. Stephen Joseph, Percy Corry and Frederick Bentham provide a very lively recorded conversation with sixty slides which should provide stimulus for a really good discussion among the audience afterwards. Each lecture runs for an hour and is available free, but a registration fee of £1 1s. must be paid *at the time of booking*. In the case of the first two lectures this fee goes to the Actors' Orphanage, but in the case of the third lecture which aims to help ventilate the problems of theatre designs and technical equipment **today, the fee appropriately enough will go to the funds of the recently formed Association of British Theatre Technicians—the ABTT.**



Silicon Controlled Rectifier Dimmers and Iodine Lamps Demonstrated

On October 25th and on November 14th two special demonstrations were given to two invited audiences, representing the lighting of television and of

stage respectively, in the Head Office demonstration theatre. The principal feature demonstrated by Frederick Bentham and L. W. Leggett was the new standard 30-way model all-electric dimmer bank for 120 volts or 220 and over based on the silicon controlled rectifier—Strand system CRD. Particular interest centred round the fact that it was shown that the new bank and existing LC transistorised reactor systems were compatible and could be operated together from the same preset desk. The effect of such a 50-50 arrangement in which LC was reserved for channels where a 2 to 1 load variation only was acceptable and CRD for full-load variation would be to pull the average price per way down. The combined banks were demonstrated from an orthodox preset control and afterwards from an experimental all-electric console fitted with the stop-keys and memory group action in common use with Strand electromechanical banks. After playing a complex, if brief, series of lighting changes to the *Prelude to Swan Lake* to demonstrate that such memory action was possible with all-electric dimmers, Mr. Bentham pointed out that much work remained to be done before this particular form of console could be offered to the



theatre. Television, however, presented a simpler problem. At the second of the two demonstrations, prototypes of three new Strand lanterns were shown and the use of a 500-watt iodine lamp in a Patt 23 spotlight was demonstrated as an exciting possibility for the future—the light being twice as bright as normal and 100 per cent. maintenance could be expected over the 200 hours life. Such a lamp was not yet available in practical form to suit theatre conditions.



Photograph by Edmark of Oxford.

The Kitchen

The photograph above is taken from the second act of Arnold Wesker's *The Kitchen* at the Royal Court Theatre during the lull between the lunch and dinner. One has become used to the once despised stage lighting equipment being prominently displayed above the stage for *Oliver* or decorating the walls of the Mermaid and, rather more incongruously, the auditorium of the Aldwych, but here we have a new role. In John Dexter's production of *The Kitchen* the Strand Patt. 243s form a large part of Jocelyn Herbert's decor. These lanterns backed up by the bare walls of the stage give a very satisfactory evocation of those strange regions (fortunately barred to the customers) where food is prepared. The remarkable mime which enables the great crescendo of the lunch service to be portrayed with utterly convincing realism without the handling of a single piece of food, real or prop, is assisted by the fact that the kitchen both sounds and appears hot. A peculiar by-product of the lighting is that the low-hanging Patt. 243s really do make the actors sweat.

THE PICTURE STAGE WITHOUT THE FRAME

by James Hull Miller

Mr. Miller is a consulting designer in the United States and has been responsible for a dozen free form or space stage theatres now in operation. In addition to his work in theatre planning, he does research in the design and production of scenery for the open stage. One of Mr. Miller's recent theatres at Western Springs, Chicago, was described and illustrated in Mr. Corry's article on pages 23-26 in the last issue of TABS (Vol. 19 No. 2).

Of late, there has been the belief that to abandon the proscenium frame stage is to all but eliminate scenery for dramatic environment. Such a belief can be sustained only by ineptitude in scenic design. Actually, with the abandonment of the frame, the scenic effects can be increased and the designer can work with a freedom not possible within a frame.

The frame and its loft operation are restrictive because they are based on the practice of one scene following another. This idea finds a natural expression in cinema and television techniques, and with none of the disadvantages of peep-hole sightlines and scene change delays.

On the open or space stage the idea of a series of tightly-framed scenes presented in halting succession dies. The open stage is much larger than the framed stage and there is more opportunity to place one or more settings within another, with an increased grasp of the play's total environment. For example, one may see a room within a house, the house within a yard, and the yard within a town.

As an illustration I have selected my own set for *Madam Butterfly* as produced by the Shreveport Symphony Society. Whereas the opera in picture frame style calls for an exterior scene in the garden followed by an interior scene within a house, from the photograph of the model it will be seen that I have devoted some 60 ft. to the garden and house, the house being designed in such a manner that specific locale is created by colour, and projection on the translucent screen panels placed to the rear of the platform on stage left. In this design, the fragile world of *Butterfly*, as represented by the island platform with its delicate screens, is opposed by the harsh lines of the post and lintel façade and the pleated cyclorama panels, these being covered with dyed hessian. No scene change is required.

Productions with numerous scenes are simplified on the space stage. Shown by model also are solutions for Lorca's *Blood Wedding*, as designed for one of my recent workshops. I have used the area of the plaster background wall and the single curve of the profile ground row to unify the stage space. Scenes one and two, the interiors

of the Mother's Home and Leonardo's House, are placed on opposite sides of the stage. Since they share the same village geographically, other buildings of the village are added by light projection on the background wall.

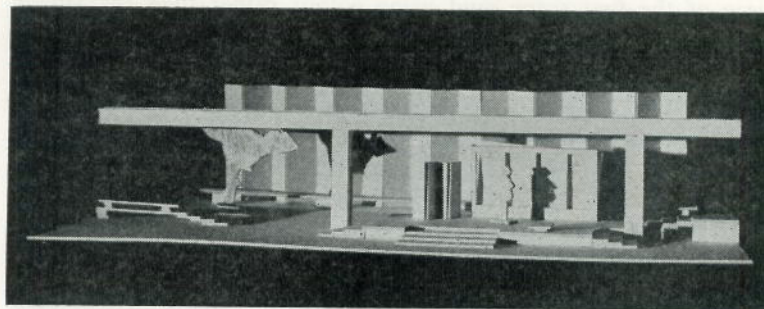


FIG. 1. Scale model of the *Butterfly* set using a 60 ft. open stage.

At this point I would like to digress a moment and mention the manner in which my background projection system works. In a previous TABS article, Mr. Percy Corry referred to this projection system as a version of the Linnebach type of lantern. While this is true, there are important modifications which bring far better results than those usually associated with the term "Linnebach".

The version of the Linnebach I use is the creation of Thomas Wilfred, a Danish-born American pioneer in pure light research. Wilfred separated the image from the lamphouse and, by enlarging the image and distancing it from the projection lamp, he introduced an amazing degree of clarity. Even a thread placed at the image position can be seen on the background wall. For this reason he prefers to use the term "Direct Beam" rather than "Linnebach".

Needless to say, the image is *considerably* larger. In the illustration, I attached a scale image to the background wall of the model for the reader to observe. The real dimensions of this particular image are about 4 ft. by 9 ft. Another illustration shows a typical section of one of my open stage theatres and the masking for the projection system is apparent. The image itself in this instance is about 17 ft. from the stage and 14 ft. downstage from the background wall. The lamphouse is 4 ft. downstage of the image.

I consider this particular type of background projection a necessity for the open stage. Its spread exceeds that of a lens projector. It is economical. Images can be made from a great variety of materials, and are technically simple.

The simultaneous arrangement of scenes one and two are replaced by a composite arrangement of scenes three, four and five, representing the inner chamber, antechamber and patio, all at the

Girl's House. In a composite arrangement the acting areas may overlap, thus increasing the effective stage space. Not illustrated is scene six, in the forest, and the final scene outside the Mother's Home. The forest was projected on the background wall. The exterior of the Mother's Home was created by reversing the double-covered set piece of the first scene, and using colour rather than the village projection on the background wall.



