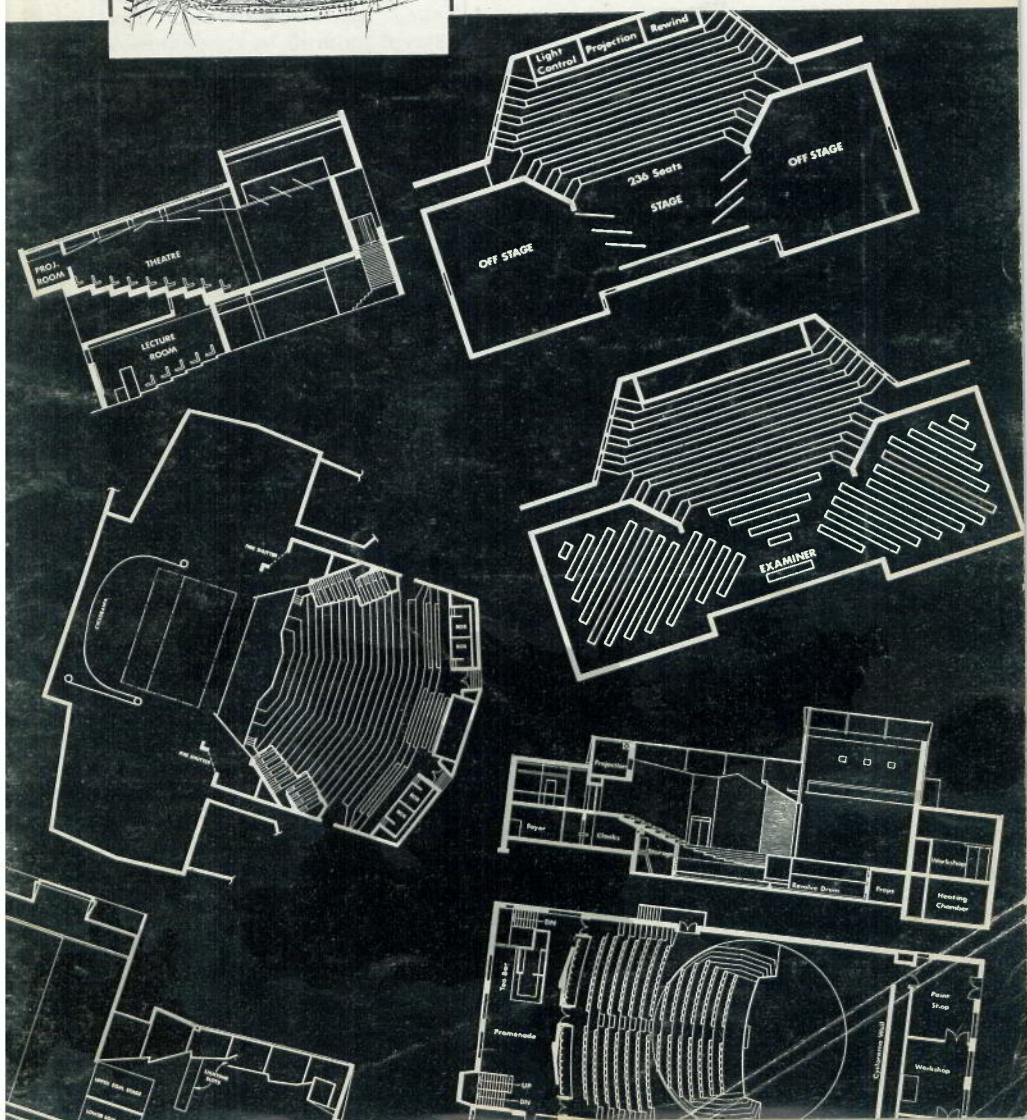


# TABS

DECEMBER 1964 VOL. 22 No. 4



# TABS

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### What is Adequate? or Adequate for What?

An unusual event has taken place recently which, although it affects one of London's little theatres, is of great significance and is worth more than a passing thought. A new preset dimmer-board had been installed, but before more than a few months had passed and before the theatre could have been said to have properly opened it was condemned as lacking certain essentials. Steps have now been taken to get it completely replaced by another. If we add that the new control is to be by Strand Electric and the rejected one was by another firm, then some will assume that an opportunity is being taken here to crow over a fallen rival. However, regular TABS readers will know better. The story has far wider implications. It

was price that determined which original system went in and price as an arbiter can not only mislead between the products of one firm and another, but also between the products of the same firm—under other circumstances, it could have been us! If price is the only arbiter, why not a Strand Patt. 45 500-watt spot at roughly £5 instead of the Strand Patt. 123 500-watt spot at £10?

Some detail is necessary to explain why the original control was said to be unsuitable. It is a matter of degree of facility. A preset control must have at least two sets of dimmer levers; one of these is operative and holds the existing lighting already in use while the levers of the other are “Preset” to the next series of levels required. Only thus can a large change of light affecting many dimmers take place conveniently. Thus far is accepted, but unfortunately a second series of dimmer levers is not enough. To quote the ABTT recommendations for Stage Lighting, “The switchboard must include a control, or controls, so that the operator can make a cross-fade slowly or rapidly from the light levels represented by one preset to the light levels represented by another preset.”

To do this properly means a more complicated circuit than a mere changeover switch to cut from one set of levels to another, and is therefore more costly. Both systems have two sets of levers and can be called “Preset”, but the facilities of the one against the other do not compare; nor does the price.

There has been considerable pressure on us at Strand Electric to provide the switch changeover preset as being something less costly than our normal preset practice (System LC) but better than the one set of levels of our least expensive remote control (System SR). We have refused to compromise and this lost us two London jobs, one of which now is likely to become ours without the asking—the remaining one is said to serve its owners satisfactorily.

The story not only pinpoints the faults of price as an arbiter but pinpoints the problem of what to recommend. How much should a theatre spend on its switchboard facilities—how many dimmers should it have, a line must obviously be drawn somewhere in the matter of expenditure.

Amazing things have been done with a lash-up of a few dimmers, switches and plugs, yet when a new “super” control goes in somewhere there are still things it will not do. This suggests missing facilities and if facilities are missing today then there is only one reason—too tight a budget. The apparent contradiction between the versatile “lash-up” and the de luxe “super” is paralleled by the joyful acceptance of the makeshifts and hardships of picnic and camp life compared to the modern kitchens and spring mattresses of our homes.

Few people now accept the idea of a car without a heater, a windscreen washer and wipers, etc.—all rare refinements not so long ago. Our standards have changed and what is expected of a stage switchboard has changed too. It behoves us to put in the best control we can afford, for unlike individual lamps, the control is a

large item not to be replaced for many years. Further it is an unfortunate fact that the simpler systems do not convert into the more advanced forms. It is a case of complete replacement.

Determination of the form and size of lighting control is the most serious of all equipment decisions that have to be made in respect of a theatre. It is this item which will determine the visual side of productions for years to come. It is the principal agency to enable the audience to view what we require them to see at any particular moment and contrary to some beliefs, theatre still means and is a place for viewing.

## A PERFECT SECRETARY FOR STRAND ELECTRIC

*by J. D. H. Sheridan*

On Friday, 30th October, 1964, there took place at the Charing Cross Hotel, a Reception and Dinner Party. The occasion was the retirement of Henry William Myers upon completion of 40 years, service with the Strand Electric Group.

It is an accepted truth that Strand Electric was founded and built by men of the theatre—the type of men for whom the theatre has always provided, not merely a way of making a living, but a way of life. What may not be quite as generally well known is that men of the theatre include accountants in their illustrious ranks.

During his working career, Henry Myers was a man of many parts—Accountant, Company Secretary, Company Registrar, Pension Fund Trustee, Personnel Manager, Clerk of Sundry Works and Commander of the Commissariat, to mention only those that first come to my mind. Of course, he was basically an accountant but an accountant with a difference—an accountant of the theatre, in fact. For him, the word “float” may have had a financial rather than a technical connotation. To him a Junior Eight might have been a preparatory school pop group or a second feature at Henley, but he has always evinced a keen interest in show business, particularly the economics, if not the technicalities, thereof. To an instinctive financial common sense he added, over the years, an extensive experience of show-business people, their likes and dislikes and, in particular, their financial idiosyncrasies. He was, therefore, a perfect secretary for Strand Electric.

In business, but certainly not in private life, there have been occasions, though not often in latter years, when Henry Myers has been regarded as “tight” (in the financial sense, of course; spiritually speaking, he has always been a near, but not too near, teetotaller). What is without question is that he doesn't like to see resources, particularly cash resources, wasted. What sensible man does? In the case of Henry Myers, the dislike of waste is highly developed. When it is remembered that, in the early years, both of

Strand Electric and himself, it was his job to try to make every shilling do the work of half-a-crown, his attitude towards waste, or what appeared to him to be waste, is easily understood.

Henry Myers was born on 30th June, 1900. He spent the latter part of World War I as an R.A.F. Cadet Pilot. After demobilisation, he had a period at an Accountancy School before joining the C. B. Cochran organisation as a book-keeper in 1923. The circumstances attending his transfer to Strand Electric on Monday, 13th October, 1924, his appointment to the Secretaryship on 1st January, 1925, and his becoming a director in 1942 are related in the Golden Jubilee issue of TABS.

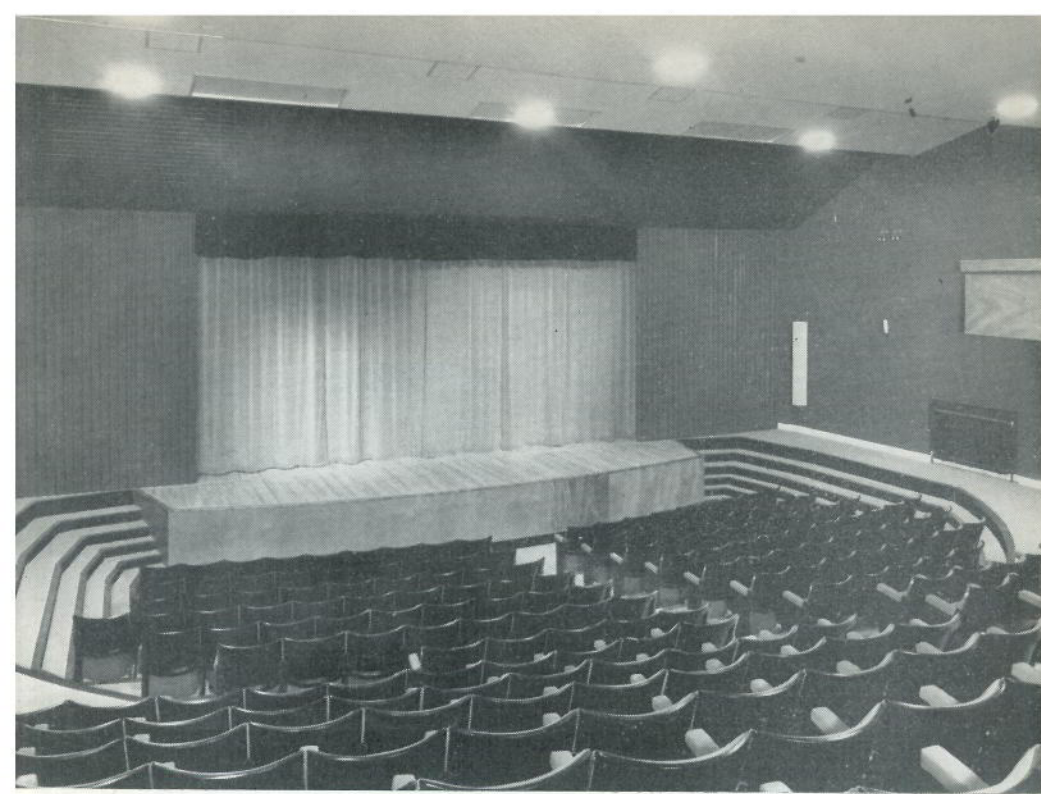
Apart from his ever growing responsibilities in the company and the associated companies, Henry Myers was always the driving force behind the social club from the beginning, when the scale of the firm was small enough to make it feel almost a family, until now when its size tends to make it more impersonal. In consequence such functions as are planned need much more drive to carry through.

