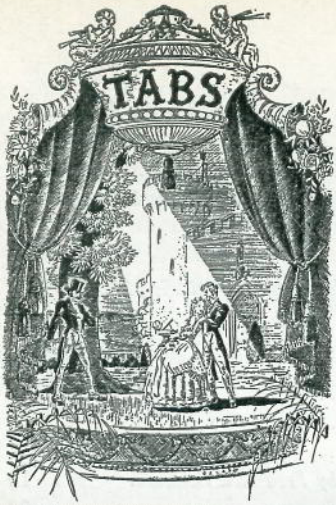

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Cover picture: ". . . Samson took hold of the two middle pillars . . ."

Act III

On the back cover of our Golden Jubilee history of Strand Electric we printed " End of Act I ". The second act has proved shorter than we thought, for by the time this issue appears Strand Electric will have become a member of the Rank Organisation. TABS readers will be aware, since a special edition of their journal was one of the weapons used, that this takeover was opposed by the Directors when originally mooted last May. The ground for this opposition was that Strand's very specialist business of the " Theatre-struck working for the Theatre-struck " might suffer. It would not be improper to add, for your Editor was one of those Directors, that there was also a trace of a very human reluctance for large cogs in a small machine to become very small cogs in a very large machine—maybe redundant cogs at that. However, no public company belongs to the Board of Directors though it is not unknown for a Board to behave as if it did. It is of course the shareholders that own the company and it is they who in the final event determine whether it will be sold or not. In the latest instance there were more than sufficient indications that it was going to be the shareholders' wish to sell and it would not be unreal to hazard a guess that their appraisal of the options before them was in financial rather than stage lighting terms. After all if one wants to practise the art it is a matter of buying lanterns instead of shares. It was, to bend a theatre phrase, a matter of " Up a lot, down a little ", or " Share and share unalike ".

Far more to the point than the reasons for sale are the reasons for purchase. What do Rank want Strand for? One thing is certain it is not for the premises—the buildings. Look where you will in factory, office or showroom and you find a collection of converted ancient properties with Strand bursting out all over. As to Strand's own theatres these are so small as to be useless save as lighting demonstration theatres.

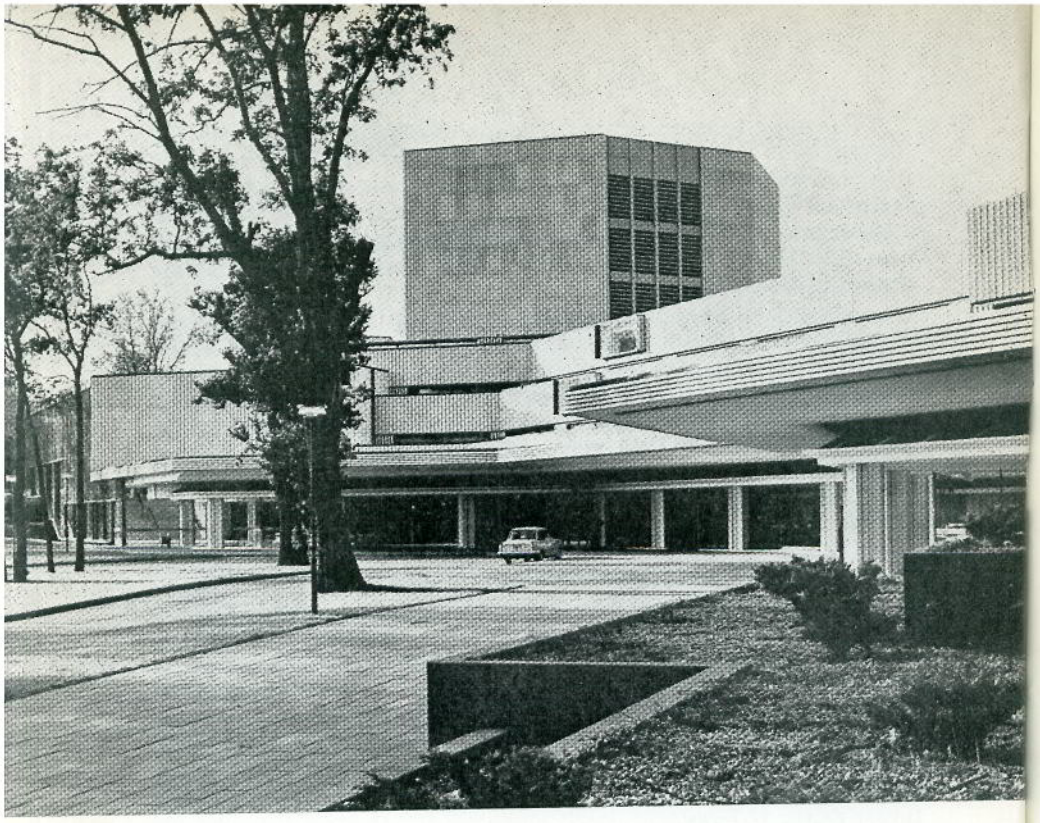
Altogether what the City calls the tangible assets of Strand account for only a fifth of the bid price. The remainder is represented by people practising the business of stage lighting in its widest sense—" Lighting for Entertainment ". This is what Rank have bought and the inescapable fact is that large and diverse as they are, they are nevertheless interested in stage lighting for their Audio Visual Division.