FIG. 2. Close-up of the platform island for Butterfly with translucent screen panels. The scene is the interior of Butterfly's house with a night garden beyond. The garden pattern is by Direct Beam projection.

One may conclude from these examples that Lorca's detailed instructions for his series of scenes have been satisfied, yet on the open stage it is possible to dress small scenes in areas *smaller* than would be indicated by a picture frame. In the same sense, it is possible to set up a series of scenes in a general geographical location in an area which would *exceed* a normal proscenium width. Furthermore, the scenery which was used in the Lorca production was not difficult to handle.

No doubt the reader will exclaim, "Why, Miller is just dressing up the old technique of set pieces on a proscenium stage with neutral cyclorama curtains. I have used it for years!"

This is not entirely correct. I employ the phrase "set piece" because it is widely recognised as an independent scenic unit in free space. We think of most set pieces as diminutive. In the case of the correctly designed space stage the same set piece does not appear to be a diminutive substitute for a larger setting. It appears as the

ideal setting. The set piece on a space stage may be any size desired by design intention, not by its actual measurements. The same freedom of design is not found on our more conventional stages where the proscenium "frames" a scene at a time and more often than not fixes the dimensions of the settings.

It was not until I learned how to put elements of the auditorium around the stage rather than framing the stage off from the auditorium that I was able to give the traditional set piece the same stature as that of the complete setting. I discovered for myself that when the scale of the setting is no longer related to the size of the stage, ideas from contemporary art are easily incorporated into stage design.

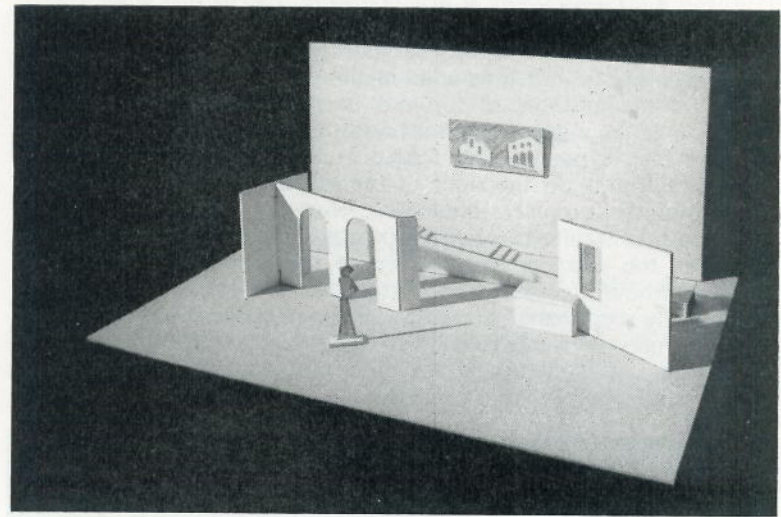


FIG. 3. Scale model of the 40-ft. wide open stage for Blood Wedding, showing the Mother's Home and Leonardo's House, the ground row with concealed platforms, and the background wall, this in production completely covered by projection, the actual image for which is shown upon the background wall for a comparison of size.

The argument most frequently heard against modern art on the stage involves the prospect of a Picasso spread out over 30 ft. or 40 ft. of backdrop. On the space stage, however, the scale of the setting is determined by the individual designer, not by the dimensions of a theatre's inflexible frame. On the proscenium stage one *fills* up a blank space with complete scenery, whereas on the open stage one occupies a dressed space with as little or as much scenery as desired.

What are the qualifications for this large space which seems complete whether or not scenery is present? We must return to one of the oldest and most enduring principles of theatre design, that of containing audience and stage areas in one organic, architectural space. Greek, Roman, Medieval, Elizabethan and Restoration

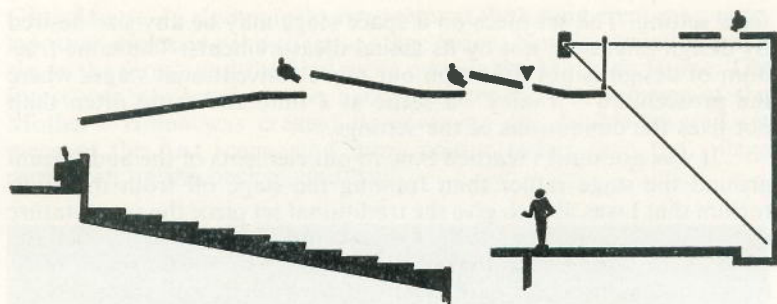


FIG. 4. Typical section of an open stage designed by Hull Miller.

theatres were always so designed. Contemporary design techniques which accomplish this same unity include the extension of the ceiling planes of the auditorium forward over the acting area and the extension of the auditorium walls and the side aisles onto the stage. Also we may expect to find folded architectural screens replacing masking curtains on the sides of the stage. A sand-floated plaster background wall replaces the cloth cyclorama.

Into this architectural envelope containing the auditorium and the stage the designer may introduce the amount of scenery he desires without reference to the total area of the exposed stage. Because the scenic units are autonomous in space the geography of the stage may be richly diversified. The open stage expands scenic expression. The audience, seated in a variety of patterns up to the quarter circle, enjoy perfect visibility.

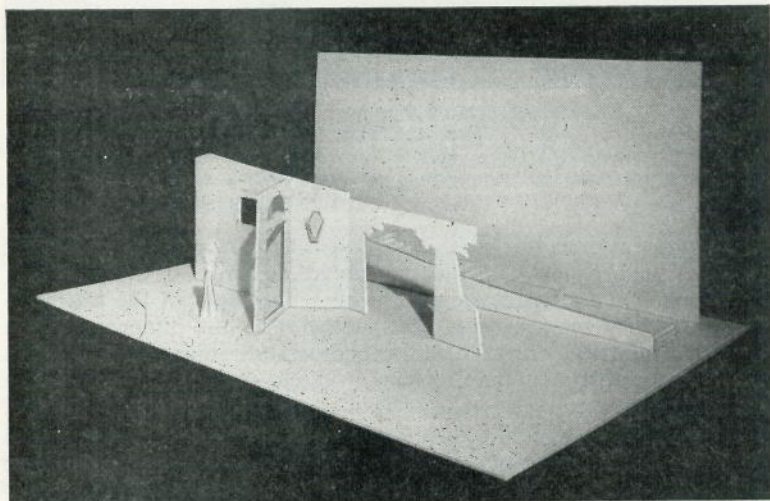


FIG. 5. Scale model for *Blood Wedding* showing scenes three, four, and five relating to the *Girl's House*.

Illumination for the open stage is superior to that for the picture frame stage because the lanterns can be sited precisely. This means better angles, fewer instruments and simpler control. There is no dodging of the proscenium frame and no bothersome teaser masking, both of which cause lantern duplications through poor siting.

This complete freedom overhead for proper illumination is achieved through the floor-based stagecraft which is part and parcel of open stage technique. Safety, speed of adjustment and the Wilfred Direct Beam projection system are all possible because catwalks or lighting bridges can be installed at all desired locations.

The picture stage without the frame is a logical answer to the technical problems of the contemporary theatre. It is not a solution for hacks or lazy artists. For the time being, the open stage demands creative energy on the part of the production designer. On the other hand, the physical load is lightened and the budget is reduced. In America, a number of small, young and aggressive theatre groups have realised this and have developed open stage theatres.