He could be seen setting off in bleak mid-winter to some seaside outpost personally to inspect the venue and arrangements for later summer gaiety as represented by the firm's annual outing. Henry Myers' great interest in sport was of service in the early days when he ran for the firm in the Theatrical Sports and has persisted in his ardent following of the fortunes of the Spurs whose crises are the only thing which might have put his allegiance to Strand in jeopardy.

This human interest in the firm and its staff showed also in his assiduous visiting of those troubled with ill health and in always finding time to see retired members on their visits to Head Office. His outside activities were many, for example, he was Chairman of the Theatrical Traders' Association 1960/1963.

I worked very closely with Henry Myers for over thirty years. We did not always agree but this never made any difference to our personal friendship. He is that kind of man. Firm in his own convictions but able to recognise that there may sometimes be another point of view. His departure from the day-to-day Strand Electric scene was a shock and it will take us a while longer to get really used to hearing another voice on Extension 120, but we feel sure that Henry Myers does not intend to lose contact with us. We assure him of our respect and high regard and we wish him and his wife many years of very happy retirement.





## THE CRESCENT THEATRE, BIRMINGHAM

by *Frederick Bentham*

Last June I described the new Questors theatre at Ealing and now it is the turn of an equally famous amateur theatre, the Crescent, Birmingham. These two enterprises are so alike, yet completely un-alike that I cannot help wishing that the opening of the new theatres had coincided and therefore could have formed one article: as it is there will have to be an unusual number of references to the "other" theatre.

There are great similarities between the two companies. Both really got moving in the early thirties when they forsook the vagrant life and converted existing long and narrow halls into their own theatres. Both amateur companies have a distinguished and adventurous list of productions to their credit. The Crescent Theatre just vacated was in fact a conversion of the derelict Baskerville Hall (named after the printer, not the hound) and had a proscenium width of 18 ft. and 188 seats. The auditorium was rather like a tunnel (there were only 10 seats to the full row) and the conversion tended to show that it is less difficult to put a picture frame stage

into a badly shaped room than our open-stage enthusiasts would have us believe.

There was no wing space at all on the actor's left but by dint of roofing over odd areas and knocking together other buildings, the premises came to possess considerable amenity. In contrast to the left, the actor's right had real wing space, but the "on stage" area itself was deep and narrow. There was a cyclorama at the rear. The lack of height and width led to a multi-border and batten lighting set-up. Impending clearance of this part of Birmingham for development led to the corporation offering to lease another site a short walk away. The Crescent is not a Civic Theatre, and the new building is to cost about £100,000.

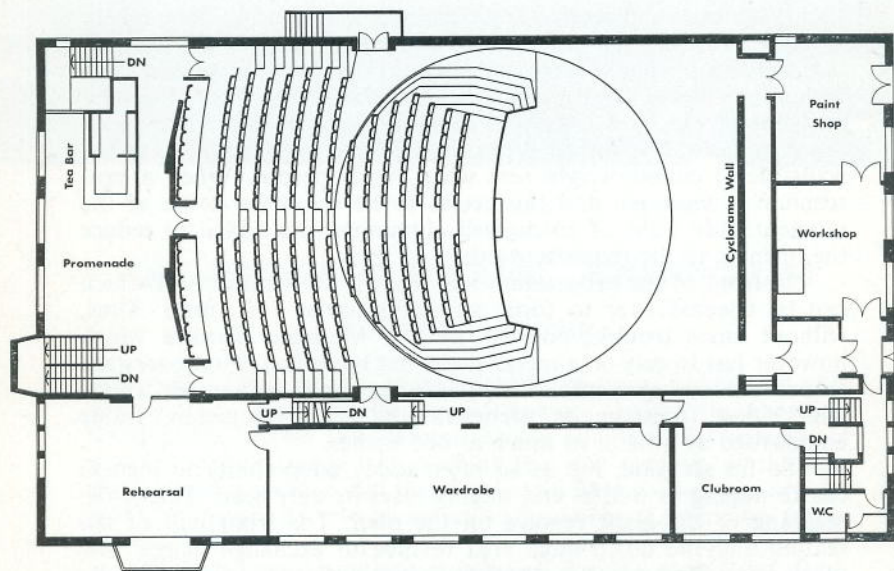
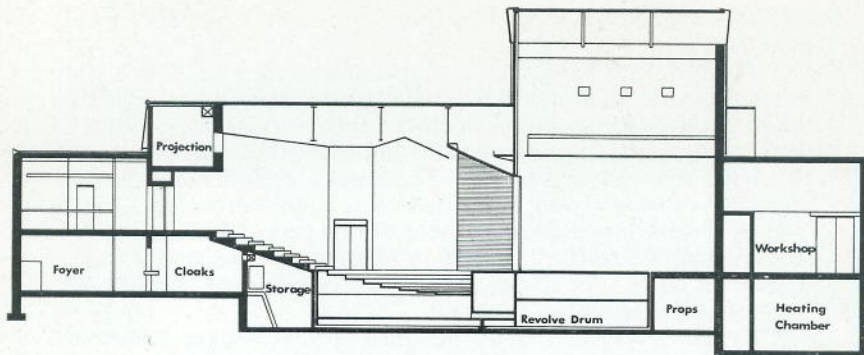
The new Crescent Theatre, designed by S. T. Walker & Partners, is in complete contrast to the old: the first impression is of width and in fact the new auditorium is nearly three times as wide. The place, however, only seats a further 100 in all, which is rather strange considering the space available and that it is intended to admit the public not just members.

If the plan and section are examined, ignoring for the moment the fact that part of the floor is a giant revolve, it can be seen that the theatre has a large end stage. The side walls of the auditorium are in the same line as those of the stage. The ceiling and roof line breaks back in section to allow a proper grid 33 ft. above the stage floor. It is intended to install double purchase (to keep the walls clear) counterweight sets when funds permit. When a proscenium is required, and this seems to be the main desire at the moment, side walls of corrugated aluminium are added to reduce the opening to the requisite width.

In front of the proscenium line there is an orchestra pit which can be covered over to form an apron stage 7 ft. deep. Thus, without much trouble, one can have a Mermaid Theatre which however has to rely on a raised stage, but has much better overstage suspension arrangement; or a proscenium stage of various widths with either forestage or orchestra and with its picture frame emphasised as little or as much as one wishes.

So far so good, but as so often today adaptability to include centre staging as well as end staging rears its ugly head. This is the meaning of the giant revolve on the plan. The front half of the seating and the down-stage area revolve to exchange places. The result is a rather peculiar transverse stage with the audience wholly stepped above it on one side and sunk as in a normal proscenium stage, on the other. Actor's entrances to this stage take place from the doors which were used for the front seats. Access for the audience to these latter seats in their revolved position would seem to be very inconvenient involving either crossing the sides of the acting area, or much wandering in backstage passages.

I have not seen the auditorium revolved but feel that owing to the two levels the audience cannot present that sense of unity or of enclosure which I understand is one of the principal aims of



Plan and section Crescent Theatre, Birmingham.

centre staging. Apart from the cost of this method there is another drawback, namely the reduction in numbers of seats and isolation of the front stalls when used in the normal end stage position (shown on plan). This is because the stepped rows must be accommodated within the circle. Thus instead of a solid mass of audience as at the Mermaid, London, or Phoenix, Leicester, we get a front group and a back group. This isolation of the front group is, how-

ever, much worse at the Questors, Ealing, when adapted to proscenium stage. There the audience simply does not hang together as one when the centre stage well is filled with stalls. They are very definitely to my mind an isolated community—the poor relations.

The inevitable conclusion one must come to, having seen several adaptable theatres including the Loeb Harvard, is that from the start it has to be decided which form one really wants most, *end*, or *centre*, or *what*? Round the chosen form there can be some adaptability in the shape of variants, but complete change there cannot be. It becomes a matter of compromise and less than adequate compromise at that.

Complete adaptability will never be obtained in any theatre, but improvised adaptability is obtainable in the studio type of outfit of which St. Mary's, Twickenham\*, is a good example. It is, however, an example which errs on the side of being overlarge and certainly cannot be classed as inexpensive. Such studio theatres do not normally have as much in the way of funds. St. Mary's seats 250 in one form and I would put the limit in planning such a place at 150 where money is really short. Another restriction would be north and west adaptability only, i.e. a long side or short side.

The trouble with the larger adaptable theatres is not just a matter of labour or expensive machinery but that there is a tendency to feel one wants a finished theatre for each of the forms, not a makeshift made up of rostrums, bits of curtain and odd flats. Questors theatre horseshoe for the theatre in the round form do not seem to belong. Once again a sense of makeshift.

At the Crescent, Birmingham, there has obviously been an aim to provide a complete auditorium; it is architectural rather than mechanical. There is no sense of the rigging and lighting bridge loft overall, as at the Questors: the auditorium has a ceiling. However, this ceiling has obviously got into trouble by trying to face both ways, so to speak, because of the centre staging alternative.

Instead of long slots facing one end, as at Oxford Playhouse†, there are traps in the ceiling which can be opened in order to point spots in the direction currently required. Inevitably these apertures are a compromise and are nowhere as good as they could have been if the stage had been going to stay in more or less one place. The exposed lighting bridges of the Questors are more logical in this context.

Enough of adaptability. Let us assume the revolve will never be revolved and we still find it a theatre which will provide a lot of interesting staging possibilities and it will be a long time before these are exhausted. Under these circumstances I would certainly try to bring into service two curiously neglected but obvious lighting positions. One is in the ceiling set back over the front row of seats and the other just above the proscenium. This latter is an ideal bridge position, but it will be completely obscured by the house

\* TABS, Vol. 21, No. 1. † TABS, Vol. 22, No. 2.



*Crescent Theatre: views from Juliet balcony.*



tabs when flown (there is no fire curtain). It is curious how some amateur companies are obsessed by the desire to fly things. In this case the result is talk of how many borders and where to hang the lighting bars. Granted a pantomime or a revival of an old time piece may need to use a flying grid in the time-honoured way, but surely the great delight for today of stage height, as provided by this grid, is the freedom from the need to mask overhead.

The theatre building itself is spacious and well laid out as the plans show. Phase II involves building a third floor on the flat roofed areas. When this is done offices and rehearsal room together with the wardrobe can move up there and the space freed becomes available for a restaurant and other facilities. The theatre is so professional in scale that one tends to forget that it is wholly amateur and that the officials one meets are snatching what opportunity they can and sacrificing their lunch hour to be there in the daytime. Amateur theatres, like the Crescent and the Questors, especially as they hope to supplement income by letting their obviously suitable premises for many other purposes such as conferences, are going to find staffing during the day a problem. However "professional" an amateur theatre is at night, by day it can present a sorry picture of incompetence; inability to provide a simple service, like rigging and switching on a few lights, completely negating all the splendid facilities.

The Crescent theatre opened on October 17th with, to quote the advance programme, "the English première of an exceptionally witty play, *Children to Bless Us*, by Andre Roussin", presented picture frame fashion complete with a box set and french window. "The scene is Paris and we find the charming Jacquet family solving all the problems of their unexpected 'happy event'." I said earlier the Birmingham and Ealing companies were alike and yet un-alike. The Questors launched themselves off the deep end of their peninsular stage with Ibsen's *Brand*!