In Strand Electric they have bought the best known and probably the largest firm in the world specialising in this kind of lighting, but it is a firm capable of greater development. It is true that ten years ago the turnover was just under a million pounds whereas in the last audited year (1967–8) it was nearly two and three-quarter million, but as some of Strand's customers will know to their and our sorrow, production in recent months has not kept up with the expanding world demand for Strand products. This is where Rank can help because it is time Strand planned and thought big. But with growth in the air let us hope we shall not lose our personality and that it will remain " fun " for our customers to deal with us and what better barometer of that in Act III can there be than the future pages of TABS?

Two Famous Names

The deaths have been announced of Herbert Kliegl in America and of Eugen Vogel in Germany. Herr Vogel was the financial partner of Reiche and Vogel, the Berlin firm which continued and developed the techniques of Hans Schwabe, a theatre electrician who became manufacturer. Eugen Vogel had served his company for fifty years during which time its equipment has been identified as the very personification of German stage lighting.

Herbert Kliegl was also German by descent and many people will best remember him seated at the desk on his father's left hand through the years in the old premises at 321 West 50th Street in New York. How the two of them managed to exercise so much influence and produce so much in such cramped quarters is still a mystery. Herb Kliegl designed much of his firm's equipment and was the man with the foresight to see that in the S.C.R. (Silicon Controlled Rectifier) now known as the Thyristor was the dimmer of the future. When he spoke to the C.I.E. Conference at Brussels in 1959 he had left everyone else still standing at the post. All they could do was to hint darkly of technical snags while they hastened to get on the same band wagon as quickly as possible.



HELSINKI CITY THEATRE

by Peter Moro, F.R.I.B.A.

Helsinki's new City Theatre designed by Timo Penttila was completed in September 1967. It was the result of a competition and the architects were lucky to have had the benefit of the expert advice of the theatre's Director, Sakari Puurunen, from the outset. To be sure the ideal theatre has yet to be built, if in fact it is capable of realisation, but this building though basically a conventional proscenium theatre, goes some way towards breaking down the moribund " Guckkasten " concept. It follows, or perhaps one should say it sets, the modern trend of wide fanned auditoria which characterises both our proposed National Theatre and the Barbican. Also like these two British examples there are two auditoria. The larger has 920 seats and the seating capacity of the smaller theatre varies in accordance with its flexible seating arrangement. Both stages are on the same level.

