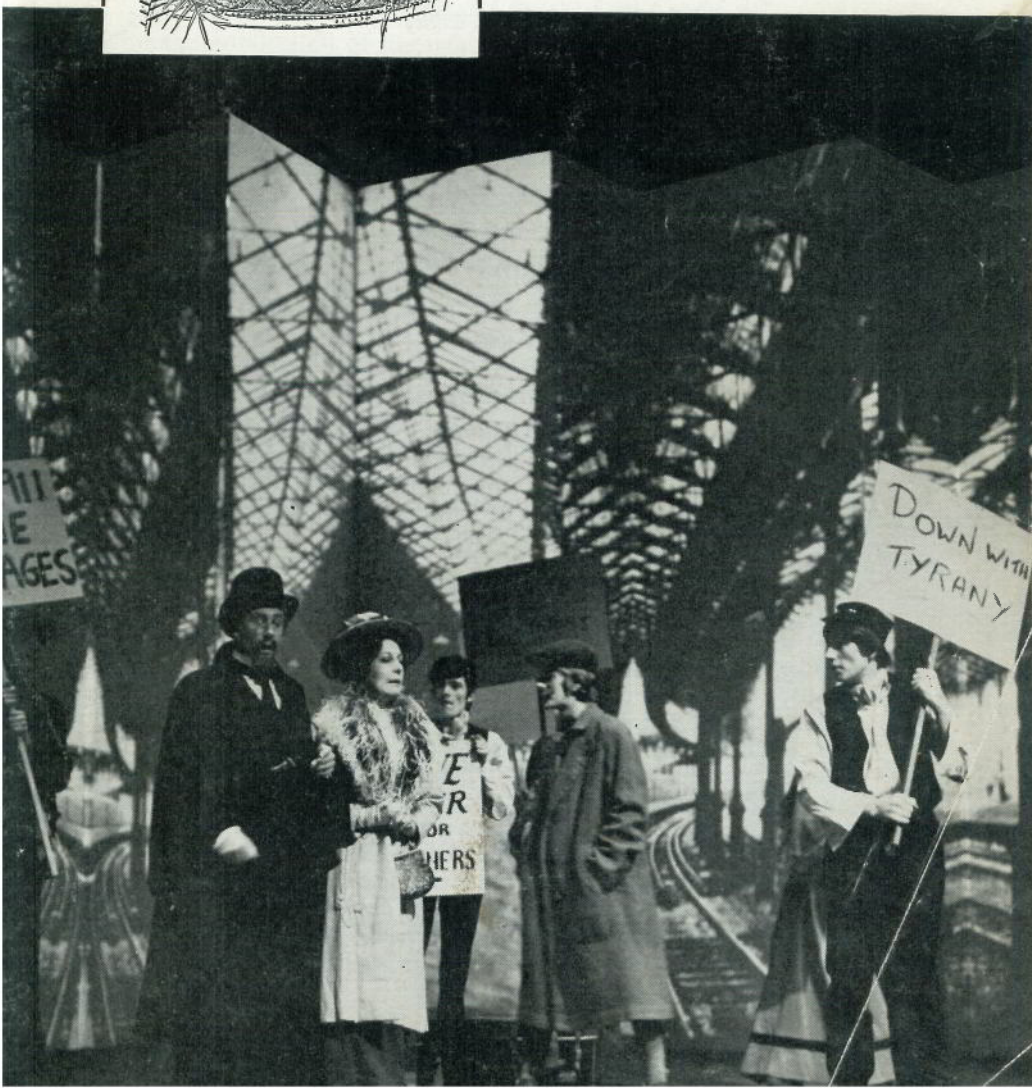


TABS

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Cover picture: One of the scenes by Patrick Robertson for
Boots with Strawberry Jam at Nottingham Playhouse.

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What is an Amateur?

We happened to attend two *amateur* performances by companies in London within a couple of days of each other recently. One was of a high standard in their own purpose-built theatre and the other was simply dreadful in a very new many-purpose but large and professional-looking theatre. The scale and style of this latter building tended to stress rather than play down the ineptness of production, acting and décor. We remembered seeing very much the same effect in the two million dollar Loeb Theatre, Harvard. Such theatres provide too elaborate settings for the paste they have to display, and the paste by contrast was made to appear all the more shoddy. It is, of course, no novelty to say that the show is the thing and a theatre building cannot save a poor show. The point we would like to make is that our experience tended to confirm a suspicion that between amateur and professional there is a bigger gulf fixed than the amateurs are sometimes prepared to admit.

It is commonplace for amateur companies to pine for a "real" theatre and "since a new theatre building is hard come by" a number of schemes now arise in which the building is conceived as large enough to take professional companies as well. The question that must have serious consideration is whether it is really possible for a theatre

which is designed to be of a standard professionals now have a right to expect, can in fact make a happy home for a fully amateur company running, staffing and playing there as a spare time occupation having done a full day's work elsewhere.

We have already referred to the handicap of the second rate in a first rate setting but it is the off-stage staff that will show the greatest strain—there are never as many of these as people imagine. Too much real hard work can be thrust upon the faithful few and the larger the theatre becomes and the more the purposes to which it is adaptable, the greater the number of bookings it breeds, the further away from a real amateur theatre it will become. The really happy company will be the one whose theatre has been designed for it and for what it *can* do.

The Lux or an Obituary for the Foot Candle

With the publication of the new I.E.S. Code*, illumination in the United Kingdom goes metric. Gone is the "foot candle"—in actual fact officially it had been banished long years ago in favour of the "lumen per square foot", but most people in theatre lighting if they could bear to use any unit at all still stuck to it. Very sensible too for a foot candle representing the incident light of one candle illuminating one foot square at one foot distance was an evocative expression. It was possible to imagine twenty candles all shining away to make 20 fc, for example. The reader will notice that this unit abbreviated very nicely too. However, it had enemies and illuminating engineers in Great Britain have long sought to impose a rival unit, the "lumen per square foot". What was the difference, it may be asked and the reply is *four words instead of two*, for the units are exactly the same. To be bathed in *x* units of the one was to be bathed in *x* units of the other.

Illuminating engineers are commendably modest and thus where electricity *enshrines* its heroes—Volta, Ampere, Faraday, Maxwell in the same way as explorers are commemorated in mountain lake, sea and fjord there is no unit known as the Gaster, the Walsh or the Sugg. Instead of naming after the inventors it has been a question of inventing names, and in this activity the results have been far from happy. Among the strange things to be found in the textbooks are the "phot", "apostilb" and "nit". The latter is mixed up with very low levels of light, would not the "twinkle" have been more romantic?

How do we obtain a "lux"? The answer is to place one candle one metre away from one metre square. The result of increasing both the area illuminated and the distance must be a lot less light, so in consequence you get a lot more lux than foot candles when describing the same effect. The factor is 10.76, and one should not be surprised now that lighting equipment all appears *on paper* to be producing more light.

* The IES Code (March 1968) published by the Illuminating Engineering Society, York House, Westminster Bridge Rd., S.W.1. Price 30s. Od.

1919-1968

The retirement of H. O. (Jim) Jordan has been announced. Mr. Jordan joined Mansell & Ogan in 1919, and became foreman there in 1926. That firm was later amalgamated with Strand Electric and he became Works Manager during the war and Director of Strand Electric Holdings Ltd. and associated companies in 1959.

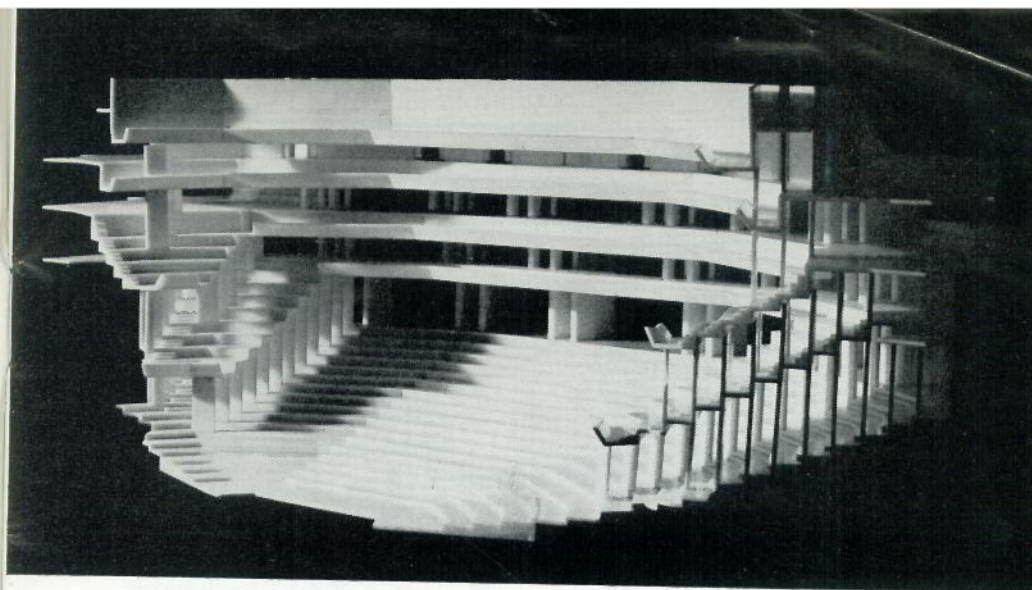
His colleague Frederick Bentham writes: "Jim Jordan's importance in the development of stage lighting can be best explained by reference to one particular device. When, in 1929, Moss Mansell conceived the idea of a magnetic clutch drive for control of dimmers it was the practical Jim who ensured that it was made and that it ultimately did in fact work.

"It is difficult in these days of technical sophistication to realise that to apply the magnetic clutch, as with every other advance in lighting control, was by no means as easy as it now, with hindsight, appears.

"Along with practical difficulties went a deep distrust among theatre people, not least in the Strand Electric itself, of the electric remote control which the clutch existed to serve. A large mechanical link of $\frac{1}{2}$ in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in. iron connecting the lever on the front of the board with the dimmer on the back, could be relied on not to commit that crime of crimes—let the show down. I well remember that climate and how at the time when Mansell retired, Jim and I alone had any real idea in Strand Electric of what electricity *could* and *would* do in lighting control.