* * *

BOOK REVIEW

Amateur Theatrecraft. Percy Corry.

Museum Press 15/-

Writing general books on stagecraft or on any other craft is a dangerous occupation. Firstly, there are too many books of this kind and, secondly, it is incredibly difficult to introduce anything new and of value when the space available only permits a skimming over the surface of a subject. This is particularly true of theatrecraft, because it involves many types of specialist and specialists demand very detailed information of their reference books. It could also be argued that general books are doing theatre a disservice as they are delaying the departure of the producer moulded in the Craig image and this type of "all-rounder" is still very common in amateur theatre. Theatre has become too complex for one man to know everything.

Clearly, Percy Corry was aware of the pitfalls before he started to write, and as a result his new book is of considerable value. He brings to his subject an attack and a liveliness which is completely disarming and manages to include some very valuable and detailed information for the specialist in language the novice will understand.

It is a far more a book of fact and suggestion than of opinion and this is fortunate, because on matters of fact, Mr. Corry is an authority. His chapters on the proscenium stage, the stage manager, constructing and painting the scenery and on lighting, for example, are invaluable sources of information, particularly as much of the information has not appeared in book form before. His suggestions, too, are of value because they will excite the reader. His diagrams of the various shapes of production as alternatives to the proscenium arch method may well prompt the intelligent producer to be a little more adventurous. Without suggesting that every play should be produced in a novel way there is no doubt that the majority of producers are working within the arch from force of habit.

It is true to say that anyone and everyone connected with the theatre should have a copy readily at hand—even those people who fight shy of the so-called "general" book.

Michael Pugh



A CASE OF IDENTITY

by Philip Rose

"A gentleman from Police Headquarters to see you, Mr. Rose." I gave a little shiver. If a policeman so much as looks at me, I feel like an arch-criminal and now, it seemed, I had been singled out for a special visit! I racked my brains for an explanation and decided that it must be a case of mistaken identity. Where was I at 8 o'clock last night?

"Come in, Mr. er——." Detective-Sergeant Inglis, my visitor, introduced himself and after taking a seat, quickly got down to business. "We think you may be able to help us with a problem we have at Headquarters. We understand you are a lighting expert." (What an efficient Police Force we have in Toronto, I thought.) Being modest, I gave my non-committal nod and waited. "Our present line-up room is not satisfactory and for our new Headquarters we want to do the job properly." My experience of line-up rooms until then had been limited to movies and television.

For those to whom a line-up room suggests a place to hang the washing, I should explain that in the Police sense, it is where suspects are lined up for identification by witnesses.

In quick time, I was whisked down to Headquarters to inspect the old room. It had a platform about 18 ft. × 4 ft. down one side, and between the front edge and the ceiling was a bronze wire close mesh behind which the twelve suspects were lined up, under a mass of bare bulbs. The witnesses walked up and down in the dark on the other side. The principle being used was very similar to the stage use of transformation gauzes in that the witnesses could see without being seen. "What we need," said Sergeant Inglis, "is an arrangement whereby the witness can have a clean unobstructed view of the suspects, who must be lit naturally. The witness must not be seen, and if possible should be able to see the suspects without having to move too much. We must allow for all types of witnesses, from children to elderly ladies with poor eyesight. The fact that the witness should not be visible is most important in order to guard against possible intimidation." This was a tall order—the existing arrangement fell a long way short of requirements.

The lighting consisted of rows of 200 W lamps top and bottom behind the screen and, although the level of lighting was high, the quality was very poor. With as much, if not more light from below as from above, faces appeared as featureless blobs, an effect not unknown on stages where footlights are used to excess! The fact that the witness viewed through a wire mesh, tended to make the suspects look "mushy", even with the lighting properly balanced. Then the witnesses had to walk up and down the line and the fact that the suspects were up on a platform, gave a false perspective. It was pointed out that it is desirable for a witness to be able to relate his own eye level to the height of the suspect—"I looked up into the gunman's eyes!"

"By the way," said the Architect of the new Headquarters, who had now joined us, "a further problem is that the first of the new line-up rooms is not very wide, twelve feet only." This news didn't help!

The lighting requirement for the line-up was fairly straightforward. The big question was, how to put an old lady 5 ft. 6 in. away with a perfectly clear view of a line of twelve husky men without them seeing her—short of putting her in a tent with eye holes! Polarised glass, giving one-way vision, was considered, but would have been too costly.

"Why not use plain polished plate glass," I said. The resultant stares clearly indicated that mental doubts were being expressed as to the wisdom of having me there at all! But I pointed out that when one stands in a well-lit room at night, it is difficult to see out through a window because of reflections from the room onto the glass. This should work for us, but I could see problems.

With a large sheet of glass, we built a mock-up in our demonstration theatre and results confirmed expectations. Provided we kept the reflected light where we wanted it, and kept that passing through the glass onto the witness to a minimum, the suspect couldn't see through the glass because of his own reflection—he was looking into a mirror. It was not unlike the Pepper's Ghost effect.

The eventual line-up room was designed as a segment of a circle. The suspects now are arranged around the circumference with the witness at the centre, so by merely turning his head, he can have a clear full face view of each suspect in turn, each one being the same distance away and on the same level.

The cost of a curved window was felt to be unwarranted and so two flat sheets of glass have been arranged as a wide-angle V. The centre join does not seem to present any viewing problems.

The lighting consists of two lengths of magazine borderlight (batten), assisted by a couple of small floods at the top and a magazine footlight in 2 sections at the bottom. The top lighting has been angled to give maximum intensity between 4 ft. 6 in. to 6 ft. 6 in. from the floor and a total of 18/150 W. General-purpose lamps are used. The footlights use 16/60 W. General-purpose bulbs with the main light axis at 35°. Top and bottom lighting is on separate dimmer control so that a balanced effect can be achieved. Obviously, one must try to light the suspects to appear perfectly normal, thus most of the light must come from the top front at about 35°.

Some degree of footlighting is necessary to take the place of fill light which, in nature, is normally reflected from below. We had to keep any reflected light other than from the suspects themselves to the absolute minimum, and the whole area is painted black, both behind and in front of the glass. The wall behind the suspects is, in fact, a black velour curtain as this reflects less light than a black painted surface. Too much light reflected through the glass would light up the witnesses and destroy the psychological effect they have in the knowledge that they are unseen by the suspects. As it is, the little light that does get through is acceptable and even if the twelve suspects were to wear white suits, their own reflections would be so intense that they would still not be able to see through the glass well enough to identify.

The final tests were conducted by twelve "suspect police officers" (see photograph on page 14) playing a new game—"Identify the Witness"—which they lost, and the fishtank is now in service and two more are being built as further proof that crime does not pay—the criminal at least!

My first contact with the Metropolitan Toronto Police having left me much impressed with their insistence on fair play for those on both sides of the glass, I will not say too many nasty things when next I find a yellow slip of paper under my car windshield wiper!

MADDERMARKET THEATRE, NORWICH

by Ross Hills

In these days when theatre forms and staging are so much discussed it is useful to remind ourselves that in the now far away 1920s even Britain had its experiments. Perhaps the most famous of all these was the Elizabethan theatre of Nugent Monck, the Maddermarket. It may come as a surprise to some to learn that this theatre is still on the active list though, as the photograph (Fig. 5) shows, not all the productions sit happily on the Elizabethan stage. We are indebted to Ian Emmerson, the resident producer, for the loan of the photographs and to Ross Hills, who has worked at this theatre for some years, for the following article.