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#### New Publication and Lecture Programme

"Theatre Planning", the bound edition of the SfB guide to the design of theatres published in the *Architects Journal*, is now available, price one guinea, from the Association of British Theatre Technicians' new address, 9 Fitzroy Square, W.1 (Telephone Euston 2666).

Due to its late publication, Mr. Basil Dean's review will not appear until our new issue.

The Head Office demonstration theatre programme is now issued as a supplement included in copies of TABS for the U.K. This programme, which also includes details of the three recorded and illustrated lectures available on loan, can be had on application to Head Office or the appropriate branch.

## MR BROWN'S TEA

by Jack Madre

*We began our Golden Jubilee year with a prologue by Joe Davis (of H. M. Tennent) in which he described under the title, "Little Tin Mug," his first days working for us in 1925. As an epilogue here are Jack Madre's recollections of his first day or so in Strand Electric. It is 1921, the year "Chu Chin Chow," the record-breaking First World War show, terminated its run and C. B. Cochran's "League of Notions" opened at the "New Oxford" theatre.*

Before joining the Strand Electric at Garrick Yard, 66a St. Martin's Lane, W.C.2, in July 1921, I had worked in the Theatre as a relief call boy at the London Pavilion and had done odd shows as "Props" at the New Oxford and the Prince's Theatre, etc. Prior to and during this period I got to know the ways and byways of London and its streets, but for some reason or other I had confused the Strand Electric with the Charing Cross Electric which was adjacent.

There the outstanding attractions were the two massive gleaming generators attended by an engineer and an assistant who were forever, or so it seemed to me, polishing and oiling these massive beauties until the great beasts simply hummed and purred with delight. Likewise so did I, for was I not joining the Strand Electric in a day or so and surely my talent would be recognised and I would be appointed to assist the engineer and help, with metal polish and a special rag, to keep the great beauties in finer trim. They would shine and purr with even greater pride in my care.

How the time did slowly pass until at last on the day at 2 p.m. I reported myself to a very nice gentleman who sported a faded frock-coat, wore pince-nez attached to a black silk cord, and topped off the effect with a very fine black beard. This was Mr. Brown, later to be called Papa. He was the first manager that Strand Electric ever employed and, with respect to all my managerial colleagues today, the most sincere and the kindest man you would wish to meet and work for. Papa introduced me to two charming young ladies, Miss Evie Earnshaw and Miss Chris Beard—the entire office staff. I apparently met with their approval, for Miss Beard immediately asked me if I knew where the Coliseum Dairy was. I did and was then presented with a very large enamel jug which I swear was two feet tall and ten inches across the base. With this I was told to go and get 1½d. worth of milk. I muttered something about "at least I won't spill any", and was given a gentle reprimand and told not to be saucy. On my way to and from the dairy I passed the generators and thought to myself "I'll soon be with you".

Immediately on my return I was asked if I knew the Chapter House. I did and incidentally it was next door to the Coliseum Dairy. Papa produced a very large blue and white mug together with 3½d. and I was sent to ask for "Mr. Brown's tea". Inside the portals of the Chapter House a very tiny waitress, Alice by name, dressed in a

black frock with a Victorian pinafore and cap called out as soon as she saw me, or the mug, "Mr. Brown's tea, please". I was told to sit down and was given a cup of tea and a bun. This rather worried me at the time as I was without the resources to pay for them; an unnecessary worry as it was apparently "on the house". After a short while Papa's tea appeared with toasted buns and I took it back. Immediately I was asked if I knew where the Scala Theatre was. I did, and was told to run up there with a letter. This I duly performed and returned with all haste to be told to wash up the tea things. Papa then asked if I knew where Warren Street was. I did, and was told to run up there with an order and to be as quick as possible as he wanted me to go on an errand for him. I returned, not quite so fast this time, to find the errand in question was a trip back to Percy Street which is very close to the Scala and to Warren Street—this seemed indeed strange planning, but no matter. At 5.50 p.m. Papa asked me where I lived and my reply was apparently very pleasing news for he produced a large bundle of letters which I could just tuck under my chin, and said, "If you drop these in at the various addresses in this order you will find yourself at the Old Vic, Waterloo Road, and you will be nearly home." So I eventually did, footsore and weary and slightly disappointed with the job. No matter, for at the back of my mind there were the generators which, you remember, I passed every time I entered or left the premises. Early to bed and dreams of the pleasant times ahead.

On reporting at 8 a.m. sharp to Papa on the second day, I was told to stoke up the anthracite stove. This seemed strange in a pleasantly warm June. Next with broom, dustpan and dusters the two offices and the showroom had to be swept and tidied. Next, here my heart bounded with excitement, I was presented with a very large tin of metal polish and rags. At last I thought I had been promoted to the generators; but alas it was not to be, for Papa led me firmly by the arm to the front door to which was fixed a very large brass plate, some 2 ft. by 18 inches, engraved with Strand Electric & Engineering Co. Ltd., etc. The instructions were clear: "Clean and polish this but don't let the polish get on the black lettering because Mr. Arthur Earnshaw adjusts his tie when entering and leaving by this brass plate." When this was done I returned to the very menial tasks. Once more away to the Coliseum Dairy for another 1½d. worth of milk and, yes, another trip to the Chapter House for "Mr. Brown's tea".

At 9.20 a.m. Mr. Arthur Earnshaw, together with his daughter, Miss Evie, arrived and, true enough, he did preen himself in my brasswork. I at once found out the reason for the fire being lit because Miss Evie produced a large casserole dish with contents which she put to simmer on the stove. I was then asked by Papa if I knew Old Street, City Road. I said I did, and this was the first mistake I was to make. I was led gently down into Garrick Yard and harnessed to a contraption called a barrow and with a gentle flick with a yard of 3-029 cable, I was dispatched to Messrs. Palmers,

colour merchants,  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles away, where I found six dozen bottles of lamp lacquer waiting to be brought back to Garrick Yard. Feeling thirsty on the return journey I decided to pull up at a horse-trough, but alas I dared not let go of the barrow shafts for obvious reasons. When I arrived back I was very well received by Papa with a pat on the back and even today I swear he took the small stones out of my hooves with a large spike attached to a very large pocket knife. I was apparently passed fit for I was at once away on more errands.

On my return to the office I smelled the delicious aroma of hot-pot and thought, "they even feed you here", but alas no firm's lunch that day or indeed since. Directly after the lunch break I had my routine trips to the dairy and the Chapter House with an odd errand or so thrown in. Next I was told by Papa to go to the Strand Theatre with a bottle of lacquer and to find urgently Mr. Phillip Sheridan. I arrived and was directed by the stagedoor keeper to the abode of Mr. Phillip Sheridan which was way down below in what I thought then was the cellar. Here I found the said gentleman in the act of changing into evening dress. I thought to myself, "this bloke must own the place". He asked me who I was and if I knew Morebolds the outfitters in the Strand. "Yes, sir," I replied, and he said, "Go and get me two collars like this one and don't take too bloody long." I tried to explain that I was a new boy under contract to Strand Electric and that I would get into very serious trouble if I dared to run errands for anyone else. His reply was sharp and firm. "You'll be in a lot more bloody trouble if you don't hurry." I made a quick exit and returned with the collars and was told to keep the change. This was received with gladness and gratitude and was the first of many pleasant encounters with "Pip" Sheridan. So it went on, 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily and 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays and never a dull or idle moment.

I paid a nostalgic visit to Garrick Yard a few days ago—alack and alas the gleaming generators are no more. In their place stand two very large monsters looking like robots, painted a dull black with rows of winking lights—so what could I do but wink back?

## ROYAL OPERA HOUSE, COVENT GARDEN

This new installation is of a type common on the Continent of Europe, particularly in Germany, but which is only represented in Britain here and on a smaller scale at Glyndebourne. By a coincidence both these opera houses had new stage installations this year. This type of installation is based on a bridge and tower structure immediately behind the proscenium opening (Fig. 1). This is the principal lighting position and is particularly valuable

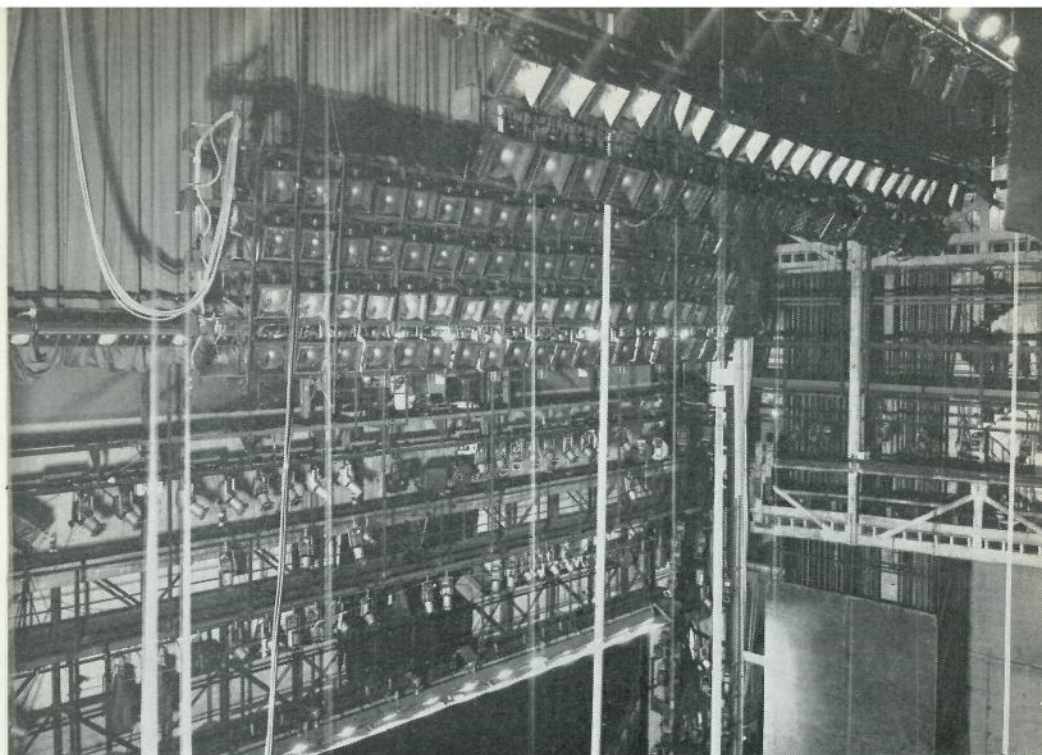


Fig. 1. Royal Opera House: view from fly rail.

when the stage is completely encompassed by the semicircular cyclorama cloth which runs right up to the grid. This cloth is wound automatically on to a roller on the OP side of the stage, a process which takes two minutes.

The main lighting unit used on the bridge is the Patt. 264 1 kW Bifocal Spot with its four hard and four soft framing shutters. However, on a stage of this size virtually all forms of stage lighting units are to be found. For Optical Projection, for example, the largest single lantern is a 10 kW Scene projector, but 5 kW, 4 kW and even 1 kW Optical Effects projectors are also used.