"This may seem an extravagant statement but it is a fact then as now, that a very wide gulf lies between expertise in electrical circuits as used for distribution—mains, power and lighting—and the sophisticated ones needed for control and automated systems. These latter known to laymen then as 'push button circuits'—everything was attributed to 'push buttons' in those days in much the same way as the word 'computer' is used today—needed a creative approach. One had to have practical experience but inspiration was all important. The creation of good circuitry of this kind is an art and this often proclaims itself in the very layout of the lines of the wiring diagram on the sheet of paper. Jim had a very real feeling for this inspirational approach and we made a perfect pair—he tending towards an overdose of practical caution and myself erring towards the reckless in following where inspiration might lead.

"During his long reign over the works Jim was not only going to see such circuitry become commonplace in Strand and lastly outmoded by modern electronics but was to play one of the principal parts in ensuring that it did."



ROYAL PROGRESS AT THE BARBICAN

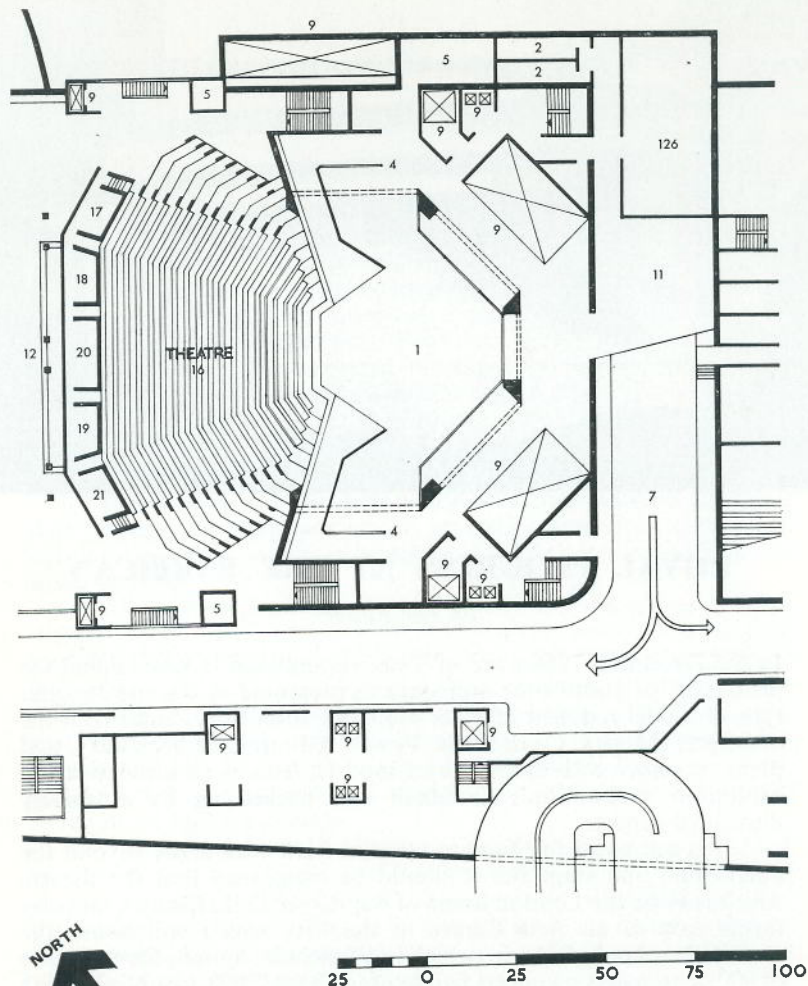
by *The Editor*

In the December 1966 issue of TABS we analysed in some detail the proposals for auditorium and stage as presented in a scene designer type of model redolent of Peter Hall and John Bury. Since then the architects (Messrs. Chamberlin, Powell & Bon) have been busy, and plans, together with architectural models, have been on view as an exhibition in London's Guildhall and backed up by a lavishly illustrated report.

It is not usual for TABS to concern itself with areas beyond the auditorium and stage but it should be mentioned that the theatre which is to be the London home of the Royal Shakespeare Company forms part of an Arts Centre in the City which will house the Guildhall School of Music (which itself includes a multi-form theatre of 400 or so seats), a concert hall seating about 2,000, a public lending library, an art gallery and a studio-cinema seating about 375.

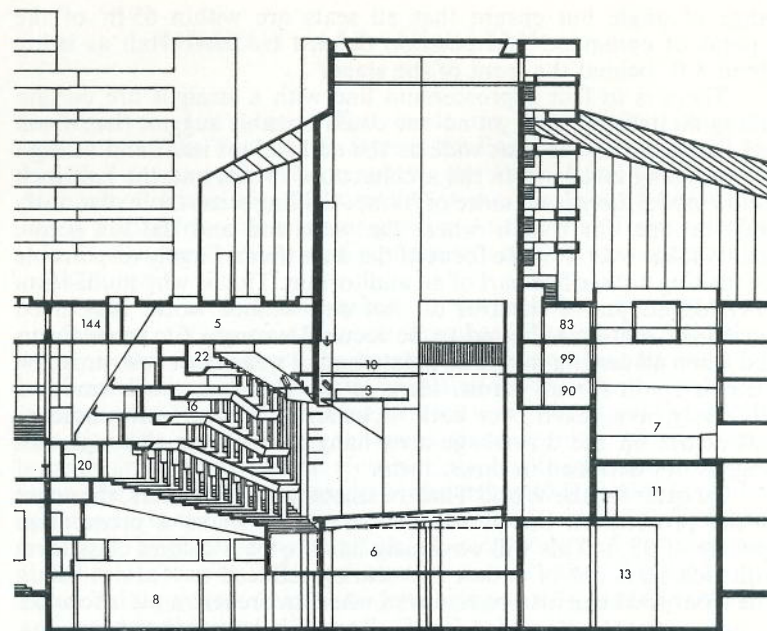
A particular feature which gladdens the heart of your editor, in view of his strictures on the wind swept Great Wide South Bank in our last issue, is the covered access from two London Transport Underground stations and from the car parks.

It is now possible to see the way it is intended in the theatre to bring the shallow balconies round the sides in such a manner that areas "papered with people" remove any sense of side walls. The shape of this auditorium (seating 1,250) makes an interesting contrast to Mr. Lasdun's proposals for the national open theatre described and illustrated in the last issue of TABS. In that case the 1,165 seats were bestowed in terrace formation "bowl-shaped" while in this case shallow balconies coming right round at the sides give a wide

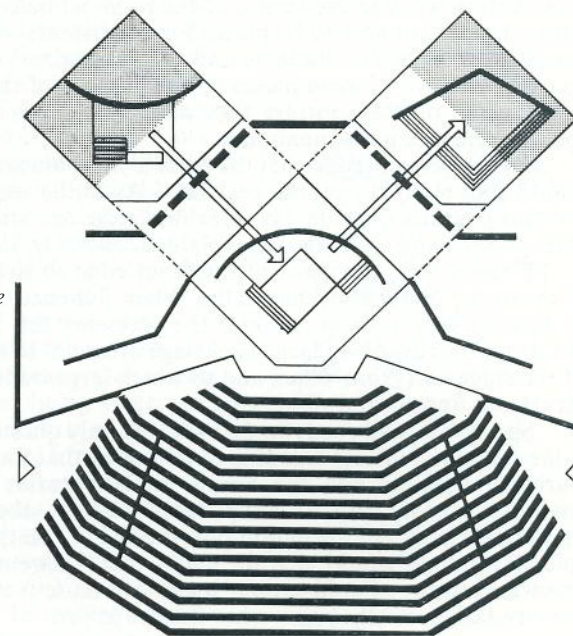


Architects: Chamberlin, Powell and Bon

- | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Acting Area | 16. Main Auditorium |
| 2. Lavatories | 17. Staff Box |
| 3. Lighting Floors | 18. Lighting Control |
| 4. Wing Space | 19. Sound Control |
| 5. Service Areas | 20. Projection Box |
| 6. Stage Mezzanine | 21. Stage Manager's Box |
| 7. Access Road | 22. Lighting Gallery |
| 8. Rehearsal Room No. 2 | 83. Maintenance Wardrobe |
| 9. Lifts | 90. Dressing Room |
| 10. Fly Floors | 99. Dressing Room |
| 11. Practice Room No. 1 | 126. Artist's Green Room |
| 12. Bars | 144. Press Office |
| 13. Scene Store | |



Plan and section of proposed theatre at the Barbican with (right) plan of stalls showing stage with means by which stage sets may be changed. Tinted areas represent lifts to scene dock below.



range of angle but ensure that all seats are within 65 ft. of the "point of command", a position defined by Peter Hall as being about 8 ft. behind the front of the stage.

There is in fact a proscenium line with a straight fire curtain falling on its front edge yet no one could possibly suggest that it will feel like a barrier. It is as wide as the auditorium itself and as high as the ceiling and both in the architectural model and the half-inch scenic model there is no sense of frame. Talking sense there obviously must be one, for that is where the walls end and the full scenic facility takes over. It is the focus of the seats that is largely responsible for making a stage feel part of an auditorium. That is why multi-form so-called adaptable theatres do not and cannot work. Any fixed nucleus of seating is bound to be focused wrongly for some forms and when all seating moves as great chunky wagons or rostrums, the focus is spoilt for all forms. Here at the Barbican much care has obviously been taken over both focus and distance; with audience and actors on the downstage area hanging together although this stage is not designed in thrust form.

To cater for the World Theatre season and other users, the edges at the proscenium line move on—*closing* to make a proscenium opening of 35 ft. This will obviously have to be a second class form with side seats out of action and seating reduced to "about 950". The front rows can also be removed when an orchestra pit is formed, an arrangement not needed for the Royal Shakespeare productions. These front seats are Peter Hall's modern "groundlings" on bench-type seating while in the centre of the topmost balcony (the lighting gallery) there are now to be places for 40 students—the "hirelings" presumably. Whether students and young England will be prepared to occupy either of these places in the London of the future is open to question, on the contrary they may expect "drive-in" facilities for their electric mini-runabouts.

The stage is raised so that the seats in the main area of the stepped auditorium really do get the best view. As to the stage itself most of the features described in our previous issue are still apparent; the Bury screens and so forth. He explained, however, that it is intended to "hinge" the stage floor at the front edge so that a one-in-eight rake can be applied mechanically. When flattened out there is also to be provision to drop the floor the necessary few inches to permit trucking. There are two large backstage areas 45° to the left and right of the stage axis from which and to which large built scenic arrangements can appear and disappear.