In the early years of this century, an actor decided to settle in Norwich. He did so for a good reason; he had been given the life-tenancy of an Elizabethan house. His name was Walter Nugent Monck, who afterwards became the founder and producer of the Maddermarket Theatre.

Fig. 1. The basic open Elizabethan stage (as used for "The Knight of the Burning Pestle", March 1959).

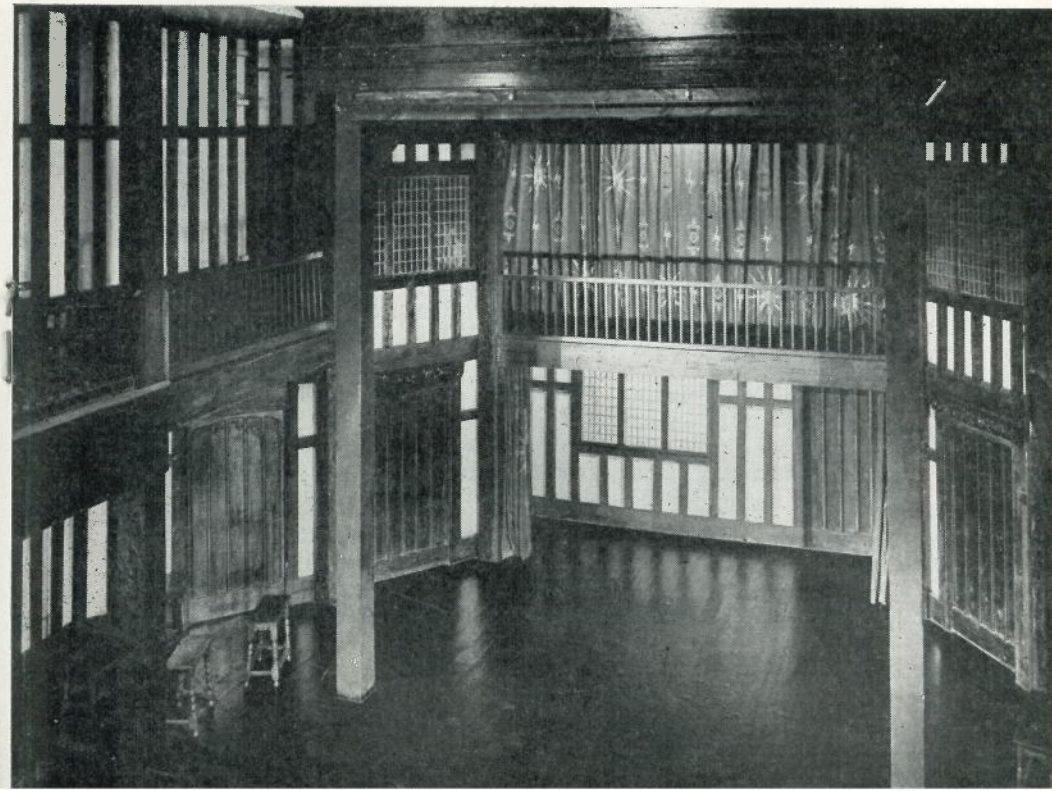




Fig. 2. Production of "King John" (June 1959).

Nugent Monck—he dropped the "Walter"—started as a music student at some academy. After a few terms, however, his teachers decided that his musical talents were scanty, and firmly told him so. By a natural transition, he adopted a stage career, and was associated with the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and with the company directed by William Poel. The latter association marked a turning point in his career. Sixty years ago the Shakespearean roost was mainly ruled by Sir Henry Irving and Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree. Their productions were expensive, opulent, and studded with "stars", especially themselves. The scenery was gorgeous, but the intervals were naturally frequent and often extensive. The text was mutilated, but the big speeches were firmly delivered from the centre of the stage. William Poel was a rebel: he did not believe in any of this pretentious nonsense. He held to a simple truth: Shakespeare himself had little scenery and few properties. Very well, then: the proper attack implied *continuity* without frills. Poel trailed around, often in draughty halls, often to scanty audiences. He is largely forgotten, but he left disciples. One of them was Nugent Monck.

We now jump to 1919 or thereabouts. Freed from his Red Cross duties Monck returned to Norwich and his Elizabethan house. He was a bachelor living rent free, and by his father's death he possessed a small private income. He gathered a small circle of

friends and acquaintances, and fostered readings of morality plays and poetry. Later on, these expanded to simple private performances in a small room called the Music House. This, however, did not satisfy him. The Music House had only a tiny platform, and held less than a hundred people. So Monck looked round for something better, and came across a building in the former Maddermarket. Madder was the old natural purple dye, made from the root of the madder plant. The name still survives, though the product was superseded long ago by aniline dyes. The building had experienced quaint vicissitudes. Largely of wooden construction, it had been a Roman Catholic church, the headquarters of the local Salvation Army, and then a baking-powder factory. Once inside it, Monck looked round with a practised critical eye, and almost jumped for joy. He realised that with very little alteration it could be converted into a near replica of Shakespeare's old Globe Theatre. Moreover, the acoustics were superb.

Difficulties arose; the building was for sale, and not for rent. Monck knew some likely backers, but they naturally imposed conditions which did not suit him; he wanted a free hand. He could raise the purchase money by selling most of his shares, but this would leave him very little; he needed to make a small profit from the plays. Would it be possible to stage a play every month? Could he get an adequate amateur company? Would the Norwich public support such a venture? In the end, doubtless after much misgiving, he decided on the purchase. He sold the majority of his shares, bought the building, and made a few alterations. It was a bold and courageous step.

It will thus be seen that the formation of the group called "The Norwich Players" was unusual. Nugent Monck was in sole command, and remained so; he selected the plays, chose the casts, and produced every play. All that his disciples had to do was to come along and act. He would show them. Come and try, carry a banner, look after the costumes, somehow or other he enlisted them. The theatre thus became a rather curious mixture of professional and amateur. The founder himself was paid, indirectly, by taking the profits; out of these he paid the scenic designer and the electrician. Nowadays the wardrobe mistress is also paid, and the booking is done by a local ticket agency. All seats are bookable at 6s. 6d., 4s. 6d., 3s. 6d. and 2s. It must be said, however, that the founder had no basic interest in large profits, except for the benefit of the theatre. He was a dedicated man; he lived simply; he neither drank nor smoked. If he had a good year he spent most of it on the theatre, some new costumes, better heating. As I indicated, the term "Norwich Players" is a trifle misleading; there is no society in the usual sense of the word. In theory, there is an inner circle of established "Players" and the others are "Associates". In practice, there is little or no distinction; "associates" may be allotted the

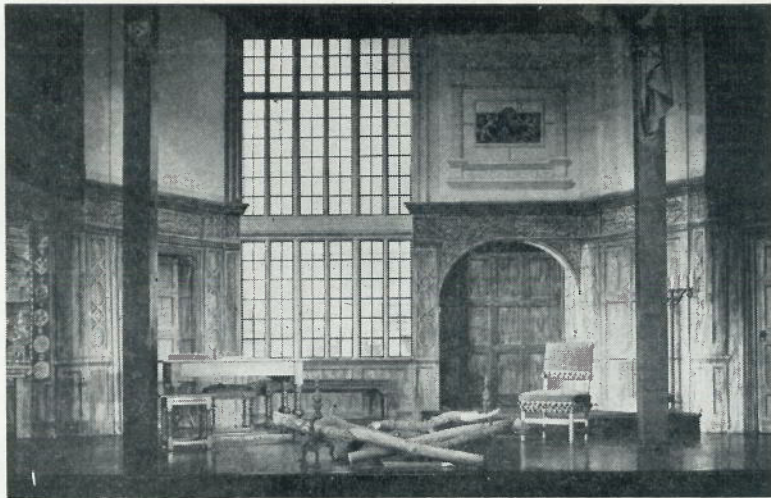


Fig. 3. Production of "Queen Elizabeth" takes the downstage wooden pillars in its stride.

principal parts. The "Players" hold a few meetings each season, and they can elect other "Players"; beyond this they have no privileges. There are no subscriptions and anybody may make an approach and request a part.