The effect of the cyclorama cloth is to blank off certain lighting positions but a patch panel makes these available elsewhere when this is the case. The patch panel is also used to re-group the compartment batten circuits. Normally each of these are four colour right across the stage and each batten has its own set of four dimmers. Each colour is split left and right (as P and OP) and brought to the patch panel. Asymmetric sets which are often encountered can be catered for by re-grouping appropriately. Switches also allow the extreme ends of each batten to be cut either P and/or OP. Although this equipment is of the flooding type these arrangements can prevent ugly patches of light on tall scenery. The upstage battens which are used on very large backcloths particularly in ballet, are



doubled. In between the batten sections are six baby floods each containing a pilot lamp for scene changes and a lighting lamp. Opera, aided and abetted by its composers, is very pre-occupied with lightning flashes. Every one of those wretched lightning flashes in the last act of the present production of *Rigoletto* is said to be shown on Verdi's score. The way in which a composer's foibles are alternately indulged and ignored in modern opera production is wayward and odd, as *The Ring* recently showed. Except in his music Verdi made a mess of lightning so please cut it down, but let us have some of Wagner's visual effects back.

The battens are all new and are unusually (for this country) centre fed from the grid the cables coiling themselves in special basket trays on top of each batten. A large number of wires have to be accommodated, particularly in the case of the last two battens which are double and quite separately controlled. This as well as the P and OP sections to each colour, ends off, lightning and all the rest!

The cyclorama floods survive from the 1934 Strand installation, the housings have merely been fitted with anodised aluminium reflectors instead of the silvered glass. The lampholder position has also been altered to take the more efficient 1,000-watt T5 lamp instead of the G/S used hitherto.

Fig. 2. Royal Opera House: new amphitheatre showing a dome follow spot aperture and FOH spotlight bridge. (Photo courtesy Bovis Ltd.)



The footlight, which incidentally was the first part of the new installation to be supplied (in 1963 when the new stage floor was put in) is of a special design arranged so that it does not project at all above the stage. The improvement in visual contact for those in the stalls effected by removing a mere  $4\frac{1}{2}$  in. of barrier is quite remarkable.

As the schedule shows there are very many socket outlets in various salient positions. The most interesting feature is, however, the mounting of the stage dips. Instead of individual traps there is one continuous slot each side of the stage which houses the socket outlets and which is covered by a complete series of removable lids which form the stage floor. This enables cables to be diverted and access to be obtained under most conditions of scenic obstruction. The slot is positioned 12 ft. off stage of the proscenium edge line.

In the old 1934 installation the front of house lighting was quite inadequate and **the follow spots were unhappily sited in the eye of the dome**. This position has been taken over by eight 2 kW Patt. 293 profile spots with remote colour change and twelve similar spots are accommodated in a new front of house bridge behind the **ceiling arch** over the new amphitheatre. The old balcony and galleries have been entirely reconstructed and reseated as the photo opposite shows. A further lighting position is right at the back of this area where either four profile spots or effects projectors can be housed.

All the front of house spot positions so far mentioned involve long throws, virtually flat on. To obtain side lighting positions some of the boxes in the grand tier and balcony stalls tier have been invaded. False ceilings, which drop down for access, conceal a pair of Patt. 264 1 kW Bifocal spots to each box. A feature of these spots is that the gate apertures are angled right hand and left hand to take into account the distortion from the side. This arrangement lessens the amount of acute tilting of the individual gate shutters. In all there are twelve spots to each side supplemented by eight each side concealed in the proscenium decoration itself.

The new follow spot positions are contrived as two rooms to each side of the centre line of the dome. Each room houses a pair of follow spots. The apertures are masked by motorised shutters carrying some of the dome decoration which slide closed when the house tabs are down and the auditorium decorative lighting lit. The result is so good that only those in the know can possibly detect, and then only with difficulty, the joints between the moving shutters and the fixed dome.

The follow spots themselves were specially constructed for the Opera House. The light source is a 2,000-watt Xenon arc lamp which not only is free from feeding and carboning up troubles, it is always ready for action; but its colour rendering is much better. There is no risk of blueness. The lantern is fitted with the usual colour magazine, framing shutters, iris and blackout, but there is also a dimmer which can be operated from the "following" handle. This dimmer has a full range from no light to full and

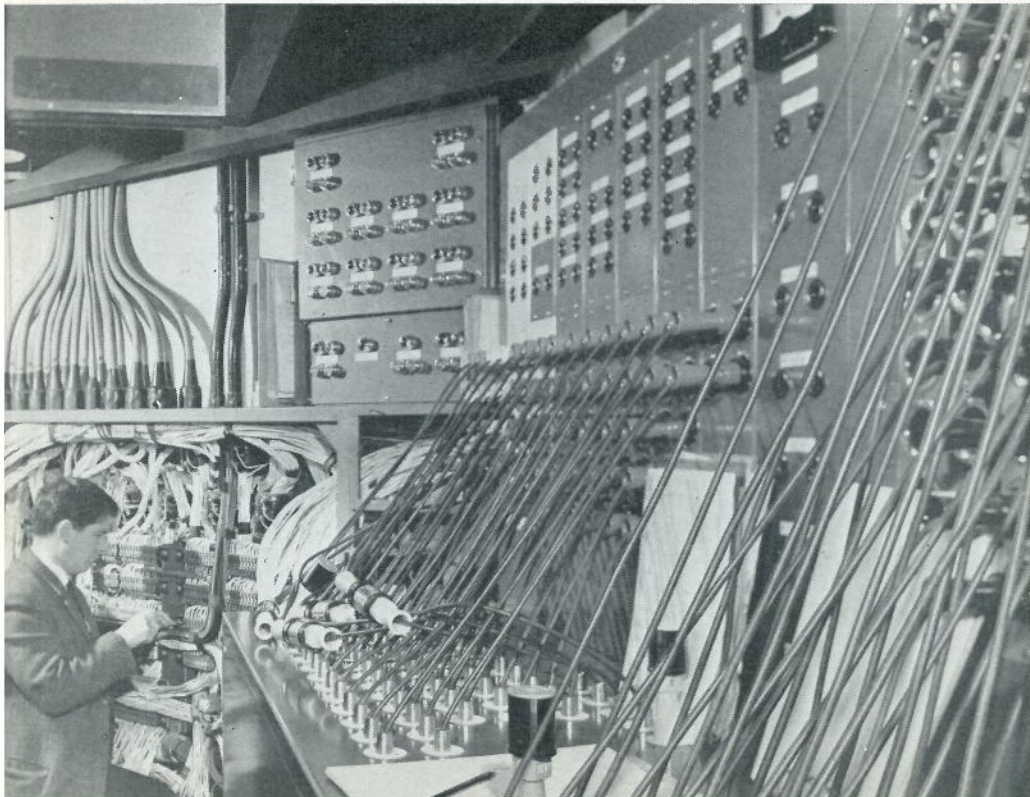
enables the operator to follow discreetly, matching his intensity to the local light levels in that part of the stage.

Each follow spot can also be controlled remotely in respect of switching, dimming and colour change from the main lighting console at the back of the grand tier. These remote facilities and the ability to convert into high efficiency optical projectors may be used in productions such as *The Ring*, where a front gauze is used throughout and "following" cannot be practised from the front of house.

The lighting layout was designed by William Bundy, stage director to the Royal Opera House assisted by Martin Carr and Bill McGee the chief electrician. The architects for the alterations were Peter Moro & Partners and the consulting electrical engineer, W. M. Bennett of Mackness & Shipley. The supply of the electrical and lighting equipment and the entire rewiring of the Opera House was carried out by Strand Electric under the supervision of B. E. Bear, Frank Church and Paul Weston. The two Strand foremen were George Clark (stage wiring) and Bill Miles (house wiring).

The design of the stage lighting control system was dealt with in the previous issue of TABS but the schedule on the opposite page is included to give an idea as to how the installation is made up.

Fig. 3. Royal Opera House: Patch panel with connectors panels in background. (BICC photograph)



### Schedule of Stage Lighting Control Channels, Royal Opera House

| Location            | Dimmers | Remarks  |
|---------------------|---------|--|
| Flys P              | 10      | (Looped also to Upper Fly Galleries)               |
| Flys OP             | 10      |  |
| Perch P             | 10      |  |
| Perch OP            | 10      |  |
| 10k Projectors      | 2*      |  |
| Top Bridge          | 16      | (6 only each side also loop to Flys)               |
| Lower Bridge        | 30      |  |
| Dips Down-Stage P   | 10      | (Mounted in continuous slots for access)           |
| Dips Down-Stage OP  | 10      |  |
| Dips Up-Stage P     | 10      |  |
| Dips Up-Stage OP    | 10      |  |
| Footlights          | 8       | (4 colour P half and 4 colour OP half. All battens |
| Batt. 1             | 4       | are 4 colour and divided as P and OP sections at   |
| Batt. 2             | 4       | the Patch Panel. Switches also cut extreme ends.   |
| Batt. 3             | 4       | Battens 5 and 5A, and 6 and 6A hang as double      |
| Batt. 4             | 4       | battens)   |
| Batt. 5             | 4       |  |
| Batt. 5A            | 4       |  |
| Batt. 6             | 4       |  |
| Batt. 6A            | 4       |  |
| Front of house dome | 4       | (Eye of dome)                                      |
| Gallery Bridge      | 6       | (12 2-kW spots switched individually)              |
| Cyclorama           | 2*      | (Fluorescent prepared for Top only)                |
| Patch Panel         | 60      | (Feeding circuits below)                           |
|                     | 240     | All 5 kW except where marked *                     |

#### Patch Panel Circuits (see also Battens above)

|                |    |   |
|----------------|----|---|
| Grid           | 10 |   |
| Bridges        | 20 |   |
| FOH Sides P    | 12 | (Profile spots in ceiling of Grand tier and Balcony |
| FOH Sides OP   | 12 | stalls stage boxes)                                 |
| FOH Effects    | 14 |   |
| Back Batten    | 10 | (For back lighting of cloths)                       |
| Hanging Bridge | 10 | (This bridge is not yet fitted)                     |
| Cyclorama      | 24 | (16 to Down-Stage large bank and 8 to small         |
|                |    | Upstage bank. Each circuit terminates in 5 by 1 kW  |
|                |    | floods)   |
| Float Dips     | 6  |   |
| Batten Spots   | 10 | (Spots to be mounted at each end of battens 2 to 6) |
| Centre Balcony | 2  |   |
| Spare          | 4  |   |
| Lightning      | 10 | (Special lightning lamps in the battens patchable   |
|                |    | to operate from five finger keys)                   |

The total connected load is 2 megawatts.

# LAMPETER COLLEGE THEATRE

by Elidir Davies, F.R.I.B.A.

St. David's College, Lampeter, the oldest of the Welsh colleges, built in 1822 to accommodate 86 theological students, is to be expanded to take 500 students.

The extensive new buildings constitute virtually a new college, but they are so arranged as to retain the original college buildings (which are registered as being of historical interest) as the central focal point of college life and activities. In addition to the new main lecture rooms, library, assembly hall, kitchens and refectory, common rooms, etc. the college required a theatre for the presentation of live drama and cinema and for college dances. For financial reasons it was not possible to consider a separate building for this theatre and in order to provide a solution to this problem it is planned to combine the assembly hall and three lecture theatres as one area which can be easily converted for any of its many uses.