So there it is all ready to be built, the only question that remains is the question—the money. It is to be hoped that the building of the Barbican theatres and the South Bank Theatres will become a competition to see who can complete the job first—the City of London on the one hand and the nation plus the G.L.C. on the other. What a splendid thing it would be if the City—that square mile which is the financial centre—should set out to win, because it would show that the city fathers really know what finance is for.

OBJECT ALL SUBLIME . . .

by Philip L. Edwards

In March of last year, I first made my acquaintance with the reputation of the Toynbee Theatre in the East End of London. "The theatre," I was told, "is owned by the Inner London Education Authority." I was later to learn that it is a "school of stagecraft" and is available to all amateur groups. At this time I was also told that the theatre "has lots of equipment and has an enormous old switchboard".

Later in 1967 I was asked to be technical director for a production of *Free as Air* at the Toynbee Theatre. Accordingly, I wrote to the manager of the theatre and made an appointment to be shown around. I came away from that first visit with very mixed impressions. The overpowering one was of how small the theatre was. In fact, there is a 29 ft. proscenium opening which is quite large by amateur standards. However, the low height above the stage forces the proscenium border to be dead at 10 ft. and the resulting opening is, in the words of the manager, "a letter box". The small feeling is heightened by the lack of wingspace and by the small auditorium (seating 394) and also by the fact that the décor is in rather dark colours—this, of course, being an advantage in reducing unwanted spill light.

I found that the "enormous switchboard" (apparently a 36-way bracket handle board) had metamorphosed into a J.P. 60 three preset desk but with only 40 dimmers fitted. The board is sited on the prompt side perch in such a way that the operator has his back to the audience. The "lots of lighting equipment" I certainly found, spanning a fair period from early Patt. 56 acting area floods to modern Patt. 264 bifocal spots. On this visit I did not see the scenery stock but I did have a brief glimpse of the workshop.

I came away laden with duplicated handouts. Most of these were severely practical being stage and lighting plans and lists of scenery items available, etc. I must confess to being rather put off by one or two of the handouts which referred to such things as "a spirit of adventure and experiment" and using the theatre to "its most exciting extent". In my experience such phrases are mainly used by



"... rather put off by one or two of the handouts."

rather "intellectual" people about complex, modern plays which are unintelligible and not the least entertaining. I am one of those "uneducated" people who still think of the theatre as entertainment.

I must say that in the event I found little evidence of this "intellectual" approach at the Toynbee. The staff were all helpful and pretty well down to earth.

Shortly after this visit, the show was changed to *The Mikado*, the reason being the all too common one that a number of people in the society were interested only in Gilbert and Sullivan shows and, therefore, left for the period of the modern show leaving the society with insufficient cast.

I then filed the set designs for *Free as Air* (for future use perhaps?) and discussed *The Mikado* with the producer. The only things the producer specified were that the set should have several levels and that there should be a door flat downstage prompt with a raised section in front of it.

From this and a list of the available flats and rostra, I drew up a set design. I aimed at a fairly geometric set but *not* a symmetrical one. I had intended to fill in the back of the upstage rostra with a spidery hedge of twigs with coloured blossoms attached. I felt that this would give a contrast to the otherwise solid and geometric nature of the set. In the event, this hedge never came about due to the difficulty of fireproofing the twigs. It was replaced with a lattice which had a creeper painted upon it and which was liberally decked with blossoms. These, in fact, were made by lady members of the cast during breaks in rehearsals. I think that this sort of thing is

valuable in persuading the cast that the technical side is really a part of the show and not an addition.

The next step was to arrange for the workshop to be available for painting the set and constructing the few items that were not available from the stock in the theatre.

Since the workshop was available for only three weekends, all the work had to be carefully planned. It was carried out by my colleagues and I with members of the society. On the whole, they seem to have enjoyed it and I feel that this is a useful asset to the social life of a society—it being impossible to talk while rehearsing but not while painting and constructing scenery. Unfortunately, it is not often possible for a society to build its own sets and the societies



"... the technical side is really a part of the show."

who are able to use the Toynbee Theatre and other theatres with workshops should make the most of the opportunity they have to get away from hired scenery which can never exactly fit a production simply because it has to serve so many.



"... a pleasant change to have the orchestra where it belongs."

This particular workshop has two disadvantages. The first being that scenery from the scene dock—at the back of the stage across an open passage—has to be carried over the stage and lowered into the workshop through a trap in the front of the orchestra pit. This is difficult, if not impossible, with a set standing on stage. The other disadvantage is that the workshop is only 12 ft. high and with 12 ft. flats, manoeuvring is difficult—especially as there are sprinkler outlets hanging from the ceiling. A little more space for laying out flats for painting would be nice. It is, however, a marvel that there is a workshop at all let alone one with adequate tools. Another great asset is that there is somewhere to change and wash without having to leave one's normal clothes hanging in the workshop itself.

As I mentioned there is an orchestra pit. It is a pleasant change to have the orchestra where it belongs instead of the usual state where it occupies the stalls floor immediately in front of the stage and thereby obstructs the view from the front few rows.

I was surprised when I supplied the theatre with plans of my set and lighting rig to find that this was something unusual. Apparently, even when they have the advantage of a good workshop, very few amateur companies bother to make proper plans. I know that one can get a surprising amount of information on the back of an envelope but a proper plan has the advantage of being easily readable by anyone and there is also the little point of alterations being made in a set or lighting rig simply because the envelope is torn.



"... one can get a surprising amount of information on the back of an envelope."

The rigging of the set and lighting went off without any real hitch. As these things do, it took a little longer than expected but was completed in good time for the final dress rehearsal. A number of alterations were made to the original lighting layout design to save time in rehang equipment. The only change from my design which I now regret was that I left the colours that the theatre normally uses in the cyclorama equipment. I could not get exactly the effect required with these and I was not happy as a result with the cyc. at all throughout the production.

The low height of the stage caused complications with top masking, especially as I had batten three dropped well in to allow use of three Patt. 23s with cloud slides on the cyc. As an aside, these took about three hours to set properly thus proving the rarely appreciated fact that optical effects should never be used unless adequate time is available for setting them.

Two further complaints I feel were that batten two barrel is oversize for a standard hook clamp; as a result of this, most of the lanterns which had originally been intended for this barrel were moved to batten one or to the boom behind the opposite prompt centre entrance. The other one is that there is a definite bias in favour of the prompt side in provision of socket outlets and that the stage uses a mixture of three-in-line connectors and 15-amp BS plugs. Both these latter problems are being corrected as the lighting equipment is modernised.

It is worth noting here that working in a theatre with an adequate stock of lanterns and colours does speed up the rigging process no end and also meant that I did not make any trips to Kennington.* While these are usually fairly pleasant, they do consume valuable time.

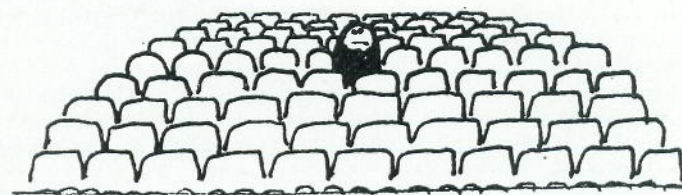
My lighting followed fairly normal lines. I avoided a suggestion that I should project suns and moons on the cyc. in rapid succession for Yum Yum's solo at the start of Act 2 on the grounds that such things, in my opinion, though obviously not everyone's, are reminiscent of village hall drama at its very worst. The only unusual feature was the use of a pair of lanterns (Patt. 123) to light the house tabs before the show, thus performing the job which the much-despised floats do so well and providing a touch of "atmosphere" for the audience.

* Strand Electric's London hire dept., address: 271 Kennington Lane, S.E.11. Tel.: 01-735 7811.

The two dress rehearsals passed without serious incident. The orchestra, being professional, provided no trouble in contrast to many amateur orchestras.

The next item of interest was on the afternoon of the first performance when in moving a ladder I smashed one of the shades on the property fittings. These had been bought from one of the large multiple stores to ensure that replacements could be obtained easily. This was all very well except that the whole of East London closes early on a Thursday. As a result, I had a hair-raising taxi ride to the West End and back. The driver had obviously realised that I was in a hurry and several times on the return journey I wondered if I and the shade would make it intact.

The performances passed reasonably quietly. The theatre has an excellent stage manager's desk with cue lights to all parts. It has two systems in fact—one very old Strand system and one made locally



"... the performances passed reasonably quietly."

and built into the desk. There is a house phone to the auditorium and elsewhere and a relay of the performance to the dressing rooms over which the stage manager can call the cast. Unfortunately, the stage manager has no intercom to the switchboard except for the cue lights.

The only thing to mar the show from the stage manager's point of view was the complete inability of some members of the cast—and others—to realise that it was undesirable for them to wait in the wings owing to the lack of space and that the only way to keep track of props was to hand them in as they left the stage and collect them as they returned. It seems much more difficult to persuade operatic society members than dramatic society members that the stage staff are there to help the performance and not to hinder it. Quite mild requests for co-operation are taken as officious—we even had one gentleman who announced that he was there as a guest of the society and was not going to take orders from any stage manager. We afterwards found that he was in the chorus and did not even know his words. This often seems to be the case. The people who are really competent in their parts are usually the most pleasant to work with. Perhaps they have no need to bolster up their egos with such "prima donna" tactics.

So far as running the lighting of the show was concerned, I found that the control was a pleasure to use. I decided that the most

logical way to treat each cue was as a complete preset change—except for fading the lanterns lighting the house tabs which were both on one circuit. This method worked well as the operator—usually myself—had to worry only about timing the cues, having set the presets up in advance in a slack period.

The only major snag in the lighting was the discovery shortly before the last performance that one of the front of house Patt. 264 lamps had failed. This illustrated another defect of the theatre. It is impossible to get at the F.O.H. equipment without rigging a “zip-up” staging, and as a result the lighting on the last night had to include a certain amount of guessing of levels to correct for the absence of the failed spot.

As is my wont, I looked pretty hard at the mouth of this gift horse and hereafter follow notes about the teeth.