Since the founder's retirement the theatre has been conducted by a trust. The traditions remain unaltered, except that possibly the present professional producer has a little less latitude.

Nugent Monck, while at the Maddermarket, produced every one of Shakespeare's plays. I believe this has also been done at the Old Vic, but not by one producer.

We must now take a look at the theatre itself and the style of the productions (Fig. 1). There are four permanent entrances, two on each side, and an alcove at the back under the balcony. This balcony extends right round the four walls, and forms a gallery for spectators on the three sides in front of the apron stage. The stage is small, but is naturally extended by the apron. The seating accommodation was originally 240, but has now been increased to 300 by an extension of the auditorium. There are no footlights, of course; the main lighting is frontal.

The back balcony is capable of many variations. It can be used as ramparts or castle walls (Fig. 2), or for the balcony scene in *Romeo and Juliet*. The alcove underneath also responds to skilful and imaginative use. In *Romeo and Juliet* it was divided into two; one division showed a bed, the other a small altar. With curtains

drawn over the latter, the scene represented Juliet's bedroom; with curtains drawn over the bed, the scene indicated the Friar's cell. For Shakespearean and kindred productions, the general method largely followed William Poel's dictum—continuity. There is normally some basic setting; other scenes are devised round this by small additions or subtractions, or by the actors opening or closing curtains. The founder used curtains extensively; hence, probably, the pillars and canopy. Possibly he originally contemplated a programme wholly devoted to Elizabethan plays, but I scarcely think so. Anyway, the Shakespeare plays were lively and virile performances, with only one interval in the middle. Cuts were certainly made to the text, but in the main they were made with discretion. There was a sweep and surge which carried both the cast and the audience along. Crowds were well handled, and the rustics usually spoke the Norfolk dialect.

With regard to more modern plays, in my view the founder was not quite so happy. His taste, on paper, was catholic enough,

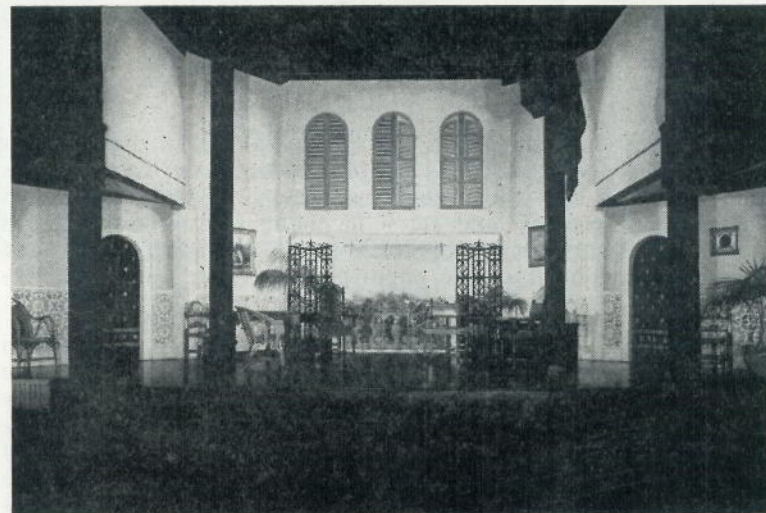


Fig. 4. "100 Years Old" Quintero Bros. (September 1957). When tabs are used they hang only between the two inner pillars silhouetted above.

but there often seemed a diminution of interest and effort. He was fond of Chekhov, and in *The Cherry Orchard* he achieved an atmosphere of nostalgic ineptitude and procrastination. I thought Shaw's *Saint Joan* would be notable, but the general result was disappointing. He dared not cut any of it, nor allow the performers to gabble. Whether the open apron stage had anything to do with the

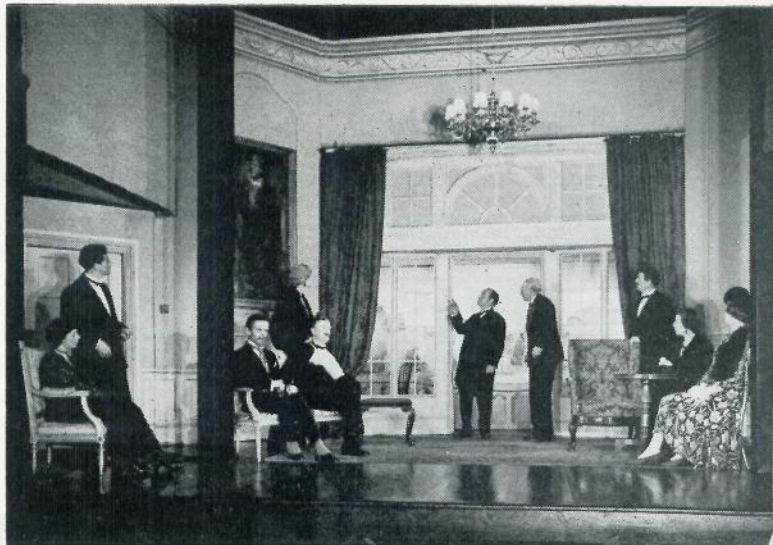


Fig. 5. "The Honour of the Family" Salacrou (May 1958). The wooden pillars strike a jarring note.

general question is dubious. Possibly the real fact of the matter is that Nugent Monck was at his best in what we may call a producer's play. He cherished colour and costume and lighting; he wanted something where he could cut if he thought it necessary, and a play without hampering stage directions. In other words, he wanted a perfectly free hand and an opportunity to create and not merely to interpret.

However, let us briefly examine this question of the open apron stage. From a production standpoint it can be useful; the extra space can facilitate crowds and concerted movement. It may be a welcome factor for comparatively modern plays such as *Strife* and *An Enemy of the People*. With a little ingenuity, it is capable of adaptation for the so-called "proscenium" play (Fig. 3). From the actor's point of view I don't think it matters a jot. If you can act on a proscenium stage you can act on the more intimate apron. The footlights have gone, and you may be able to see the audience more clearly, but that naturally depends on the frontal lighting. The Maddermarket possesses "tabs", but they cover only the space between the two upright pillars. This raises a difficulty where people are "discovered" at the rise of the curtain, and again at the end of the act, but it can be reduced by lighting or a back entrance and exit. It always struck me as a sketchy arrangement, but the audience seems to regard it as a convention and, within my experience, doesn't bother much about it.

We must now examine the relationship between actor and audience, which to my mind is the crux of the matter. Should the spectator exist in the same world as the actors or not?