Although the two theatres are linked by a common entrance foyer, the planning of entrance doors and cloakrooms effectively establishes a separation of circulation. To the left a grand flight of

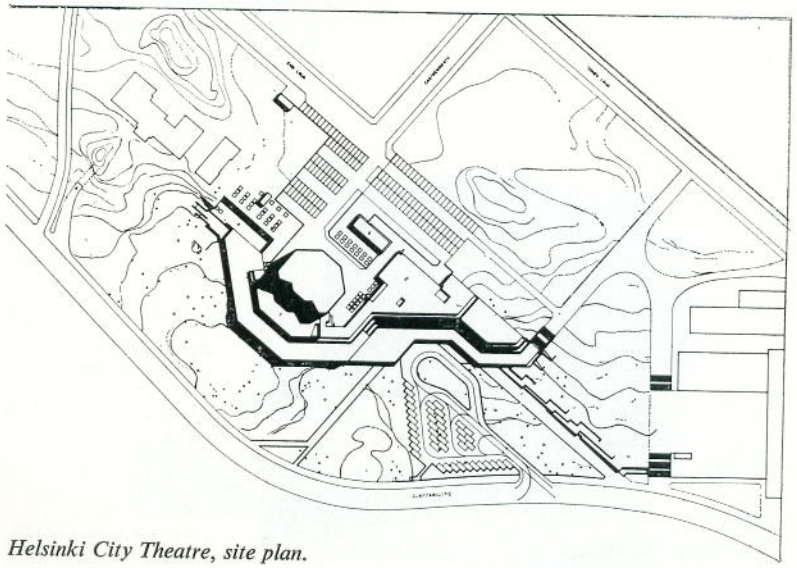
stairs leads via a generous fully-glazed foyer to the large auditorium. The annoyance of being made to climb stairs to the rear of the stalls only to descend again inside the auditorium is ameliorated by the elegance and ease of the stairs one has to negotiate. The route to the smaller theatre to the right is more subdued and intimate. The small foyer leading to this theatre with its bar and cloakroom can be thrown open to the auditorium by sliding away the dividing wall.

The choice of colours and materials, mainly teak, bronze and white marble, is most attractive and shows impeccable taste. The public lavatory accommodation is perhaps the most luxurious I have ever seen but one must remember that in the cold Finnish climate these places are also used for shedding the necessary woolly underwear before entering the auditorium.

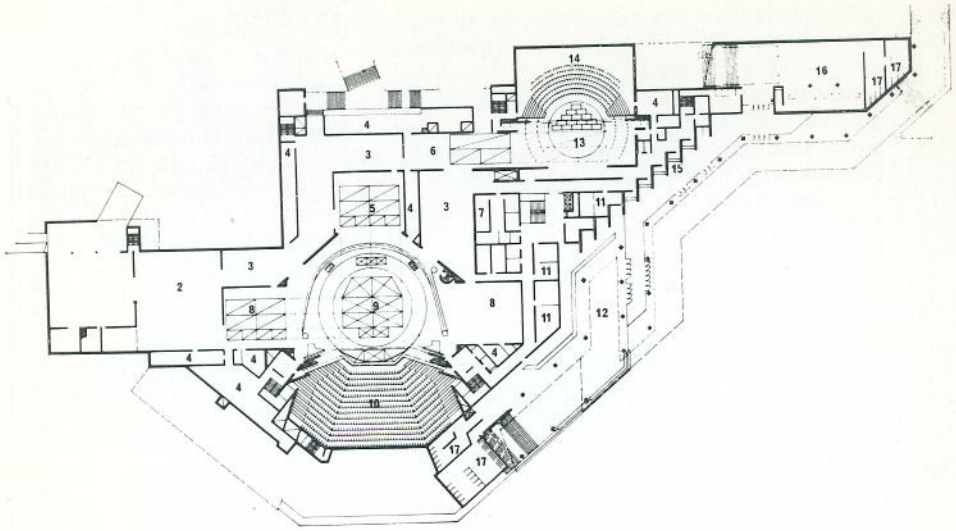
The large theatre is a wide fan proscenium with sliding portals to adjust the proscenium opening. The projecting forestage and orchestra pit are separated from the auditorium by a specially shaped fire curtain so that its use can be fully exploited theatrically.