It was unfortunate that the control had to be mounted in the way it was as the standard J.P. desk has the masters at the right hand and in this case the operator cannot possibly see the stage while operating them. Needless to say, the final answer to this is a front house control.*

I should prefer to have quadrant masters rather than the rotary type fitted. I find timing a change difficult with a rotary action knob. I found the position of the house light dimmer disquieting being immediately next to the board black-out switch. There is no logical reason for this feeling especially as the D.B.O. switch requires a very positive action and is most unlikely to be knocked off accidentally, unlike the preset black-out switches which are rather light acting and can be knocked off easily if one is a little clumsy in operating the preset master knob. This happened only once—during a rigging session—so perhaps I am unduly critical here. I found that having alternate dimmer levers black and green was no real help in providing a visual landmark on the board. I feel that perhaps if every tenth lever were a different colour it would be better, but as there is more than adequate labelling of the channels this would be a luxury. I would rather have the desk angled more nearly horizontal but there are probably many operators who would prefer the present near-vertical desk. A plot rest would be an asset. I put mine on top of the desk and I managed quite well, but a shorter person would probably find this awkward.†

So there we are, three performances; a lot of hard work by a lot of people and apparently three **contented audiences**. As I have said it was very pleasant to work in such a well-equipped theatre and workshop—by amateur standards anyway. The show had its ups and downs; it certainly was not as deadly serious as this article.

* This is to be done when funds allow the construction of a suitable room, see Donald Walker on Toynbee Theatre, Tabs, Vol. 26, No. 1.

† The vertical desk and no plot rest comes from the need to provide an inexpensive standard which can be used standing or sitting and in very confined spaces. Rotary knobs are purely the influence of cost, though some users do prefer them anyway. The alternate black and green lever knobs was the customer's special idea and is not standard.



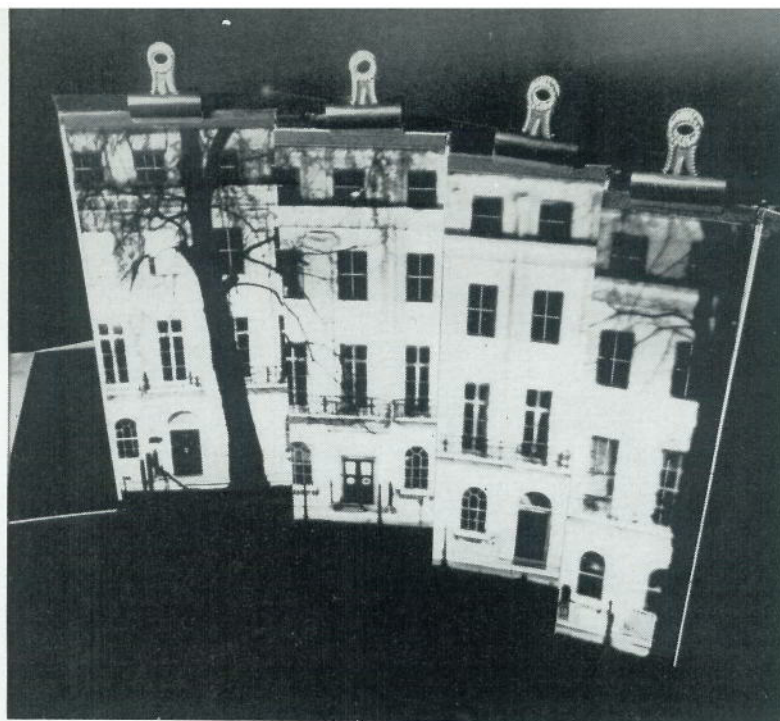
“BOOTS WITH STRAWBERRY JAM” at the Nottingham Playhouse

by B. E. Bear

Being TABS this is not a review of the production which has had wide coverage in the national press, but of the part played by Patrick Robertson's designs. Mr. Robertson is head of design at Nottingham Playhouse.

The show, a musical biography of Shaw, is a series of short episodes, and the demand for 24 scenes obviously influenced the treatment but, and this is the success of the design, the result has a style and validity of its own whilst still being essentially a part of the production. It is not to be admired as an ingenious way to do 24 scenes but as an attractive and effective way to do any one of them. Nor does repetition of the method become stale, such is the variety of visual images from formal patterns to realistic woodlands and city squares.

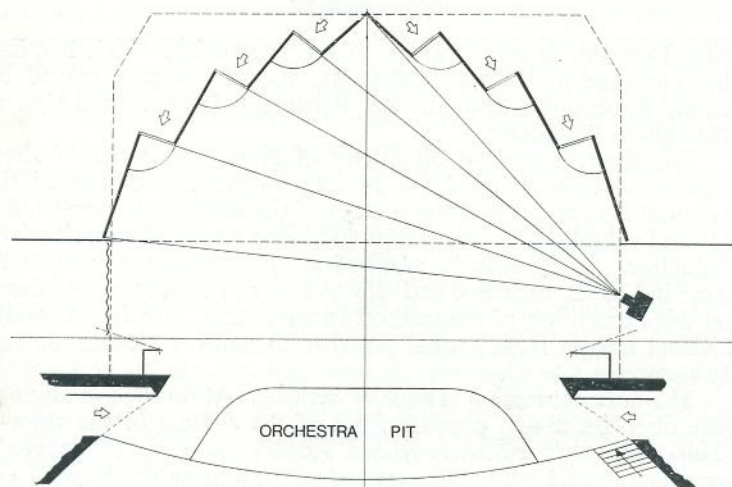
The next impression is equally exciting. At no time in any one scene does the design proclaim, out of the context of the show—“This is a smart use of projected scenery—how clever we are”. Too much is said today of projected scenery being the hope of the



"Boots with Strawberry Jam." Design by Patrick Robertson, production slides by Allan Hurst, Nottingham.

Above: Lantern slide positive on glass, made from four photographs clipped as shown.

Below: Basic plan showing screens with interconnecting mirror with doors (↓). Projector shown on P. side only with curtain masking for truck entrance O.P. Both projector and entrance were in fact duplicated on the other side.



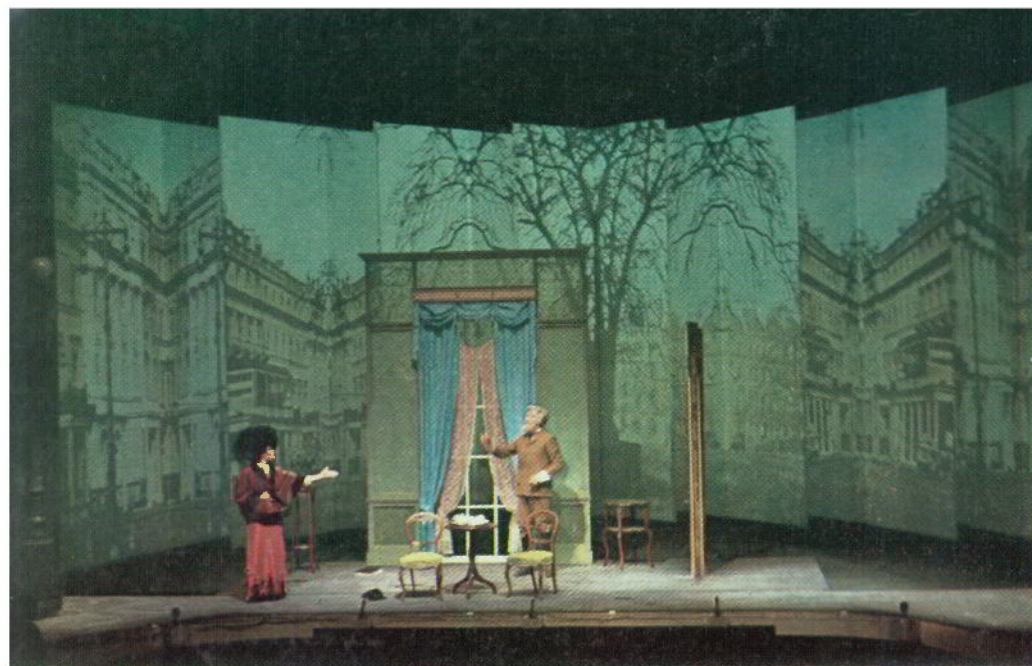
future and a lot of what is done is nothing but lantern slide décor, without the "magic". In this case I deny that it was possible to tell the difference from periaktoi scene changes until the number of changes made the number of sides suspiciously large.

Here the projection becomes an integral part of the flats—it sticks—and it is only the extensive repertoire of different scenes offered that tells us that they are not, nor could they have been, painted. A glance at the plan will emphasise why this is so. A projected picture is focused on the four flats each side from the fly gallery opposite—so far a normal technique. The space between these flats is needed for entrances—a traditional method. But here across these gaps Robertson has put complete mirror flats at right angles to the surface on which the projections appear. Thus each projected picture is duplicated in the mirror and the flat appears to run back to twice its actual size, no mirror being evident. This immediately gives the message that this cannot be a projection because half of each flat is apparently behind another. Entrances are made through the mirror as the bottom section is a concealed door. Luckily for the design "Mirralite", a stretched plastic, was available which gives a perfect "front silvered" reflection, and has not the impossible handicap of the weight of glass.

The projections are used on their own and also as backgrounds for small settings on trucks downstage and a proper balance has

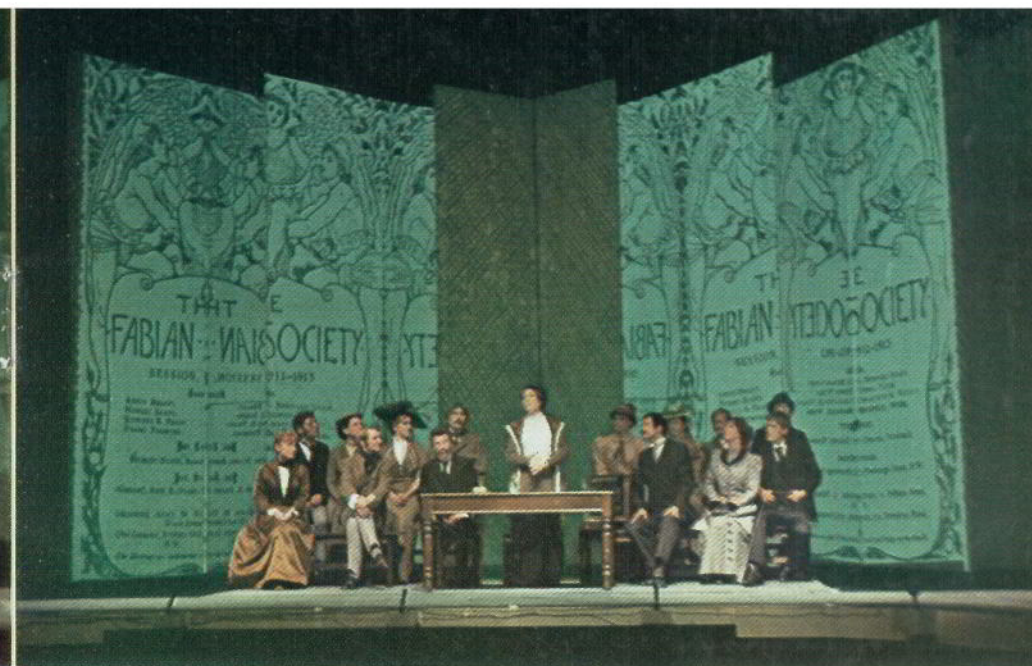


Close up of stage showing built scene with projected background of large cameos.