Personally, I much prefer a line of demarcation; the two parties should exist in different dimensions. The line may be actual (proscenium stage) or imaginary. The spectator is then in a position

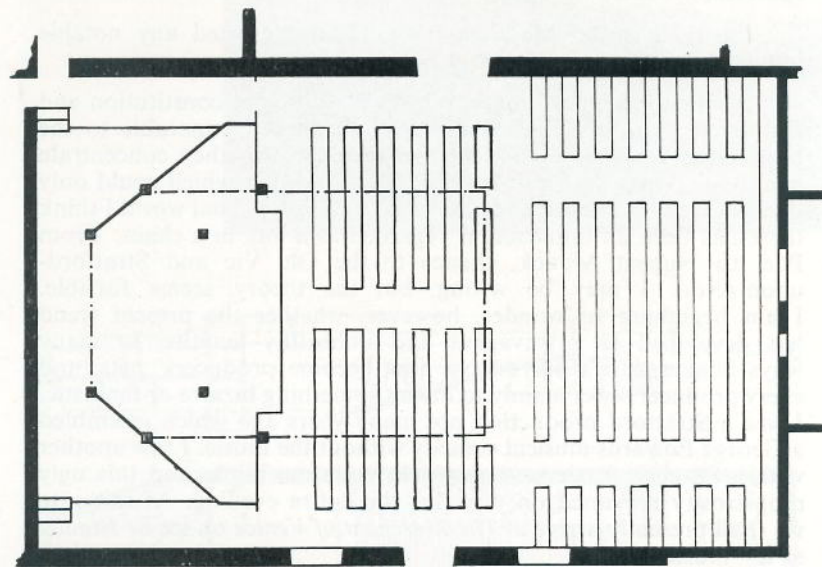


Fig. 6. Plan showing stalls and stage level, balcony overhead indicated by broken line.

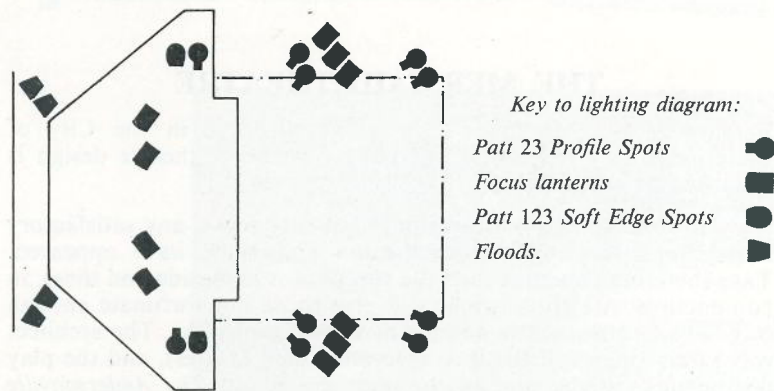


Fig. 7. Normal lighting layout including permanent and hired equipment.

of objective superiority; he can watch poor ordinary mortals proceed to triumph or despair; he can anticipate what may happen; he chortles because he knows something that the actor does not, as in the screen scene from *The School for Scandal*. In short, I like illusion. If Joe Baker plays "Sir Peter Teazle" I am not watching Joe Baker; I am watching Sir Peter, poor deluded man, being led up the garden path. So let him keep to his acting area and we, the spectators, will do the rest.

Lastly, has the Maddermarket Theatre exerted any notable influence on the theatre at large?

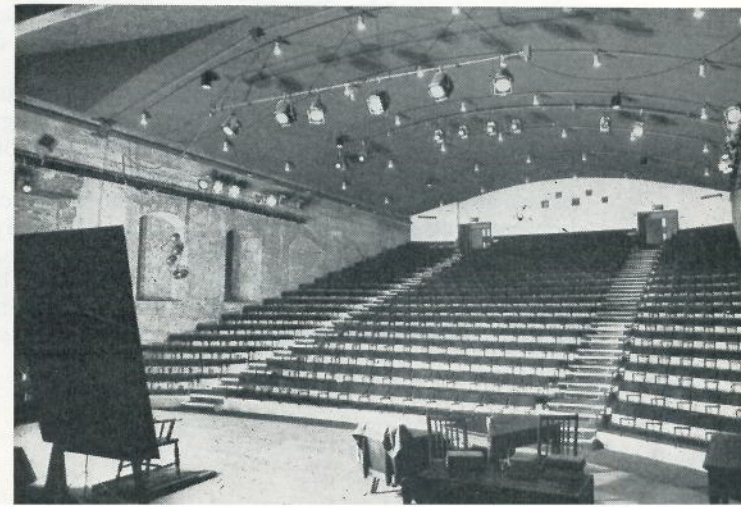
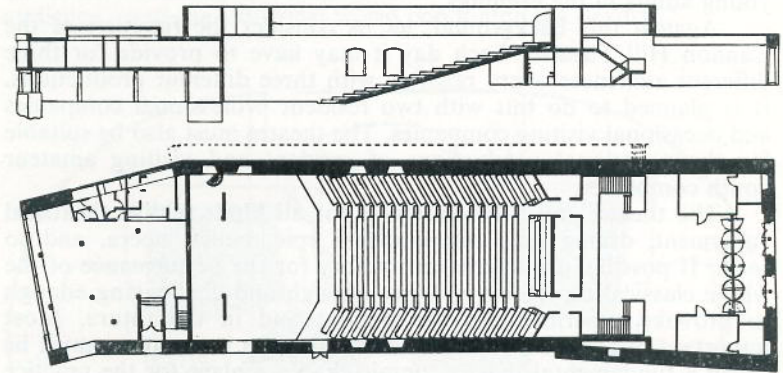
Amateur societies, in general, have a different constitution and a different type of stage. Those with facilities comparable to the Maddermarket are few and far between, nor do they concentrate mainly on Shakespeare. It is therefore a question which could only be answered by intensive research. To the professional world I think there has been an influence, if regarded as a link in a chain. From Poel to Nugent Monck, thence to the Old Vic and Stratford-upon-Avon. I may be wrong, but the theory seems feasible. I am beginning to wonder, however, whether the present trend has developed to extravagant and unhealthy lengths. In many ways Shakespeare's plays have now become producers' pets, and every producer seeks mainly to invent something bizarre or fantastic. I saw a Stratford production not many years ago which resembled a George Edwards musical comedy without the music. I saw another with a fantastic basic setting which made me blink, and this ugly monstrosity remained on view for the entire evening. At this rate we shall presently arrive at *The Merchant of Venice* on ice or *Hamlet* as a "musical".

* * *

THE MERMAID THEATRE

Bernard Miles' Mermaid Theatre, Puddledock, in the City of London, is very frequently referred to whenever theatre design is discussed or written about.

However, it is a curious thing that very few if any satisfactory illustrations showing the auditorium and stage have appeared. TABS therefore commissioned the two photos alongside and these, in conjunction with the section, will give those not fortunate enough to have seen this theatre an idea of what it looks like. The architect was Elidir Davies, F.R.I.B.A. (Devereux and Davies), and the play on the stage at the time of the photograph was *The Andersonville Trial*.



THE CANNON HILL THEATRE

by John English

*A new flexible Theatre to be built as part of the Midlands
Arts Centre for Young People in Birmingham*

On a 15-acre site made available in Cannon Hill Park by the City of Birmingham the Midlands Art Centre is to provide enjoyments in the arts for young people from six or seven years of age into the early twenties. It is not intended to replace other cultural institutions, but to be an introduction and preparation for the community's major theatres, concert halls, art galleries, and so forth.

The words "young people" represent a wide range of needs and interests; in general terms the Centre has to provide for three groups of people—young children 6–11 years, middle-age children 11–14 years, and young adults say 15–25 years. Again in general terms what is provided by the Centre will be devoted to young children in the mornings, to older children in the afternoons, to young adults in the evenings.

Against this background, let us consider the function of the Cannon Hill Theatre. Each day it may have to provide for three different audiences—very possibly with three different productions. It is planned to do this with two resident professional companies and occasional visiting companies. The theatre must also be suitable for the occasional productions of resident and visiting amateur youth companies.