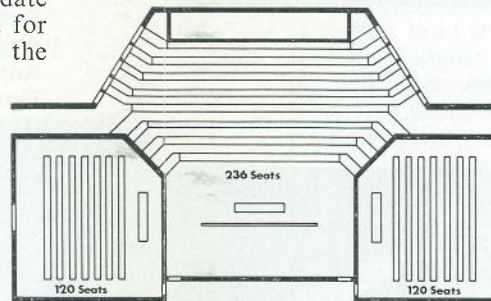
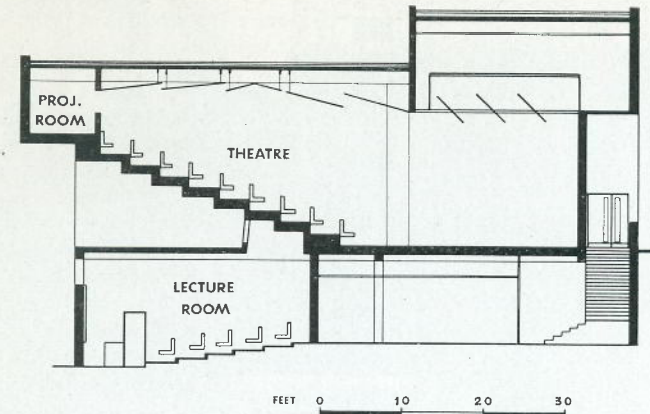
The pattern of the three lecture halls is so arranged that the centre unit has a permanently raked auditorium (to accommodate 250) and faces on to a flat floor area; this area can be used for additional seats to face a raised dais. With these conditions the unit can accommodate approximately 380 people and can be used for:

- (1) Lectures of special importance (where the normal lecture hall would be too small);
- (2) Music recitals;
- (3) Film shows.

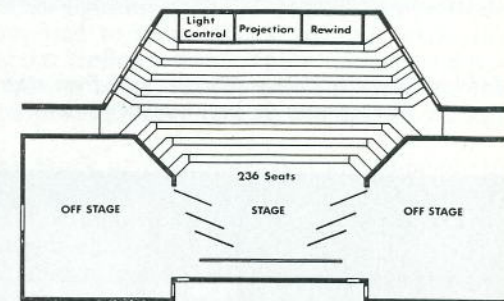
A projection room is provided at the rear of the auditorium, together with a separate re-winding room.

On each side of the flat floor of the central unit are two further lecture rooms separated by specially designed sound-proofed partitions. These partitions can be lowered into the floor, thus converting the three units into a single space for the following uses:

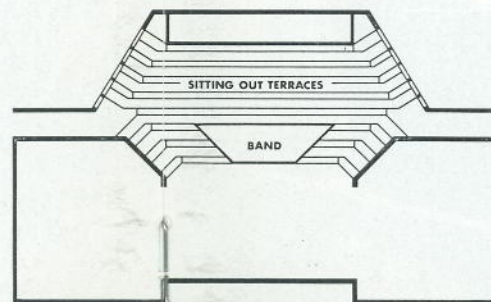
- (1) *General Assemblies.* Additional seating can be brought in to provide total accommodation for 600 people.
- (2) *A General Examination Hall.* The removal of a percentage of the seats and the introduction of specially designed desks for every third seat in the auditorium area will provide examination seating for 140 students.
- (3) *A clear Dance Floor area of 107 ft. by an average of 30 ft. wide.* By removing all the loose seating on the flat floor area. The band can be positioned on part of the raked auditorium area.



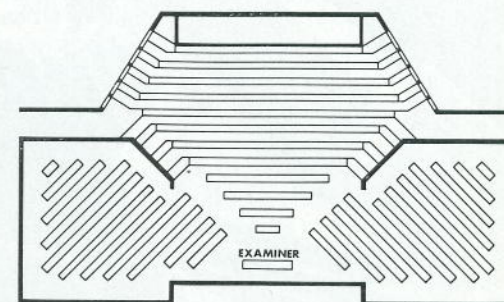
3-LECTURE HALLS



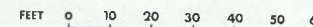
DRAMA

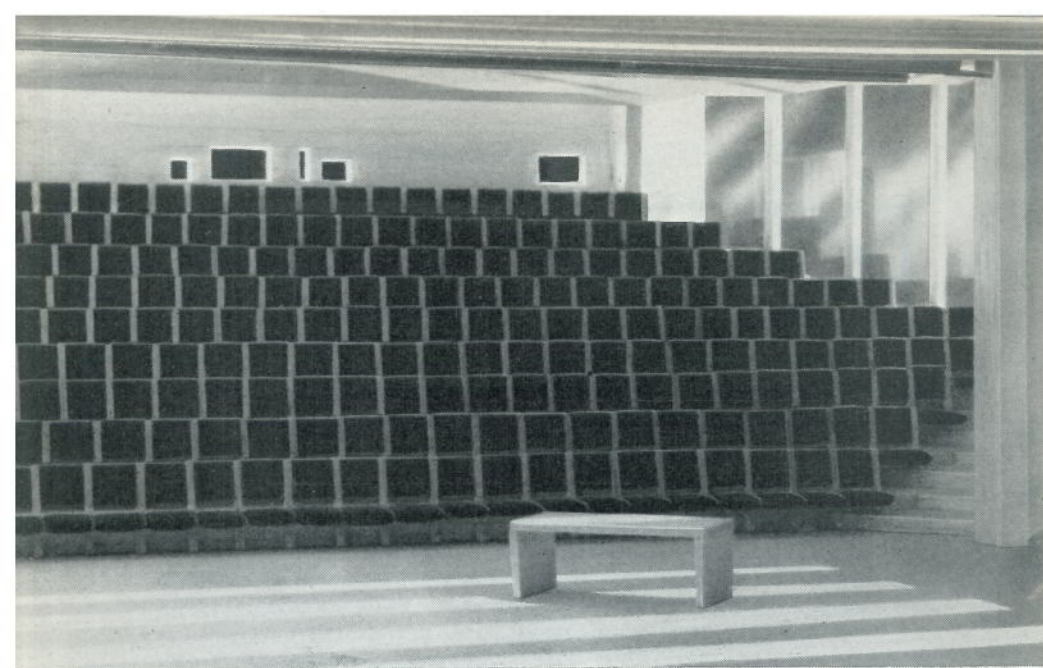


DANCES & SOCIAL FUNCTIONS

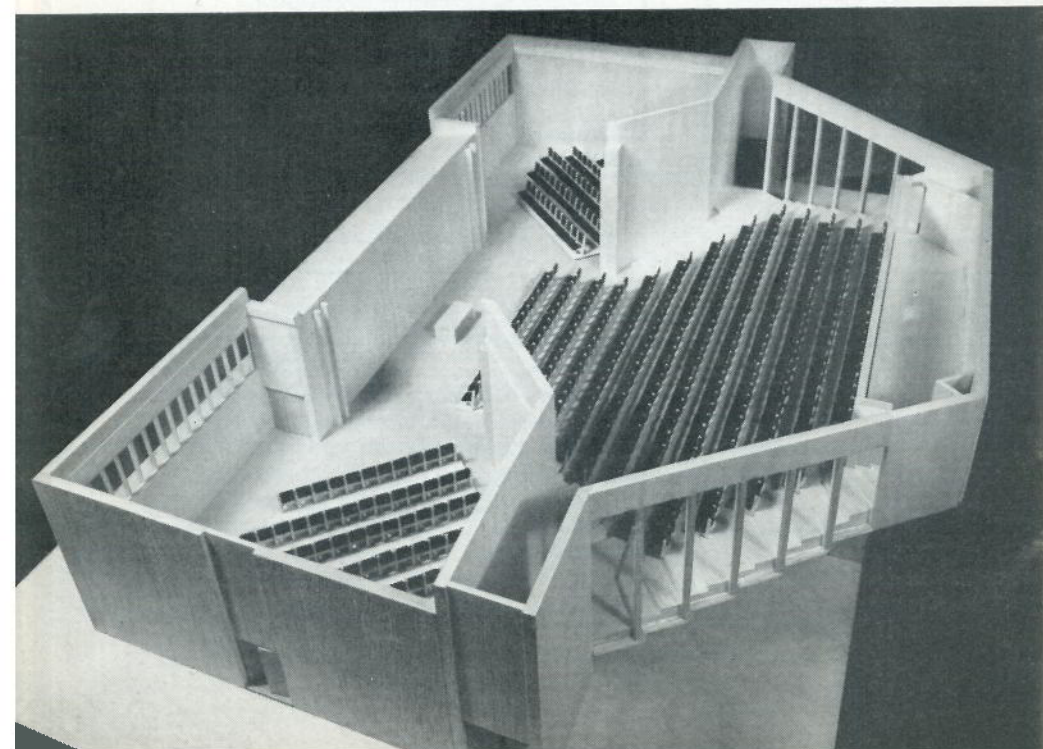


EXAMINATIONS





*Model of Lampeter College Theatre: view from stage (above).  
Arrangement for large assembly (below).*



The "theatre", as one can see clearly from the plans and photographs, occupies the central unit with its raked auditorium facing a flat stage or acting area. The acting area is defined by the use of specially designed triangular trolley towers which act as wings when curtains are not appropriate. The "off-stage" wing space is generous, being constituted by the two large classroom units when the dividing walls are lowered into the floor. In the floor of the wing space a trap door can be raised to give direct staircase access for actors and actresses to the smaller lecture theatres under, which will serve as dressing rooms, while the lavatories for both men and women can be available for artistes without recourse to "makeshift" conditions.

The ceiling of the stage, which during normal College activities has the appearance of a flat panelled ceiling, conceals a stage loft. For theatrical purposes flat panels are hinged to fall into a vertical position, thus exposing the loft but at the same time masking it from the auditorium. The loft will be fitted with a grid from which five sets of curtain tracks (or their equivalent) can be hung, in addition to stage lighting bars.

In order to have stage lighting positions in addition to those at ceiling level it is proposed to have vertical lighting set in the specially designed triangular trolley towers. The whole of the lighting will be controlled from a stage lighting console alongside the projection room, and the general house lighting will also be worked from this position.

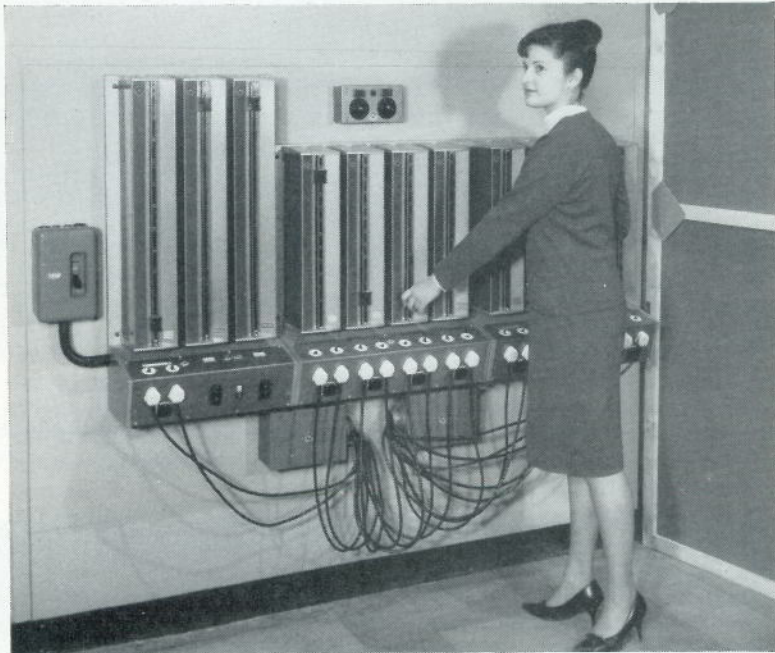
To the north of the block at the lower level are situated the new refectory and coffee rooms, while the large hall dividing the two buildings acts as a foyer to the theatre.

This is a simple approach to the setting up of a minimum standard for a college theatre, but it is sufficiently flexible to encourage imaginative presentation and the use of stage equipment and lighting of a standard to provide scope for the creation of powerful dramatic effects. My recommendations are based on my design of the Mermaid Theatre, London, in which a simple stage and auditorium, reasonably well-equipped, can provide a setting for theatrical and dramatic works of a high order.