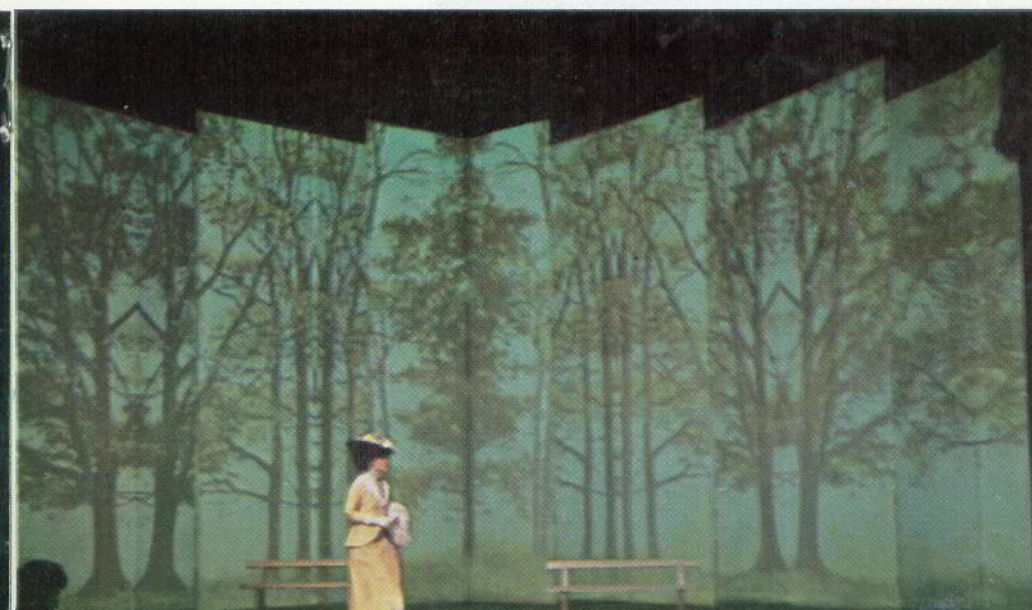


been kept in the lighting (Geoffrey Mersereau) so that at no time was the picture swamped, even when there was a full-up scene with 50 kW directed at the actors.

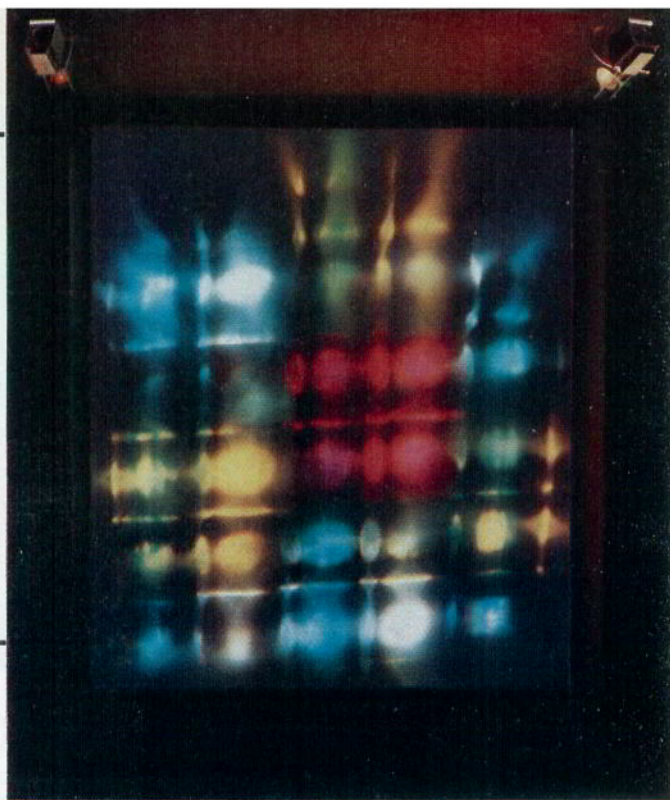
There had been a lot of detail work in planning and making the slides and the result is the true art and craft of scene design. Just as the solid theme and variations of Sean Kenny's set for *Oliver!* had the busy Dickensian life running over, under and through it and was the focus of the production, so Robertson's theme and



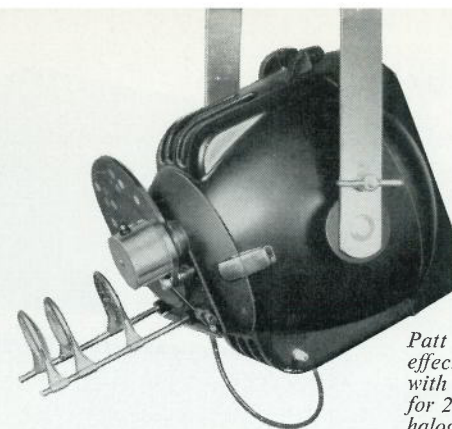
light variations give, with the costumes by Rosemary Vercoe, a great style to this production which was directed by Wendy Toye. John Neville who has done so much good in the new Playhouse at Nottingham is to be congratulated on putting on this show and, although as I said at the beginning this is not a review, on his playing of George Bernard Shaw with a masterly make-up. Just as the scenery was unrecognisable as to its true origin so too this G.B.S. needed the programme to tell us who was playing him.



INTO
SOMETHING
RICH
AND
STRANGE



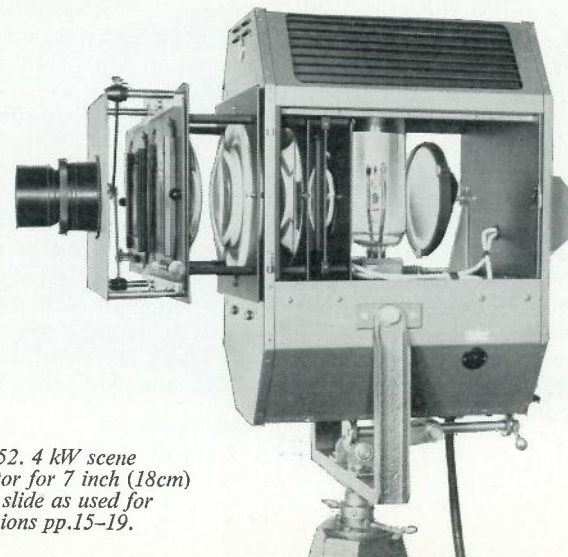
Two effects produced by the new miniature optical "Kaleidospot" discs used on the Patt 102 100w or the Patt 202 250w (opposite top) projector.



Patt 202 250-watt Mini-effects projector complete with built-in transformer for 24 volt tungsten halogen lamp.

The two colour effects shown opposite and the scene projection at Nottingham Playhouse (pp. 15-19) show the range of theatrical work expected from modern effects projectors. This kind of thing has always been a feature in Strand Electric's catalogues from their very beginnings. The two latest are shown on this page. Above is the Patt. 202 for use with a 250-watt tungsten halogen ("quartz") lamp which is complete with built-in transformer. This and the Patt. 102 100-watt Kaleidospot use miniature optical effects discs to provide both naturalistic moving effects like clouds and flames as well as a fascinating range of "psychedelic" colour effects, two moments of which are shown opposite.

The large projector below takes a 7-in. square slide and uses a 4-kW lamp. This is a scene projector and as such was used at Nottingham to give the effects on the preceding pages. Among other places it is also used at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden—most recently for projection on cyclorama during the opera *Midsummer Marriage*, but its use by Joseph Svoboda was also illustrated in TABS last September (Vol. 25, No. 3). Other Strand Effects optical projectors are Patt. 252, 2 kW and the Patt. 152, 4 kW.



Patt 752. 4 kW scene projector for 7 inch (18cm) square slide as used for projections pp.15-19.



St. ALBANS, THE ABBEY THEATRE

by Brian Benn

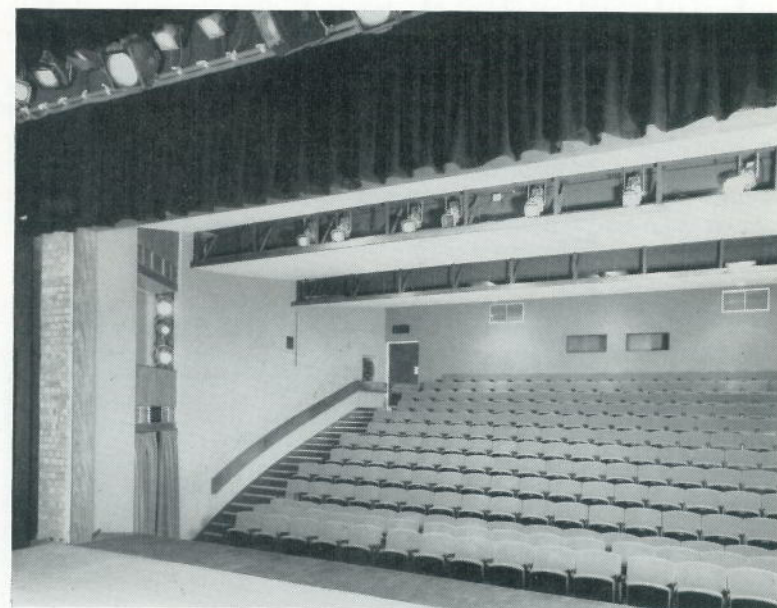
The relationship between client and architect, sometimes known as the theatre of non-communication, has been nicely resolved by the Company of Ten. Antony Moyes the architect has been a working member of the group for some years, where he relaxes by painting scenery, so that he was in the special position of knowing the company and its needs and intentions very well indeed. Purely by chance the company also counts amongst its members a solicitor, a brace of quantity surveyors, several dozen electricians and other skills, and a B.B.C. sound engineer. All this talent has added up to create the new Abbey Theatre which opened on April 15th, just over a year from the start of construction.