The theatre must be equipped for all kinds of live theatrical enjoyment, drama both intimate and epic, ballet, opera, and so forth. If possible it must be satisfactory for the performance of the whole classical repertoire and free enough and challenging enough to provoke experiment in the present and in the future. Most important of all it must be what, for want of a better term, must be called a fundamental theatre, unmistakably a place for the practice of theatre arts as an immediate experience between live actors and live audience brought together for each unique occasion. It has to be a theatre that will free both actors and audience as far as possible from the overlapping confusions of the kindred dramatic arts of cinema, radio and television.

These then are the considerations behind the design of the Cannon Hill Theatre—an exceptional range of usage requiring great flexibility of size, shape and actor audience relationship—a theatre with a very heavy production programme, possibly heavier than any theatre at present in use—perhaps three performances a day of three different productions. Such requirements obviously call for exceptional technical equipment, yet more important than anything else the theatre has to be satisfactory in human terms, both socially and aesthetically—a place for stimulating, rewarding, pleasurable, theatrical enjoyment.

Many people in many places are busy devising flexible adaptable theatre plans that will serve the classical past, an uncertain present and an unknown future. I believe that the Cannon Hill design has turned out more promising than most. I think this is so not entirely by chance, but because it is based on a very simple fundamental form—that of the Arena Theatre Company field experiment. This form, in use as a working theatre since 1948, is now familiar to most people. It is also the basic form of the theatre at Stratford, Ontario, the new theatres at Chichester and Minneapolis, and also, as far as one understands it, it is the form that Peter Hall is seeking at Stratford and at the Aldwych. It also happens to be a basic of actor audience relationship in a historical sense; the form—on a reduced scale—of the Greek theatre, out of which step by step our other forms of theatre have developed. This I believe is the principle reason why in the Cannon Hill Theatre we have found somewhat more straightforward solutions to the problems of adaptability and flexibility.

The basic Arena Theatre Company design was conceived in terms of a single unifying space containing the three elements of the theatrical occasion; the drama at the centre, the real world—the audience—and the theatrical world containing the drama.

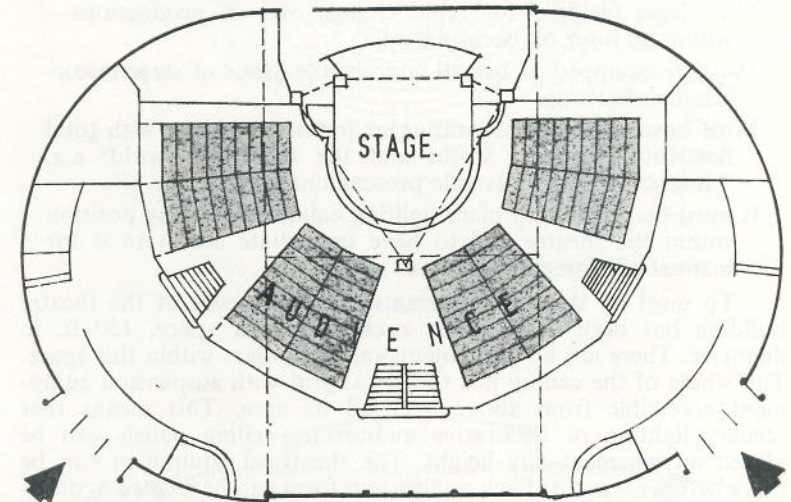


Fig. 1

The drawing (Fig. 1) shows one arrangement of the Arena Theatre as used experimentally in a circus tent.

The Cannon Hill Theatre takes this simple form and arranges

for an actor audience relationship ranging from the most contained form of theatre in the round to the least contained of the picture frame theatre (Fig. 2).

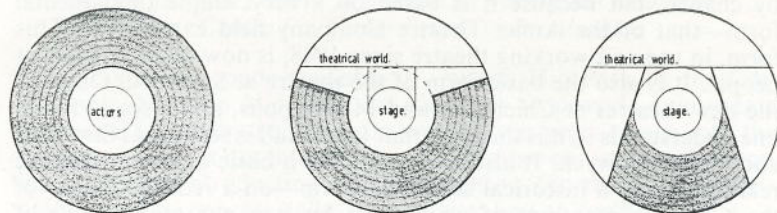


Fig. 2

Before describing in more detail some of the theatre arrangements possible in the Cannon Hill design, it will be as well to state some of the specified technical requirements. The theatre must be capable of:

Housing three companies and three productions at any one time.

Must have facilities for rapid change over of productions—within an hour on occasion.

Must be equipped to use all conceivable kinds of stage decoration and setting.

Must have means of separating or joining together, with total flexibility, the real world and the theatrical world, e.g. “house” tabs—adjustable proscenium walls.

It must be possible to place lighting equipment in any position within the theatre and to have immediate access to it for manual adjustment.

To meet all these requirements, the inner core of the theatre building has been designed as a clear circular space, 150 ft. in diameter. There are no permanent walls or pillars within this space. The whole of the ceiling is a theatrical grid with suspension equipment accessible from above over all its area. This means that scenery lighting or decorative auditorium ceiling panels can be placed anywhere at any height. The theatrical equipment can be put where we want it. Each auditorium form can be treated acoustically for its special purpose.

Permanent seating tiers are provided over approximately half of the theatre space; additional seating tiers can be set up over the remaining space. The theatre has a wagon and revolving stage system, usable in each of the different forms. There is also a stage lift system capable of taking whole stage settings into the basement for storage or resetting. There is a simple lift and truck system to

enable the orchestra to be moved to various parts of the house as required by different use and different forms.

Dressing rooms, rehearsal rooms, stores, foyers and other social arrangements are provided for on three floors around the outer rim of the building.

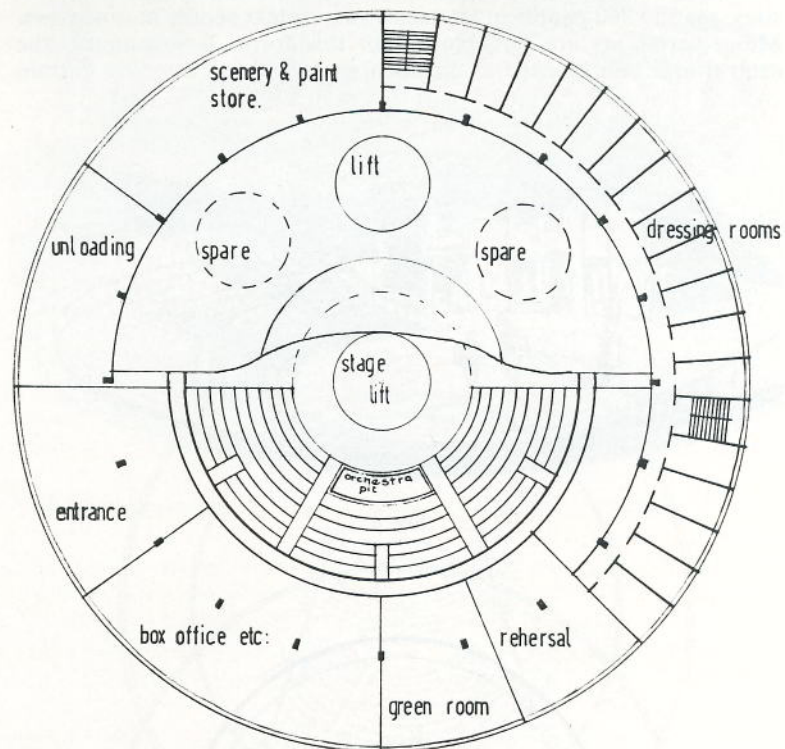


Fig. 3

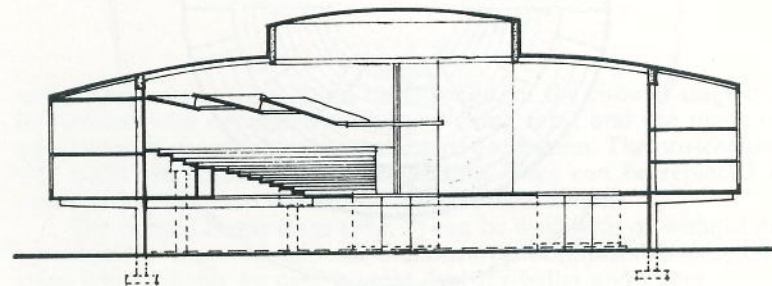


Fig. 3 shows in outline the accommodation provided at first floor level, and the section.