## THE OTHER END OF THE SCALE

It is one thing, not without its problems as we saw in our last issue, to provide a switchboard for the Royal Opera House, but what of the other end of the scale? It is a fact that there is at least one education authority in England which while maintaining a drama adviser, nevertheless allocates only £100 to the stage lighting equipment for each school stage. This is a suspiciously round figure which

in spite of rising costs remains unchanged. An installation must be built round a switchboard, yet without some lanterns as well there will not be much light on the stage. A fair division under these circumstances would seem to be fifty-fifty.



This is quite literally where the design of the Junior 8, introduced just over a year ago, began. A complete switchboard with 500/1,000 W dimmers, switches, socket outlets and blackout grouping facilities for under £50 list. It had also to be portable. Really portable that is, capable of being carried by one man and stowed in the boot of a family car. The new switchboard hit the bull's eye, and the only slightly sour note is that they have been so much in demand that most of the time we have not been able to achieve the other target—switchboards in stock off the shelf.

From the start it was intended that the Junior 8 should grow, and thus a second instalment and third instalment could be added in the shape of Slave 8s. This brings the number of circuits up from 8 to 16 and to 24. The figure of eight circuits was arrived at as the absolute minimum for a basic layout; six circuits are not enough for any serious work. As the switchboard grows into 16 or 24 circuits one begins to pine for master dimmer control. Rods of wood

or extra hands are perfectly possible improvisations, but . . . ! It is to provide this facility that the new Master unit has been introduced. The two variants that concern us here are the "Master 2 Plus" and the "Master 3". The photograph shows that the new unit is based on three dimmers instead of the four of the Junior 8s. These dimmers are, however, larger and are available as a 1,000/2,000-watt or a 4 kW master. In the case of the "Master 2 Plus" it is assumed that two Junior 8s are controlled, one Master in the line to each. The third dimmer is independent and has two circuits connected with three-way switches to the dimmer, independent of it or off. As the dimmer is a large one this can be useful for a cyclorama.

The Master 2 Plus and two Junior 8s (as illustrated) together give a useful 18 circuits with masters in a compact form which enables one operator by pushing down only three adjacent dimmers—an easy job—to fade in or out the whole stage. The socket outlets which are an integral feature of these switchboards, allow "patching" to regroup circuits to give cross-fades, sequential fades and so forth, as necessary. The Master 3 allows three Junior 8s (24 circuits) to be mastered. Both the Master 2 Plus and the Master 3 are normally connected to the main feed of the boards they control and thus provide the useful facility of dimming all individual circuits whether switched to dimmers or to independent live.

The master units can be used with all Junior 8s including all these already supplied from the beginning. Nothing more complicated than a screwdriver and pliers will be required to join up.

\* \* \*

## NOTES ON SCHOOL THEATRES

by Stephen Joseph

*Before the reader pushes aside this article with a "more theatre-in-the-round propaganda, I suppose," he should recall that Mr. Joseph is lecturer in drama at Manchester University and author of a number of books on theatre, the most recent of which is Scene Painting and Design. Mr. Joseph is also, of course, responsible for the only two professional theatre-in-the-round companies in this country at Stoke-on-Trent and Scarborough. The following notes were in fact prepared by Mr. Joseph in answer to a request from an Education Officer.*

Where schools are provided with facilities for drama the usual procedure seems to be to put a stage in the assembly hall, and to equip it as nearly as possible as a proscenium theatre. The result is usually unsatisfactory. It is not a "proper theatre", in spite of its traditional pattern, and a number of questions immediately arise:

*Is a cyclorama necessary?* Firstly, of course, a plastered and painted back wall is not a cyclorama and the real thing would be wildly out of place. But secondly, why should the back of a stage be

permanently ready to represent the sky? Are plays mostly placed in the clouds? And finally the thing is relatively fragile and usually suffers from dirty hand marks as well as scratches and scrapes from the many objects used backstage. Consider a natural concrete finish (not too smooth either). It will be hardier (and quite interesting to light as a background). Or a surface deliberately prepared for painting decoratively. Or an architectural background.

*Why put in legs and borders and other stage curtaining?*

On a proscenium stage the main tabs probably have a fairly vital function, and an additional tab track to serve as a traverse or back curtain may be justifiable. But the clutter of wings and borders is merely an indication that the stage has not been properly designed and/or that the people who are going to use it cannot be expected to use it properly; important considerations. Better to (a) paint the back stage walls and ceiling, except possibly the back wall (see above), matt black, preferably with emulsion paint, and (b) provide a series of basic screens in the form of book flats, or better still (if the school is capable of using them) a set or two of flats. Note that if the school is not capable of using (possibly even making—certainly painting) flats it hardly has much use for a proscenium stage. There are more suitable forms of non-scenic theatre available—to be mentioned later.

*Why are there usually three lighting bars on stage, while only two or four outlets are provided for FOH lighting?* Most of the stages are so small that only one on-stage bar is needed; and it should be wired so that each circuit goes independently back to the control where any linking that may be wanted can be effected on a simple patch panel. The lights on this bar should be good soft-edged spotlights such as the Strand Patt. 123, using (in most cases, where the stage is fairly small) 250 watt lamps. There should be between 6 and 12 spotlights on this bar, depending on the size of the stage, frequency of usage, etc. All other back-stage lighting could be best provided by using soft-edged spotlights on tall portable telescopic stands. Provide about six. Most important of all, plenty of front of house lighting must be provided. At least 12 spotlights, each wired independently back to the control. Probably best to use Strand Patt. 23 spotlights with hard edges. Note that nearly all spotlights in school theatres are difficult to get at without lowering bars on winches (which makes any accurate adjustments too difficult for most schoolchildren to attempt) or ladderwork (which is hazardous and a nuisance). All spotlights can be accommodated in a ceiling void, built to provide safe walking, designed to permit the spotlights proper working space, etc.

*Why is the stage raised? Why is it raised so much?* The stage is raised, probably, because it has become accepted that stages are raised. As far as drama is concerned the main reason for so doing is that the actors would not otherwise be seen. The alternative way of providing good sightlines, by raising the rows of seats, is

not practicable because the hall must serve other purposes (which require a flat floor). There is much to be said in favour of a low (or quite unraised) stage, particularly for youngsters, though this is not the place to discuss the matter. There is therefore much to be said for taking drama out of the assembly hall altogether and housing it in a class room which can be properly designed with raised seating rows. This ties up with the whole question of size. The assembly hall should be big. For assembly a proscenium stage is not required. Other activities that require a large hall, not equipped with a proscenium stage, include cinema shows, concerts, dances, physical education, exhibitions, badminton, worship, bingo and eating. This is not a bad list. Why throw in the drama too? The drama does not require a large auditorium, even if it does have a proscenium arch round it. A classroom can quite easily benefit from having well raised rows of seats—indeed a *lecture theatre* sums up the situation. Note that big audiences can be catered for by providing the drama in doses; several performances instead of one. A much happier theatrical and educational notion.

By now bigger issues are beginning to be raised and it may be worth coming out with a few fundamental principles for providing theatres in schools:

1. The theatre and the equipment in it should be easy to use by the people who are going to use it. In schools this means children. Equipment should be simple, sensible, sturdy and thoroughly efficient. Note that this does not necessarily result in cheap goods being chosen, and, for instance, Strand Electric spotlights are nearly always better than any others of similar design because they are simpler, more sensibly made and more efficient than their slightly cheaper alternatives.\* Wings and borders are not sensible, and it is probably better to do without scenery altogether by having a theatre in the round or to have an architectural background on an arena or endstage, if the school does not have the facilities to cope with standard painted scenery.

2. A school theatre should be small, accommodating about 200 people at the absolute maximum. Better still about 50 people. The stage should be comparatively big. The room may serve as a classroom, but it should be primarily a drama room.

3. The form of theatre should be chosen with care. There is some indication that the proscenium stage is going out of fashion in the profession, and there is considerable evidence that this form is not particularly suited to the needs of young people. It is possible that much of the well-intentioned energy spent by educational authorities on drama is wasted because they are using a form of theatre that is both out-of-date and inappropriate to the creative and emotional needs of young people. The most important reason for rejecting forms of stage other than the proscenium is that most

\* *Unsolicited but pleasant to hear nevertheless!*—ED.

school-teachers, whether or not they are specialists in drama, only know about this single form or, at least, have had most of their experience with it. It is not unfair to blame the vicious circle—drama is hardly taught in schools and therefore even teachers know little about it. But this circle is bursting at the circumference, and quite soon new ideas may be commonplace. It seems odd that while teachers are demanding modern science laboratories, language laboratories and other up-to-date equipment, they seem reluctant to let the drama be other than what it was a hundred years ago. It may be necessary to look carefully at the situation and make sure that any new school is staffed by a headmaster and teachers who are either aware of what is happening in the theatre and are tolerant of it, or who actually have fresh ideas of their own.

4. A school theatre may be in the form of a theatre in the round (particularly primary schools), end stage, or three-sided arena.\* Each has much to commend it and choice should depend on location of school, tradition, staff choice, place of drama in the school curriculum, etc. However, provided the theatre is very small, a fully adaptable theatre studio may provide the best answer.

5. In a drama studio it is sensible to use portable rostrum units to provide seating rows, and good storage is required. Stage lighting should be placed in the ceiling and a lighting loft carefully designed. Control should be simple, designed with the intention of being operated by children and use a patching principle. All circuits should be wired permanently and independently back to the control. Related dressing rooms and toilet facilities should be provided. Consider (in schools where appropriate) that a drama studio can also be used for radio, film and television work, provided this is anticipated at the time of designing.

6. It is not just the teachers who may know little about modern theatre in education, but also architects. The Ministry of Education may be able to help here, and a theatre consultant with particular experience of this type of work might be usefully employed to work with the architect. Note that the consultant should be brought in right from the start, and should be instrumental in the preparation of the brief (as far as the theatre or drama studio is concerned).

7. Note that the provision of a drama studio is not likely to mean greater expense in the total cost of a new school. Every school can expect to have a large assembly room, and several classrooms. It does not cost more to turn a classroom into a drama studio than to equip the assembly hall for drama. Probably the opposite. The drama studio/classroom will be cheaper, as far as the drama part is concerned, than the theatre/assembly hall. And more sensible.

\* For details of these forms see "Planning for New Forms of Theatre," by Stephen Joseph, free and post-free from Strand Electric.

## AROUND THE WORLD IN SIXTY-THREE

by Percy Corry

Concluded

### Across the Pacific

I spent twenty-four hours in Hawaii, a welcome break between long hops. It was delightful to stroll by Waikiki Beach in the early morning sunshine: quite delightful—until I got within range of the speakers in the palm-trees, dispensing background music with infuriating insistence. In spite of about five weeks of constant conditioning to this form of torture, I was still nauseated.

There was a new building on the campus of the East/West University in Honolulu, which was obviously an expensive theatre, but I was not able to get inside. A fly-tower suggested conformity to general practice.

The following is a nice extract from the Waikiki Beach Press:

"*A Shot in the Dark* a light-hearted and chic French murder mystery continues its run on Waikiki Beach, Sept. 6th and 7th.

"For serious theater buffs, Oumansky is producing Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* at the Magic Ring, Sept. 27th and 28th."

Quite clearly, theatrical culture knows no frontiers.