The building cost £30,000, and the fittings, furnishings and services added another £16,000. What they have got for their money and an enormous outlay of members' man-hours is a building with a handsome and economical exterior and a carefully planned and detailed interior. Its main function is to be the home and playhouse for the Company, which has 300 active members together with 800 members of the Theatre Club. The group has been giving at least six main productions per season, five running for a fortnight and one for a week. The new theatre has stimulated great local interest in live entertainment and it is intended that The Abbey will be available for professional and educational lettings and for visits of other amateur companies.

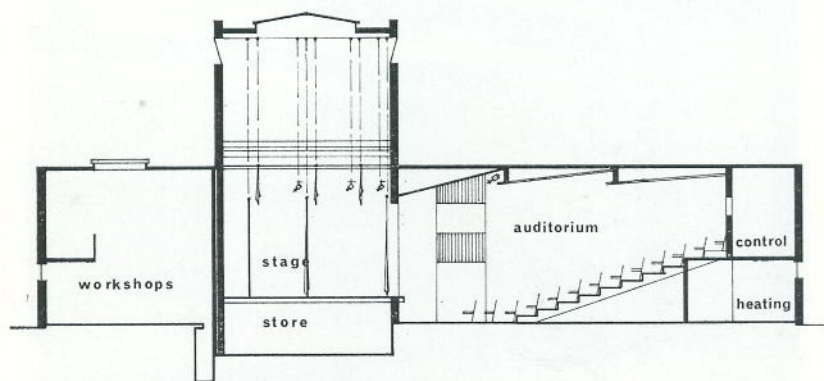
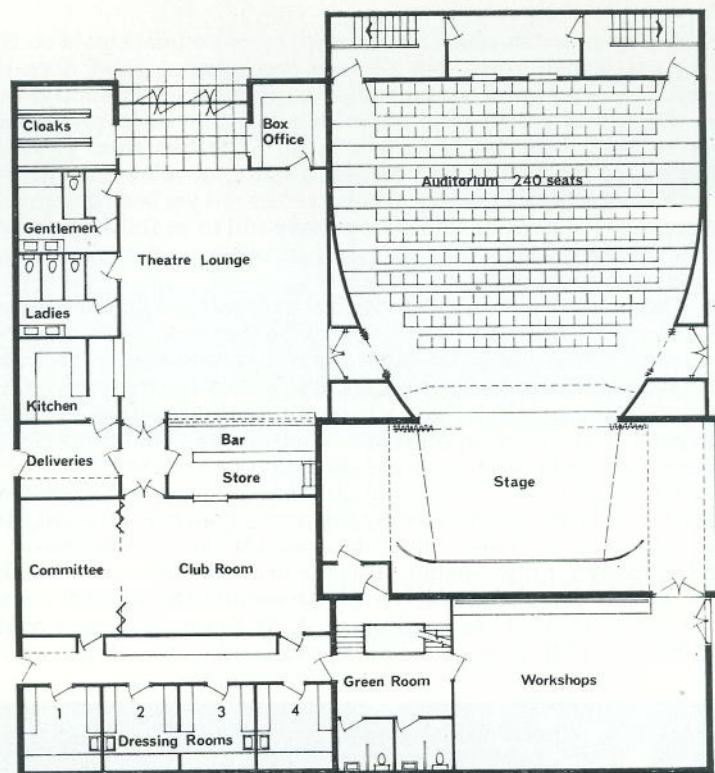
The auditorium holds an audience of 240 on dark gold seating in 13 continental rows, but the spacing between rows does not permit easy access past seated audience. It has a single stepped rake and the muted green walls curve in and down to a proscenium opening 24 ft. wide by 11 ft. 6 in. high. The two front rows are designed for removal to give orchestra space, or allow the addition of a forestage. Rather wisely this latter has not yet been designed as the problems of erection and storage have still to be fully considered. Sightlines are excellent although the first two rows may feel left out of happenings up by the backcloth.

The heating and ventilation system caters for separate areas of the theatre according to their times of occupation and usage. The equipment is intended to operate with no attention beyond servicing, and instructions for the plant are given from a control panel in the box office/manager's office, where all the theatre sections are displayed with their appropriate controls and indicator lights. Sections can be brought in as required on time-switches.

The stage is 46 ft. wide and 20 ft. deep with clear wing space each side of 11 ft. The surface is tongue and grooved softwood, with one large trap up stage centre, designed for the swift interment of the Company's upright piano. It is the firm intention to cut further traps as and when required, giving access to the full-width stage basement, with 10 ft. of headroom. A fly tower 34 ft. high relates neatly to the 11 ft. or so of the pros., and is fully utilised without the



St. Albans Abbey Theatre, view from stage.



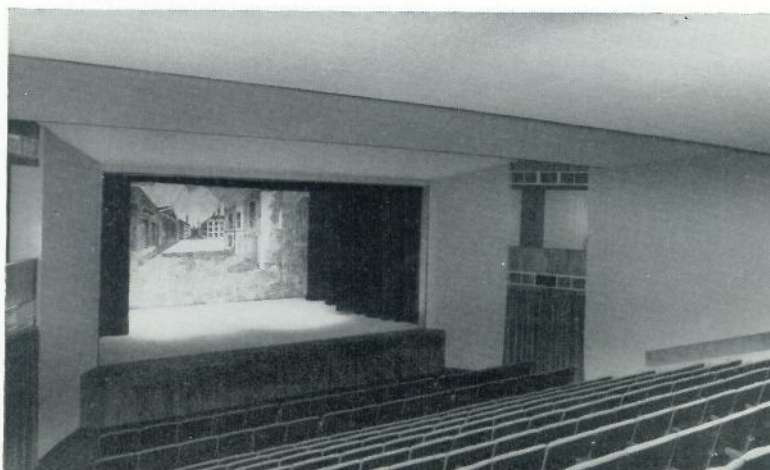
Abbey Theatre, plan and section.
Architect: Antony Moyes of Michael Meacher and Partners.

expense or the space loss of a grid. The roof construction incorporates three I-beams, at centre and 14 ft. to each side, from which the header pulleys are suspended, and the sets lead off to the fly-rail, stage left with a height of 14 ft. 6 in. under. At present there are five counterweight sets, 12 hemp sets and three winched spotbars. All rigging for flying was carried out by the Company, the equipment being supplied by Hall Stage. The choice of lines and bars seemed rather lightweight for a wide variety of uses. Rigging and maintenance of pulleys is by means of an "access" type scaffolding, a somewhat tedious and alarming prospect at a height of 34 ft.

Down left is the stage management desk, again a local product. It includes the usual cue-lights and cue call system of any modern desk, together with acknowledgement lights, a digital clock, and tell-tale indicators monitoring intercom speaker lines. Further useful features were an instant Houselights override switch for emergencies, and facilities for rehearsal or standing performance lighting. Circuits previously selected on a preset of the lighting control are thus at the stage manager's disposal without the presence of a console operator. The usefulness of this splendid desk is somewhat tempered by the fact that it is some 8 ft. off-stage and has a pass-door between it and the wings—not a great problem with simple dramatic shows, but not so jolly, say for a fast musical, or a cue-full ballet.

Upstage right, through double doors, is a large workshop with one wall fitted with pulleys for paint-frame work, and ample power supplies, well-lit and heated. Visiting companies may find difficulty of access with large flats or set pieces, due to the small doorways both on to stage and from outside (7 ft. high by 5 ft. wide).

Upstage left, through a stage entrance with efficient light-and-sound trap, is a small Green Room, with an imposing open staircase leading up to a well-appointed wardrobe workroom, large and pleasant to be in. Main wardrobe storage is in built-in cupboards in the dressing room corridor. There are four identical rooms, with a total of spaces for 16 artists, though some "doubling-up" could be done without undue crowding. The dressing rooms have access



also to the dressing room/club room. This has the same plan as the stage and is intended for social purposes and rehearsals, and an interesting secondary function as a studio theatre. The room has been designed windowless, and with one end fitted with a curtain to give a small acting area. Audience and actor entrances are separate, and the power and circuitry are fitted for the addition of a small slider dimmer board and spotlights from Company stock.

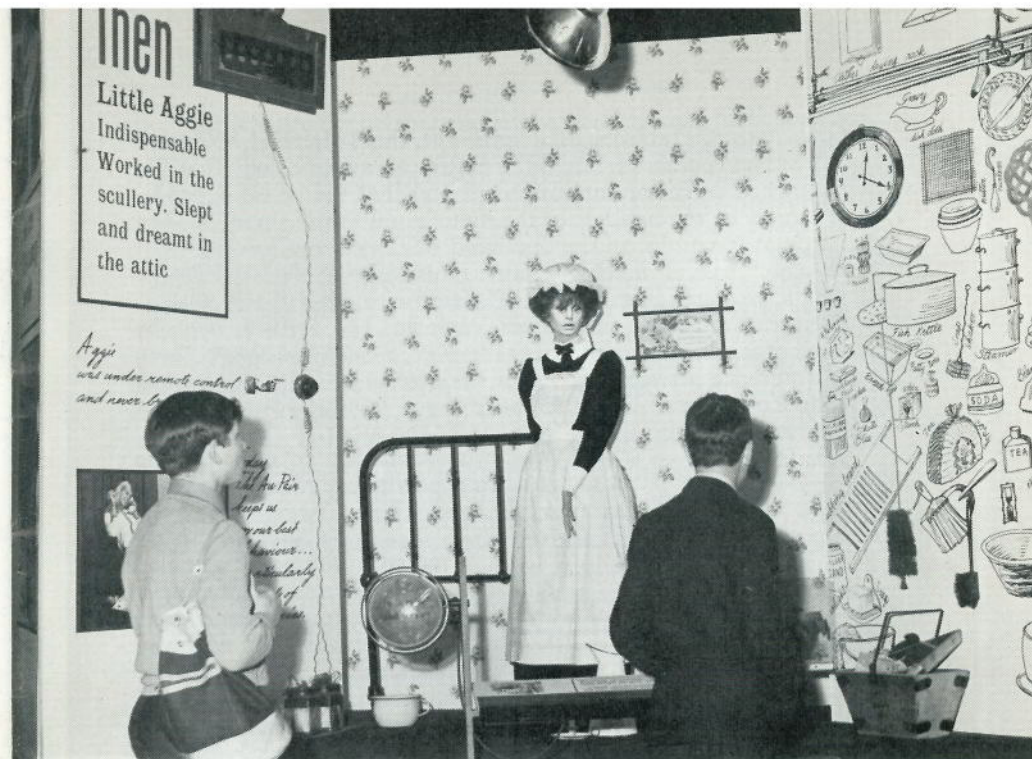
The stage lighting/sound control room is at the back of the auditorium, with a clear view of the stage. A Strand J.P. 60 is fitted, with 40 channels connected. Circuit wiring was carried out by the client's members, as was the design and fitting of the stereophonic sound system. All stage lighting circuits terminate in three large patch panels at downstage right. Bars plug direct, and other circuits terminate near the patch panels in trunking and short flexible tails with 15-amp BS plugs. The panels are positioned about 12 ft. from the floor, as it was felt that this would keep them clear of scenery and action, but surely with such a small number of circuits available, re-patching during a show will become necessary and a trifle difficult. There is a large selection of ancient and modern on the equipment side, and there are three internally wired bars hung on winches. F.O.H. lighting positioning is poor, in two ceiling slots, 12 and 24 ft. out from the pros. line. The lanterns (Patt. 264s are fitted) and mountings are fixed literally to the roof structure within the slots, and have front access only, by ladder from the auditorium. Due to the lowness of the roof line very shallow angles of throw result, which is a pity, as the stage depth illusion must suffer. Wall slots level with the front ceiling slot (each bearing a lone Patt. 23 at actors' eye level), again provide a most unsympathetic angle.