Some of the typical theatrical arrangements that are possible are now briefly described. There are, of course, many other possible arrangements.

The Arena Theatre arrangements (Fig. 4) can be provided in two sizes, seating 960 people in thirteen rows, or 600 people in nine rows. Many variations are possible within this form. For instance, the central area can be used as an open stage with no dividing curtain

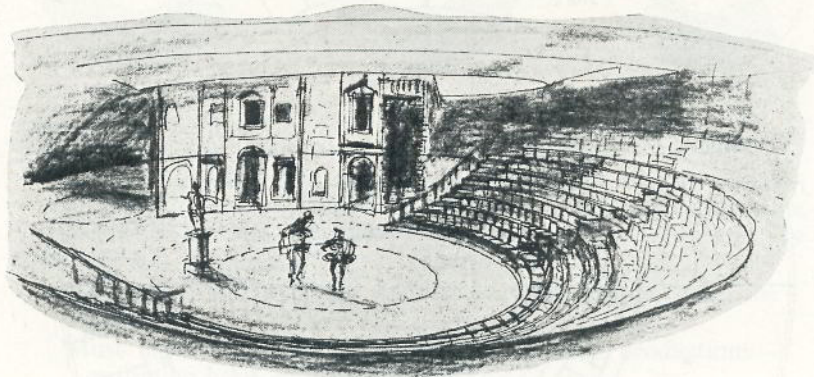


Fig. 4

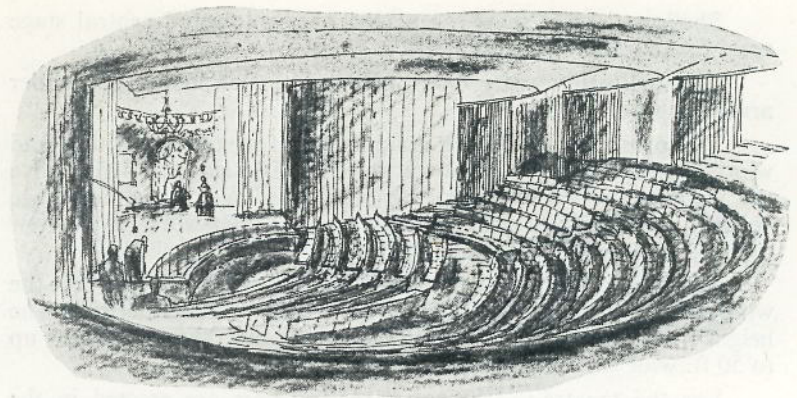
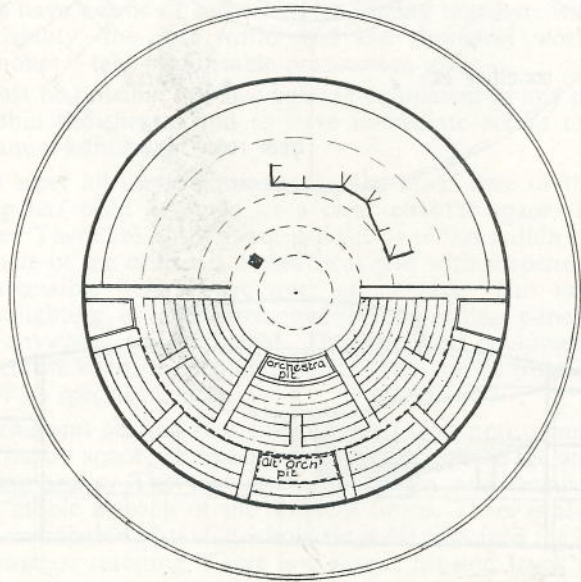
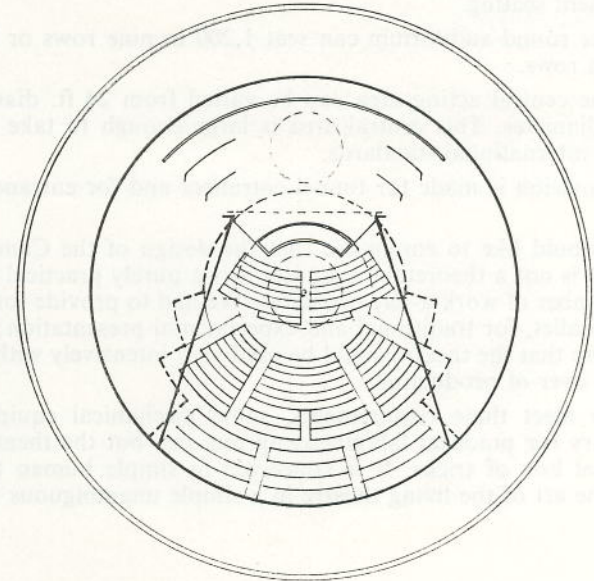


Fig. 5



and a permanent architectural background, or the circular stage can be isolated with circular travelling or rising tabs, and use made of any degree of changeable stage setting or decoration. The proscenium side walls are adjustable and retractable. They can be replaced if required by theatrical setting throughout their length.

The picture frame stage (Fig. 5) can be used with or without an apron and, if required, with an orchestra pit of adjustable size: this stage will probably be used a great deal for ballet and opera,

Shallow tiers of seats are placed over a lowered central stage area, making the orchestra stalls.

The auditorium seats 700 in twenty rows, or 500 in the smaller arrangement.

The proscenium opening is adjustable for shape, position and width. In the sketch it is shown at 40 ft. The stage is 4 ft. above the stalls floor. The stage depth shown is 36 ft.; the forestage space is in addition to this. The sight lines at their worst give a view of 25 ft. wide on a back cloth 36 ft. from the house tabs line.

The acting area includes a 24 ft. revolve which is also a lift; the wing space is large enough to take a 24 ft. wagon on either side. The height from stage to grid is 45 ft. The stage can take backcloths up to 50 ft. wide or use a cyclorama with a chord of 90 ft.

For the theatre-in-the-round, seating tiers are erected in the theatrical space, matching the permanent tiers of the Arena auditorium; when not needed these tiers and seats are stored under the permanent seating.

The round auditorium can seat 1,200 in nine rows or 2,000 in thirteen rows.

The central acting area can be varied from 24 ft. diameter to 48 ft. diameter. This central area is large enough to take a circus ring of international standards.

Provision is made for tunnel entrances and for entrances from below.

I would like to emphasise that the design of the Cannon Hill Theatre is not a theoretical exercise; it is a purely practical solution to a number of work-a-day problems. We had to provide for drama, opera, ballet, for traditional and experimental presentation; we had to ensure that the theatre could be used very intensively with a rapid change over of productions.

To meet these requirements, some mechanical equipment is necessary for practical labour-saving reasons, but the theatre is no technical box of tricks. It is conceived in simple human terms to serve the art of the living theatre in a simple unambiguous way.

* * *