### Across Australia

I was taken to Manley Beach so that Sydney Bridge and what will be the new Opera House could be approached by ferry boat. The Opera House was still without any indication of those sail-like upper structures which have caused so much interest, and so many practical problems. The building is being financed by State Lottery. Fortunately Australians are inveterate gamblers. Unofficial estimates of probable total cost seemed to vary from ten to fourteen million Australian pounds.\*

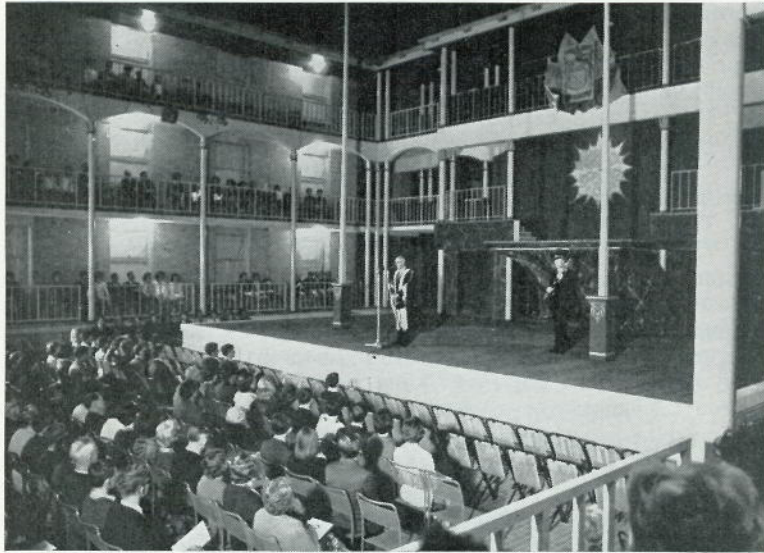
The Elizabethan Theatre Trust is a subsidized producing company with an old theatre in Sydney. Apparently the subsidies are not on an over-generous scale. Each State has its own Performing Arts Council, which organises theatre activity generally, including tours sponsored by the Trust. There is a lively interest in theatre, particularly, I was informed, in the smaller towns. Many new theatres are being built or are in the planning stage.

Canberra had a partly-erected Opera House/Concert Hall to seat 1,200 with a small Playhouse, capacity 300, adjoining.† Wagga Wagga, a small town made familiar to British people by Bill Kerr, has a very good new Civic Theatre, with an enormous orchestra

\* Latest estimate due to difficulties encountered in the form of roof structure is A£18,000,000 = English £14,400,000.

† When completed this will form a separate article with plans and photographs in TABS—ED.

pit and an outside exterior sign of bold and colourful design. Albury's Civic Theatre was half built and looked promising. Wangaretta has a new Town Hall which has one large and one small hall, each with a stage and each, alas, with a flat floor. In Melbourne and Adelaide I saw a number of plans for new theatres, including one for a brand new town called Elizabeth (not Alice). Brisbane seemed to be the least active. In Perth, there is a civic repertory theatre and the University has a very interesting project. In the



*Perth University, open air theatre.*

centre of a new Study Block there has been created, as nearly as possible, a modern reproduction of the original Fortune Theatre, using the known measurements of that theatre, and triple galleries which also provide corridors to the studies. It is intended to use the theatre in the Elizabethan manner, for research purposes. Presumably the groundlings will be enthused in advance if they are to be deprived of seats during a full-length performance of Hamlet.

The school stages in Australia vary considerably. In many of the new schools there are no stages at all. In others, the facilities available are very limited, even judged by UK 1920 standards. There are others, however, which are well planned and equipped by modern UK standards. The facilities seem to vary from State to State. The limited facilities are a little surprising in view of a quite considerable interest in theatre generally.

### Across the Indian Ocean

At about 2 a.m. the flight from Perth to Johannesburg was interrupted by a re-fuelling call at the tiny island of Cocos. Were it not for coffee, sandwiches and souvenirs, served under floodlights, it would have been an idyllic tropical setting, with palm-fringed moonlit ocean. Next stop Mauritius, a somewhat larger island, grossly overcrowded. The dominant memories are of corrugated-iron hovels, swarms of handsome black children, mostly of Indian origin, dressed in their bright Sunday best, and of the sprawling acres of sugar cane with enormous piles of boulders too bulky and too numerous to be cleared away. A garden of Eden gone sour.

### Across Africa

Johannesburg is a commercial and industrial centre of no great distinctiveness, with pleasant environs. When Jacoranda and Bougainvillea are in full bloom, many of the suburban roads are quite lovely. Johannesburg has several theatres, including a comparatively new Civic Theatre.

This theatre, opened in 1962, was then the ninth new theatre to be built in South Africa since the war, which makes our own score at that time look rather feeble. The theatre had to be designed to give as much flexibility as possible since it must serve not only as a Playhouse—for both classical and intimate drama—but also as Opera House and Concert Hall. The problems have been effectively resolved by the architect, Manfred Hermer.

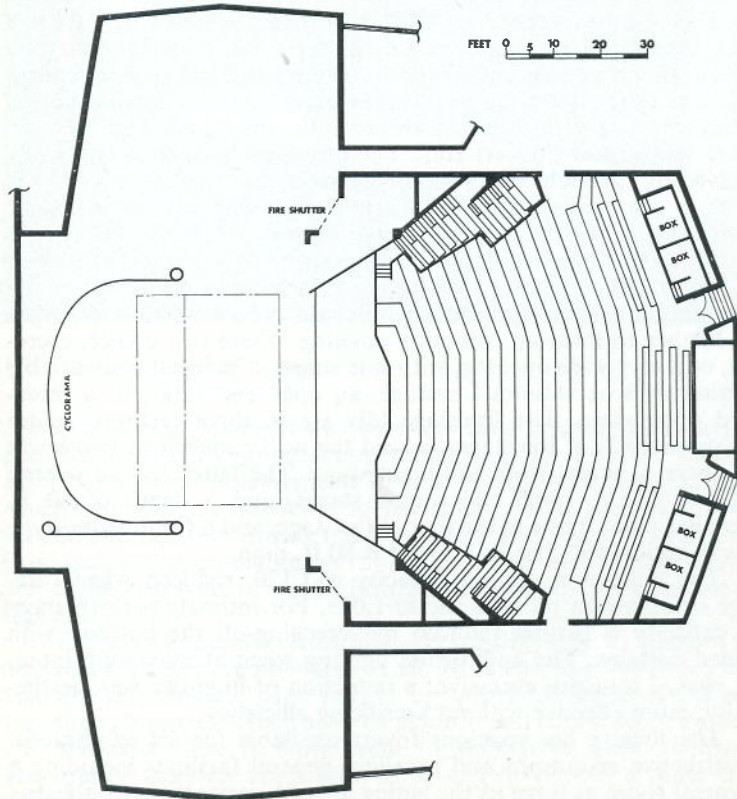
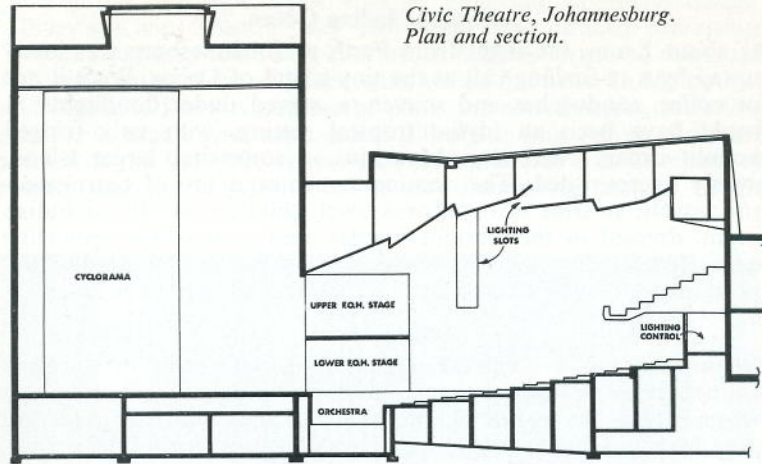
The side walls of the auditorium adjoining the stage consist of removable panels concealing side stages. When the panels are removed, the stage opening is 60 ft. wide; with the panels replaced the opening is reduced to 40 ft. and in addition, as shown on the photograph, a removable proscenium can reduce width and height still further to form an orthodox opening. There is a choice, therefore, of a very wide opening, with side stages, a reduced and variable opening with or without forestage, an open end stage, or a three-sided open stage. The forestage lifts are in three sections, centre and sides. Each of the stages behind the wall panels is at two levels and there is access from the main stage. The latter has an overall width of 172 ft. (with two wagon stages) and a depth of 60 ft. There is a paint frame at the rear of the stage, and a Continental-type canvas cyclorama. The grid tower is 80 ft. high.

The maximum seating capacity is 1,120, reduced when forestage or orchestra pit is in use to 1,033. For intimate performances the capacity is further reduced by screening-off the balcony with framed curtains. The auditorium lighting when at maximum intensity, was, I thought, excessive: a reduction of intensity was, aesthetically, more effective without sacrificing efficiency.

The theatre has spacious foyers available for art exhibitions, an attractive restaurant and excellent general facilities including a rehearsal room as large as the acting area. A very attractive theatre, well worth more detailed study.



*Civic Theatre, Johannesburg.  
Plan and section.*



*Playboy of the Western World* was produced during my visit. An excellent set, standing freely in front of the cyclorama.

There are also new Civic Theatres in Bloemfontein, East London, Pretoria and Oudtshoorn: other towns not visited have their Little Theatres. Many new civic theatres are being planned. In some ways, the problems of South Africa are similar to those of Australia: both are large countries with small communities. In the Republic, as in Australia, each State has its own Performing Arts Council. There is a lively interest in amateur theatre. I saw an excellent performance by Cape Coloured amateurs at the Cape Town University Theatre. The play, though no masterpiece, was about the coloured people and had, I was assured, complete veracity.

Cape Town, an altogether delightful city, has the money to build a new Civic Theatre, the planning of which was being delayed by differences of opinion about the site, whether it should be in the city centre, or in a prosperous and well populated suburb, with good transport facilities and plenty of space for parking cars. Siting of new theatres must take account of the motor car. Parking difficulties can be a real deterrent to playgoing.

The schools in South Africa have stage equipment nearer to British standards than in Australia but the lay-out of the draperies in relation to the lighting was extraordinarily ineffective in many of them.

South Africa has great potentialities. It has difficult national problems and it is no part of my brief to discuss them. A limited

*Civic Theatre, Johannesburg with removable proscenium in position.*



experience, however, emphasised how important it is to view those problems in proper perspective and not to allow unrealistic theories or ingrained prejudice to cloud judgement at safe distances.

#### Across the Equator Again

There are more pleasant experiences than that of being wakened at 4 a.m. after a journey of 5,000 miles and being ejected from a BOAC Comet into Cairo Airport, with a four-hour wait until a Lufthansa Boeing could convey me to Athens. Fortunately, air hostesses are all charmingly helpful, whether dark, dusky or fair of skin, and at crack of dawn airports seem to operate with efficiency at all levels. Even bank clerks were present to cash the traveller's cheque into unfamiliar Greek currency; and background music began at 6 a.m. In Cairo it had the piquancy of unfamiliarity and more than normal unintelligibility. When it was merely instrumental it was rather suggestive of a railway wagon with inadequately lubricated wheels frustrated by imperfectly operated brakes. To avoid further Anglo-Arab complications it should be stated that the Cairo cacophony was no worse than what had been liberally inflicted elsewhere.

#### Greece

Here, for the first time in my journeying, I was a lone tourist. No welcoming hand at the airport. No new theatres to visit. But the oldest theatres of all were fascinating. In three days it was possible only to sense the antiquities of Athens. There was not time to savour them. A return is imperative.

A conducted tour of the Acropolis was essential. The English of the knowledgeable guide was perfect: his phrasing was so intriguing that it diverted attention from its factuality. I hope I may study in greater detail the relics of the Romanised theatre of Dionysus and the partially restored Herod Atticus\* theatre in which there are drama festivals during the tourist season.