The first and last impressions of the Abbey are gained from the warmly coloured and roomy foyer. A capacity house will find mingling space and be catered for speedily from a bar 18 ft. in length. The plate glass entrance doors give a fine view across a wooded valley to the Cathedral.

The Abbey Theatre is a good building with a few shortcomings well compensated by a wealth of good thinking well carried out. But a theatre is nothing without the people who give it life and purpose. There is an air of quiet competence about the Company of Ten that leads one to believe that if they ever really find this theatre wanting they will just go ahead and put it right.

St. Albans: Abbey Theatre
Stage Lighting Circuits
Control
 JP 60 3 preset
 (40 dimmers fitted)
 120 kW Mains 240 Volts

FOH: 20 (12 fitted)
 No. 1 Bar: 12 (10 fitted)
 No. 2 Bar: 12 (8 fitted)
 Rear Bar: 4
 Dips: 12 (6 fitted)



IDEAL HOME AS THEATRE

by Frederick Bentham

Once again this March the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition opened its doors to the public who proceeded to flock there in their thousands for four weeks. This has been an annual event in London—war excepted—for 60 years and the attendance this year was 1,138,324. What is this but a great “pop” festival created long before anyone dreamed up this expression? The motivation of the members of the public who attend is *entertainment* and the motive of those who provide the bait is the acquisition of money or, to use another low word, “profit”. The general public's desire to crowd together, to stand and stare, to window shop—to build optimistic if sometimes tawdry castles in the air and one day to buy, is fully and very professionally exploited. Not a drop of culture here—entertainment and commercial profit—how low can you get!

There are many forms of exhibition and even the sternest trade or scientific one differs but little in its method of working. Indeed one firm at the recent electronics exhibition in London stole the headlines with a robot display which relied on actress impersonation backed up by Peppers ghost. A rival stand provided a display of another sort, *see-through* blouses. What is the motivation here but “entertainment” and “profit” and as such the balance will be finally struck and entered on the tax return.

Moving to the International scale with the wonderful Montreal Expo 67 of last year still fresh in the mind, can anyone deny that the crowds flocked there for entertainment and that the lavish expenditure of money by the builders of the many good things there, be they International Pavilions on the one hand or fairground sideshows in "La Ronde" had all much the same motivation as the Ideal Home with which we began this exercise. Philanthropy was entirely absent.

Countries advertise themselves, each has art, culture, schools, engineering, science and, except for the cage, its size and shape, there is little difference between them. The minicar has everything—so has the Rolls Royce, or at least they have if you confine your attention to the advertising literature of the one or the other.

What strikes one is the sheer professionalism of many of the designers who work in these fields. In the British Pavilion the work of James Gardner, a real pioneer, and Theo Crosby were outstanding. Some of these Gardner Expo ideas (see photograph on previous page) were served up again at the Ideal Home as was also the Sean Kenny pre-history preface to the British Pavilion. Olympia's glasshouse difficulty in providing a real blackout lessened the impact of both. I also missed the Kenny moving Montreal walkway which shifted the crowd through the blackness of the little seen. One let this platform take over and thus low intensity mysterioso became possible. Mysterioso needs low intensity to exercise the mind; it is not just a question that optical effects need dark to prevent the projected images being washed out.

Olympia as Theatre: Ideal Home Exhibition Décor 1958 . . .



Optical projection was also the basis of the two Svoboda displays in the Czech pavilion. This was theatre of another extreme—the scenic and optical virtuosity holding the audiences spellbound without the need of actors at all. The light and music features occupied large rooms adjacent to one another, from which all daylight had been excluded. In the first various projected effects were shown on moving screens, some of which were constructed of a material like cane which revolved at high speed. A large open ball formed of widely spaced hoops thus became solid at speed. Two effects then resulted when a film loop was projected on such a surface—firstly, a curiously ethereal picture presented, as it were in mid-air and secondly changes due to strobing. Further, being transparent, one could see one shape and its projected pictures through another. The whole ingenious whirring sculptural mobile of moving shapes so held the interest that we forgot to time its probably extensive cycle. The same applied to the show next door where the whole wall was formed of an area of several hundred individual pictures. Each of these had its own back projector with automatic slide change. Thus, sometimes the many pictures were combined to make one complete picture, for example of a lion, at others a series of separated pictures, each built up of complementary slides on adjacent screens. The pictures themselves were, at times, completely naturalistic, even photographic and at others, abstract or even a mixture of the two. This was not all however; each of the screens really formed the end of a box and each could be driven forward or backward. It was

Décor 1968: both designed by Trevor Smith and Tim Hopewell-Ash



particularly effective in the abstract patterns when parts of the screen moved forward and others receded, the surface then being broken in contours.

One could be hard and sum up *all* these exhibitions as so much advertising and yet the public go year after year. The reason is that it is popular theatre, actors and actresses delivering their lines, or improvising, amid décor and device while the audience mills around them. This is and has been (since 1851?) the "other theatre", the theatre in which the audience are not tied to their seats to confront the stage, the theatre of audience participation. By comparison the theatre of Gropius and his disciples is a tame non-starter.

The extraordinary thing about the Theatre Colloquium also in Montreal last year was the number of speakers who carried on at length, usually in French, on "le Théâtre libre" in which the director could do anything and the audience be anywhere. The theatre where by every device known to man (many in fact not known to engineers), the actor, audience, décor, acoustic ambience would change so that the audience could be placed within the play or without the play or as one sometimes suspected made to do without the play.

There were torrents and torrents of stimulating or boring verbiage depending on whether one likes that kind of thing. Yet apparently it occurred to hardly anyone that this theatre of the future was there working by the mile in the vast Expo a matter of minutes away.

I am fond of dwelling on the strange perversity that makes theatres with a proper stage wish to disguise the fact and forget that they have a curtain while halls without go to no end of trouble to fit up that which they have not and ought not to have. So it is that some directors rail against the theatres which for them prisons make. Why do they not go elsewhere and get on with it? When Reinhardt and Cochran wanted in 1911 to give *The Miracle* extra-scenic perception, they boldly took Olympia for the purpose and Olympia is where the Ideal Home Exhibition is staged each year. The trouble is that talk (accompanied perhaps by close-ups of improperly shaven directors on television) can be confused with wisdom. The oracle in Delphi used ambiguous wording and perhaps because of that there is in the human (or at any rate the well-read educated one—*homo sapientissimus*) a trait to hold in high regard the purveyor of the ambiguous. They like to exercise the brain on the hidden meaning that may lie behind the great man's words, instead of dismissing them as they undoubtedly would, given more lowly utterance, as nonsense. Codswallop is a very expressive term and we must remind ourselves that great ones are far more liable to utter it for they do not have to take the same care as the non-arrived. Artists are extra prone to utter codswallop for they attempt to supply an explanation after the event. They do not in the first place know why they did what they did but later become so adept at explaining after the act of creation that ultimately the explanation itself takes over and

precedes the creative act. They then conform to their own formula; such men are dangerous in the theatre—not necessarily when concerned with transitory productions which come and go. To ruin a good play with over-production and to tart up a mediocre classic are minor crimes. In a few months there can be another production for the first and limbo once again for the second. Things become really serious when such gentlemen are let loose to advise on theatre design. A theatre once built, the community—both players and audience—are stuck with it.

All too few theatres are built—at any rate in Britain—and we cannot afford to have them mucked up for one man's fancies of the moment. Let the genius blow off steam in production, be it ever so cabin'd, cribb'd, confin'd by everyman's theatre or let him exhibit himself outside, *A L'Expo mes enfants terribles*. For the rest of us when confronted with such a man as potential theatre consultant, let us greet each and everyone of his ideas with "How?" and "How much?" As "The Sydney Opera House Affair"* shows the genius may not be very good at answering either question.

* The Sydney Opera House Affair, M. Baume, Nelson.

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE THEATRE

by Martin Carr

Whilst the new theatre in Gordon Street, W.C.1, for the Students' Union of University College, is not the first new theatre to be built in London since the war, it is undoubtedly the best designed and equipped. (This is not a reflection upon the Mermaid, which was a conversion job, and has never been equipped to the standards normally associated with professional theatre.) The Central Collegiate Theatre as it is called, is by no means perfect—the considerable restrictions imposed by the site ensured that space would be at a premium—but to me at any rate, it has a delightful auditorium, and the technical facilities are certainly beyond the normal ambitions of most of the amateurs and many of the professionals who will use this building.

As far as London is concerned, I for one welcome this theatre with enthusiasm because it will be available not only to the University societies, but to any other group, amateur or professional, that can arrange a booking. For once a properly designed and fully equipped theatre will be available in the centre of London to house many of the "fringe" theatrical activities for which at the moment there are no alternatives to St. Pancras Town Hall or the Scala, whose very existence is now in jeopardy.