On my visit to Piraeus, George, the taxi-driver, was good enough to translate the play-bill outside the King's Theatre. He said the theatre was presenting *The Islands of Aphrodite* and was open for three nights per month. The strip-tease clubs of Athens seemed to do better than that.

#### Son et Lumière

An attractive prospect to view the Acropolis at night: in the event, alas, a disappointment. The "Son" was alternately prosaic and pseudo-heroic. The "lumière" was irrelevant and repetitive. Quite clearly the lighting designer had been defeated by episodes and dialogue that defied impressive visual emphasis.

Was it in imagination that one heard faint moans borne on a gentle breeze during this push-button oblation at Athene's ancient altar? Or was Euripides gyrating restlessly?

It is but fair to report that two American ladies were heard

\* See *TABS*, Vol. 20, No. 2.

to say how marvellous it was. Of course, they were right. The Parthenon, however uninspired the floodlighting, could not fail to be marvellous. With lunar lumiere it must be superb.

#### Conclusions

There was too little time in each country to gather more than general impressions. It seems fairly clear, however, that the overall pattern is much the same in all the countries.

There was little evidence of any appreciable desire to deviate from orthodoxy in theatre form. In Australia I saw ambitious plans for a new State theatre, obviously inspired by Stratford, Ontario, but was informed that there was strong resistance and the plans were unlikely to be approved. Nearly all the new theatres seen and those being built or in the planning stages conformed to the same pattern. The proscenium is no longer an obvious frame but is formed by the side walls and ceiling. The openings are wide, providing, in effect, end-stages with wing space and fly-towers. They can be used if desired as open stages or the opening can be sealed off by curtains. Apron-stage lifts are now orthodox, providing orchestra pit, extension of seating, or apron-stage, as required. The extended proscenium, providing a much wider acting area, demands adjustment of scenic design, in which the exclusive use of spot-lighting becomes imperative. Except for large spectacular productions, perimeter settings are inappropriate and the need for a fly-tower is, in many cases, less important. There was evidence to suggest that some designers and directors have not fully appreciated the freer possibilities of the wide stage. The adjustable proscenium does not appear to have much usefulness. With imaginative use of lighting, any part of the wide stage can be isolated without affecting sight-lines.

There appears to be a general acceptance of the fact that a large auditorium with a stage capable of presenting opera, ballet and other spectacular productions is not a congenial playhouse. As a result there are many schemes providing for two adjoining theatres, one an intimate playhouse and the other catering for the large audiences necessary to support elaborate productions. Both may to some extent be flexible in use. The large theatres may also house symphony concerts, conferences and other events requiring accommodation for a lot of people. The smaller theatres vary similarly in their uses on a smaller scale. **The capacities of the large auditoriums seem to vary between 1,500 and 3,000, and the smaller between 300 and 700. Where one theatre has to serve both purposes, the compromise capacity appears to range between 1,000 and 1,500.**

In spite of Frederick Bentham's cynical theory that theatres are built to provide fun for the people who work in them, and in spite of the uncomfortable element of truth in the theory, it is becoming evident that the long-suffering customer is really dictating the form of theatre that is most generally adopted. Recognition that the customer has a line of sight which must not be obstructed has widened the proscenium and adequately stepped the auditorium.

There are still planners who have not yet seen the light. But they will. It is slowly becoming obvious that the playgoer is the most important person in the playhouse. If he isn't properly catered for, physically and emotionally, intellectually and socially, visually and orally, he can stay away. And he does. And in his other capacity as payer of subsidies he may well jib at providing fun and wages for those who over-rate his capacity for punishment and his tolerance of inefficiency which pretentiously masquerades as artistry.

In America there is a greater interest than elsewhere in the alternative forms of theatre, open end-stage, arena stage, theatre-in-the-round and adaptable theatre. In the main it is a specialised interest but it would seem probable that there will be some increase in the numbers of these valid alternatives: the main direction of planning, however, is towards the type of proscenium theatre already referred to.

It seems to be quite certain that the professional theatre in all the countries is now dependent on subsidy by civic or state authorities or by charitable trusts, except for the commercial theatres in a few large cities, where star-studded productions can still be staged profitably. The Civic Theatre is taking different forms. The following extract from the brochure issued by the Queen Elizabeth Theatre in Vancouver is a significant statement of its purpose:

"Vancouver's Queen Elizabeth Theatre, with the smaller Playhouse attached to it, can handle any size of production, from full-scale opera and symphony concerts down to recitals. The Theatre stages ballet, closed-circuit television showings, trade equipment shows and jazz concerts. It is as adaptable for school graduation and religious rallies as it is for badminton finals and cooking schools. It has hosted film festivals and political meetings, boat shows and dancing schools, conventions and chamber music concerts. It is the showcase—and the meeting place—for today's society."

Civic Theatres in Australia and South Africa exist or are being planned for similar purposes. Some of the Civic Theatres in the smaller towns will be or are occupied by resident companies. Others will be or are used partly by professional and partly by amateur companies. Most of the Civic Theatres have facilities for exhibitions and have restaurants.

The need for adequate theatre facilities in educational establishments appears only to be fully recognised in America where it is common practice to provide properly planned and equipped theatres in their new high schools, colleges and universities. Elsewhere the provision is generally inadequate, with some commendable exceptions, and the attitude towards drama in education is indefinite. There is a persistent refusal to recognise that a stage in an orthodox assembly hall, designed for a number of conflicting uses, can never be satisfactory for drama unless a theatre form of auditorium is provided.

In South Africa there is some attempt to establish a national drama in the Afrikaans language. As in the case of Eire and Wales, it is, one suspects, a rather self-conscious symbol of rebellion against the English. One could assume that as America accepts and adapts the English language as an essential part of the American way of life, the others should not really find it so difficult to recognise the common language as having some virtue. By way of counter-irritant our National Theatre should, perhaps, attempt to revive Chaucer's English in protest against the American social and cultural invasion of England. Well, perhaps not. All of us believe, or pretend to believe, that art should be international.

## FORUM

### TOURING OPERA IN THE NETHERLANDS

*By J. Blom (A Member of the Forum Staff)*

About a hundred times a year the Opera Company Forum of Enschede in the Netherlands sets out in the manner below. The distances are not always as great, but altogether the company travels more than 23,000 km. per year. There are in addition the forty or so performances at home in Enschede.

- 5 a.m. Three packed vans containing the scenery and costumes leave Enschede for Tilburg, 175 km. away.
- 11 a.m. Wardrobe mistresses set out by train, arriving in plenty of time to hang out costumes in the dressing rooms.
- 12 o'clock. Arrival of technical director to inspect the work that has been done in setting up the scenery on the stage and to prepare the lighting.
- 3 p.m. Two motor coaches are ready at Enschede for the company and the orchestra, altogether about a hundred persons.
- 7 p.m. The company arrives at the theatre at Tilburg. A short rehearsal on the stage follows a quarter of an hour later.
- 7.30 p.m. Early comers arrive, the house starts to fill up.
- 8 p.m. The company ready on the stage. House lights are killed. The conductor taps his baton and the overture begins.
- 10.45 p.m. The performance is over. The audience shows its appreciation with warm applause and flowers, the conductor making sure all the members of the company share the ovation.
- 11.30 p.m. The coaches are ready to depart but there is still a little while to wait for the wardrobe mistresses, who are putting the costumes in the cases.  
The technicians are taking down the scenery to put it into the three vans. They will be ready at about midnight for a fast run back to Enschede for it is now quiet on the roads.
- 2.30 a.m. Everybody is home again after a typically long day.

It is not easy to find the textile town of Enschede on the map. It lies near the German border on the line Amsterdam-Amersfoort-Derventer-Enschede. It may not be easy to find the correct pronunciation, but if you say "Ansheday" everybody understands what you mean. It is, however, easier to explain how the Opera Forum came to be at Enschede.

This industrial town, rapidly developing after 1945, needed a modern theatre and this was ready in 1954. At the same time plans were ripe to found a second Opera Company in the Netherlands that could, with the support of the authorities, meet the growing demand outside the cultural centres of the Western part of the country.

What was more natural than that the new Opera Company and the new theatre should get together? To a certain extent one can regard the new company as the continuation of two smaller groups: the Utrecht Opera under the direction of Chris Burgers and the Chamber Opera Cameratta of Max van Doorn. Both had much idealism but very little money. And for an opera a lot of money is required, a lot indeed. Given financial support from the Government, the Provinces and the Municipality, Forum would, in addition to serving its home town, extend its activities to all those towns in the North and East Netherlands wherever adequate facilities existed. The artistic manager was Paul Pella who already had experience, being well known abroad and in the Netherlands. The commercial and organising side was put in the hands of Chris Burgers.

The inhabitants of a territory, which occupies about half of the total area of the country, have to be educated for the "Opera." Only a few have seen a performance in the western part of the country or in one of the towns just over the German border. For hundreds of thousands the Opera was not much more than a name. While the Opera played it had also to organise. Cultural councils of the surrounding towns had to be persuaded to give their co-operation. In small towns with insufficient accommodation the authorities had to be convinced that an Opera can only be played in a suitable theatre with an orchestra pit.

With the co-operation of the various coach companies the subscribers are brought from a wide distance to the theatre and afterwards they are taken home again. In nearly all the cases nothing is charged to the subscribers for this transport. This is possible by special subsidy of various municipalities and provinces.

The first season, 1954-55, started with *Don Pasquale* and *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, two works of the original companies. The next year it was possible to give three premieres: *Le Nozze de Figaro*, *Le Barbier de Sevilla* and *Les Pecheurs des Perles*. That season ended having given 68 performances. Since then the company has continued building up a repertoire which first of all had to take into account a public which had never seen an opera, except perhaps on television, and also a public which had to be acquainted with



Forum's production of Verdi's *Don Carlos*.

the fact that there are many other works which exist outside the popular repertoire. The first category was catered for by presenting every year a good operetta; while for the "more advanced" there were productions such as *Katja Kabanova* of Janacek and *Der Rosenkavalier* of Richard Strauss.

Great attention is given to the education of the public for example, by introducing readings. In most towns special terms are offered to the younger people who can buy a subscription at greatly reduced prices.

In the course of the years a stable opera audience has been formed in the East and North of the country. A public that not only desires to make the acquaintance of the larger repertoire but which is also making higher demands regarding the technical perfection of the performances. It is understandable that the one and the other have to keep within the financial possibilities.

It has been possible recently to buy a lighting control installation so that in theatres, which have limited equipment, a performance can be given which answers the highest technical requirements.

A standard Strand Electric SR all-electric remote control with eighteen dimmer channels and two master dimmers is mounted in a Mercedes van. The dimmer rack, split in two parts, is built into



the van. One part houses the eighteen reactors and the other part the relays, circuit breakers, rectifiers and power pack units.

The control cabinet is portable and can be used on the stage on a special pedestal. One multicore cable connects the control cabinet with the dimmer racks in the van. The supply is from a flexible cable from the mains in the theatre to the van and a third cable connects the dimmer racks with the spots on the stage. The cables are wound on cable drums in the van for transport. In all the theatres where the Opera Forum gives performances there are the same mains connection facilities.

Another auxiliary equipment which is used is a closed circuit television system. In small theatres there is never enough space for the choir, so that the singers cannot always see the orchestra conductor. A Pye television camera type TVCI is directed on the conductor and a HF monitor with a 23 in. screen is placed in front of the choir. In this way everybody can exactly follow the conductor. Needless to say that the company is using Strand spots Pattern 23, 123 and 243.

Thus Forum is fulfilling its task; giving opera performances in the provinces Friesland, Groningen, Drente, Overijssel and Gelderland; offering the public the chance to visit these performances, introducing the public to the opera and attracting the younger visitor.