The U.C.L. Theatre seats 599 maximum, arranged in stalls and single balcony. For the first time in London, continental-type seating has been permitted and this alone would be sufficient reason for enthusiasm. The back-to-back row spacing is 3 ft. 4 in., and there is plenty of room to pass without disturbing those already seated.



University College Theatre view of auditorium showing open ceiling lighting bridges and blinders.

There are three exits to either side of the stalls, in which are 16 rows, each of 30 seats. The rows are gently curved, but the curve is not positive enough to give a sense of encirclement when the open stage is in use.

In the balcony the curve is very pronounced, and this does "encircle" the open stage; here the rake of the tiers is very steep—almost too much one would say for those who dislike heights. With a few seats placed on the horns of the curve close to the stage, the feeling is very much one of intimacy and contact. For both proscenium and open stages these side seats give a suggestion of "in the round" viewing which I personally have found most enjoyable. The lines of sight from the circle are astonishingly good when you consider that the projection of the apron can be up to 18 ft. from the proscenium line.

If this auditorium has the feeling of being a "mini" Nottingham, then I put this as a credit to Fello Atkinson, the architect,

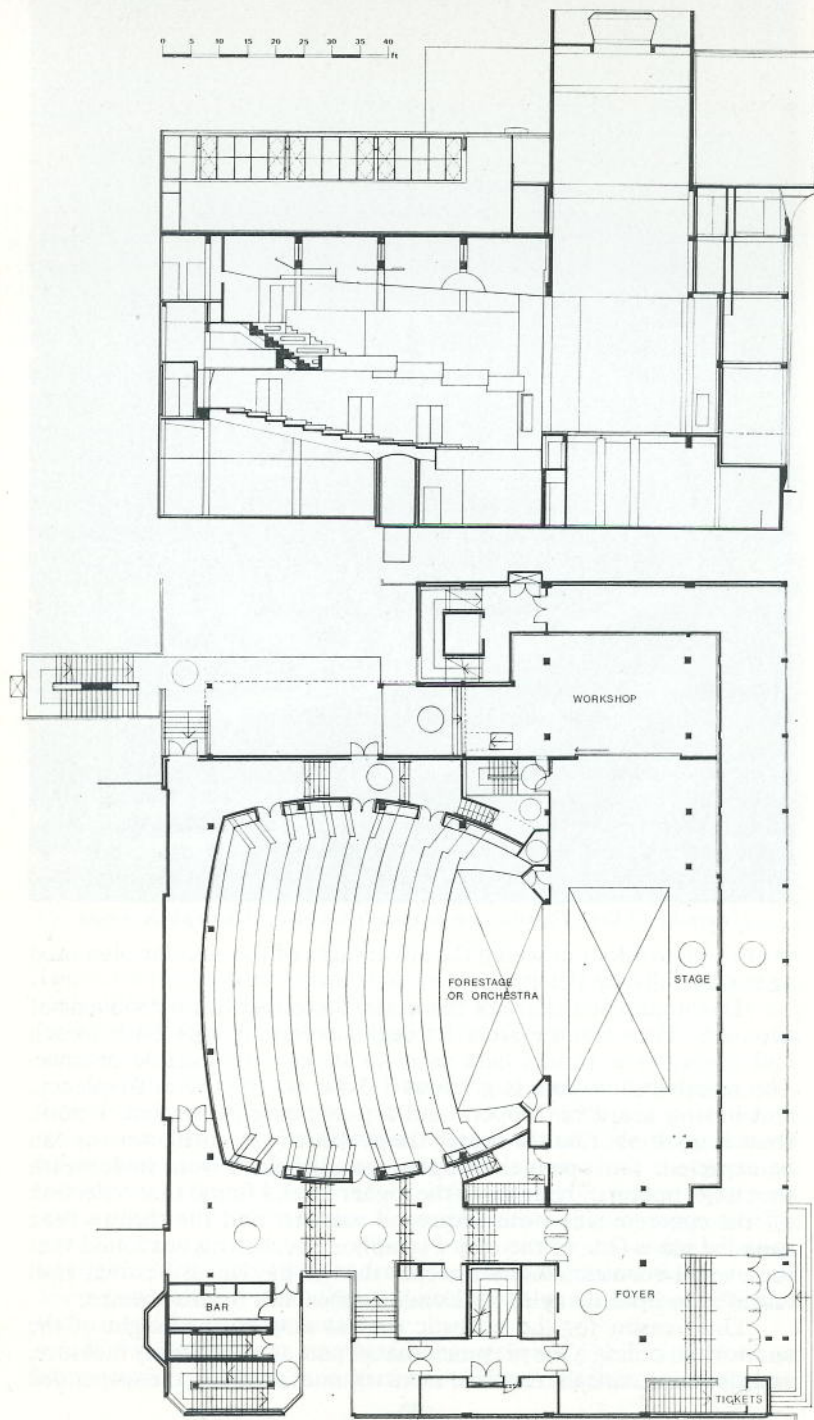


University College Theatre view of stage showing orchestra pit in action.

for this his wisdom in seeing the advantages of the circular plan used so successfully by Peter Moro.

In a multi-use theatre of this scale, there are always problems of acoustics. How can the architect deal successfully with both speech and music? The results here seem to strike a reasonable balance. The reverberation time is given as 1.5 sec. at 100 cycles frequency, and having heard both opera and a play being performed, I think there is no doubt that for speech the acoustic is as satisfactory as can be expected. For opera the singers sounded dead from underneath the circle, but on moving up to the higher level, I found that reflection off the concrete side walls improved matters, and the theatre then sounded alive. One of the major symphony orchestras has found that the overall acoustic closely matches that of the Royal Festival Hall and it is to hold many of its London rehearsals in this theatre.

One reason for the acoustic success may be the height of the auditorium ceiling. One presumes that in part as an economy measure, and also to provide the required extra volume for music, the suspended



University College Theatre plan and section.
Architects: Fello Atkinson ARIBA, James Cubitt and Partners.

ceiling originally planned was scrapped, and the lighting catwalks—and very extensive these are—are exposed, leaving an open void above. In order to tidy up the appearance of this area, which houses a variety of service ducts, the auditorium lighting is suspended at catwalk level and provides a “blinder” effect. The resulting glare may be a little too much for comfort, but it is certainly effective in masking out the absence of a conventional ceiling. As a bonus economy, the F.O.H. spotlights get unrestricted coverage of the stage—of particular importance in the open form. However, I was very aware of the lack of side lighting F.O.H. positions for both proscenium and open stage forms. The open stage really does provide a large acting area, 42 ft. by 18 ft. When this is added on to the proscenium stage as was done in a recent student production of *Becket*, the resulting acting area is truly exciting. But as usually happens, the director who chooses to work on the open platform is left without any scene-changing facilities, and all entrances have to be made from the proscenium or the small token Georgian doors. When the apron is lowered, it can form a pit adequate for the best part of 60 musicians, surely more than the acoustics or economics could accommodate. The pit does then become a definite barrier to contact between stage and stalls, and this is exaggerated by the curious arrangement of the front to the proscenium platform. For as at Southampton, the edge of the stage is set back into the opening, rather than projecting somewhat in front of the arch in the conventional manner.

One is conscious that the backstage area is not equal in quality to the auditorium. In depth the fly tower does not cover the full stage area, and the proscenium opening is of modest width by today's standards. The grid is adequately high (60 ft.) and is fully equipped with double purchase counterweights. A scene dock on the O.P. side contains a paint frame but there is no other storage space or workshop.

Lighting and sound systems are extensive—a Strand SP/80 control with JTM dimmers and Stagesound console generously fitted with twin decks, twin gram units and seemingly complex mixing facilities. For some peculiar architectural reason, the lighting box gives an excellent view of all stage forms from the rear of the circle, but the sound operator, also in this locality, sees mostly the heads of the back row of the audience. And there is no physical intercommunication between the two control rooms, for in between them is a projection room equipped to a standard which seems to be possible only in universities.

Backstage, it is not the theatre equipment that takes the breath away, but what I can only describe as the selfishness of the services engineers, who seem to have commandeered far more than their fair share of the limited space available. The dressing rooms are frankly a disappointment, and some A.B.T.T. advice could have been used here. To be fair to the engineers, the theatre is only one part of the building complex, which includes amongst other things the only full-

size indoor rowing tank in the country—and this is up on the roof. One can imagine that when the plug for that is pulled out, a big drain pipe is needed, but it does seem a pity that the actors should have to suffer in consequence.

But in spite of the occasional deficiencies I like this theatre. It has atmosphere, and it is comfortable, and the equipment is on a scale not to be found anywhere else in the country in a theatre of this type. The architect estimates £200/250 thousand—an exact figure for the theatre alone is not possible—and to me this is good value for money, even if the awkwardness of the site has resulted in some curious architecture. But for once one can be enthusiastic about a university theatre, and this in itself is something to cheer about.

University College Theatre Stage Lighting Circuits

Control

SP 80 3 preset

176 kW Mains 240 Volts

FOH 26 + 6 with changeover

No. 1 Bar: 15

Mid Stage: (Flys) 10

Rear Bar: 5

Flys R down: 5

Flys R mid: 2

Flys R up: 5

Dips: 12

CORRESPONDENCE

A multi-lantern complexity

Dear Sir,

I, of course, agree wholeheartedly with Richard Pilbrow that the primary function of lighting must be to make the actor's performance visible. But I do feel, equally strongly, that it is the function of the lighting designer to attempt to do this with less rather than more equipment.

I think it was S. H. Newsome who said to me: "Anyone can light a show if they use enough equipment and spend enough time doing it: the lighting designer is the professional expert who achieves the same result with a fraction of the equipment in a fraction of the time."

However, the real danger of the "multi-lantern complexity" is that although practical for West-End long-runs, it breeds techniques quite unsuitable for the repertoire pattern upon which our theatre is now developing. Now that the switchboard end of the installation has been conquered, some means must be found of simplifying the present time-wasting focusing procedures. This is going to require a lot of co-operation and compromise between the lighting designers and the equipment manufacturers—access, ergonomics and self-discipline are involved all to a greater or lesser degree.

I personally feel that the answer will be for the manufacturers to provide more sophisticated lanterns and for the lighting designers to use fewer lanterns: the budget will be the same, but the saving in time considerable.

FRANCIS REID,
Maldon, Essex.

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