The stage itself is equipped with a 16-metre diameter revolve incorporating lifts which can tilt in true continental fashion. Lines are fully power operated and everything is thoroughly mechanised. Mechanisation backstage was a deliberate policy, its main purpose being to save labour. While continental theatres of comparable size have a technical staff of 60–100, only 15–20 are needed here.

Prompting is done from the control box at the rear of the auditorium through a system of strategically placed directional loudspeakers incorporated in the stage floor downstage and suspended from above upstage.

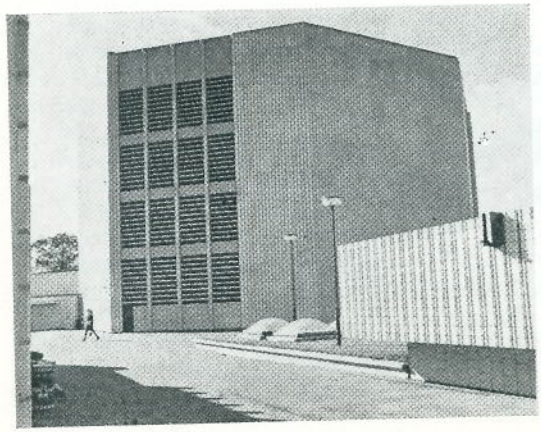


Helsinki City Theatre, site plan.

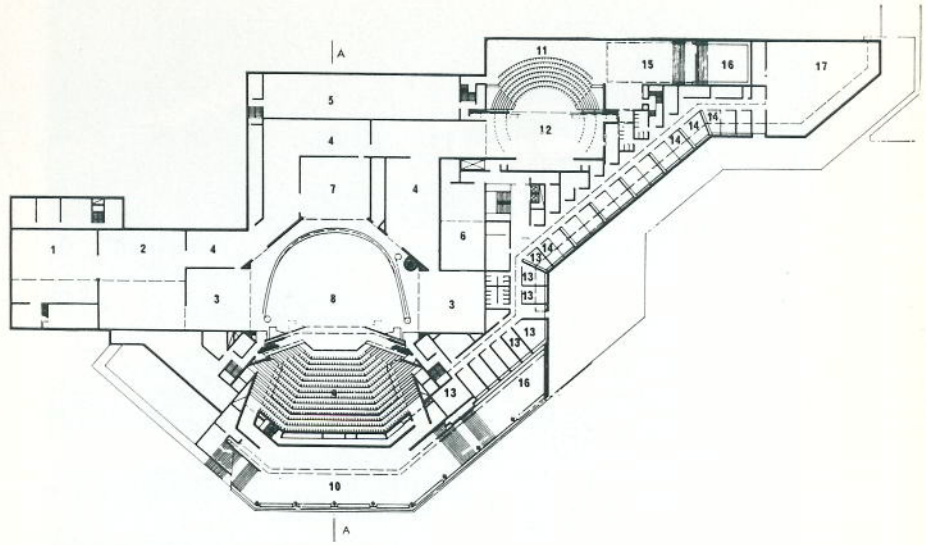


Ground floor plan.

1. Carpenter's shop
2. Scene painting shop
3. Scene storage
4. Storage
5. Rear stage
6. Scene storage, side stage
7. Stage hands' room
8. Side stage
9. Main stage
10. Auditorium, stalls
11. Actors' and assistants' sitting room
12. Cloakroom, large stage
13. Small stage
14. Chair storage
15. Booking office hall
16. Cloakroom, small stage
17. Public W.C.s.

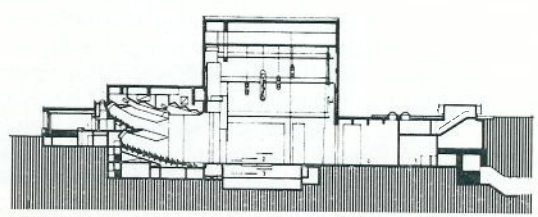


Stage tower, courtyard view.

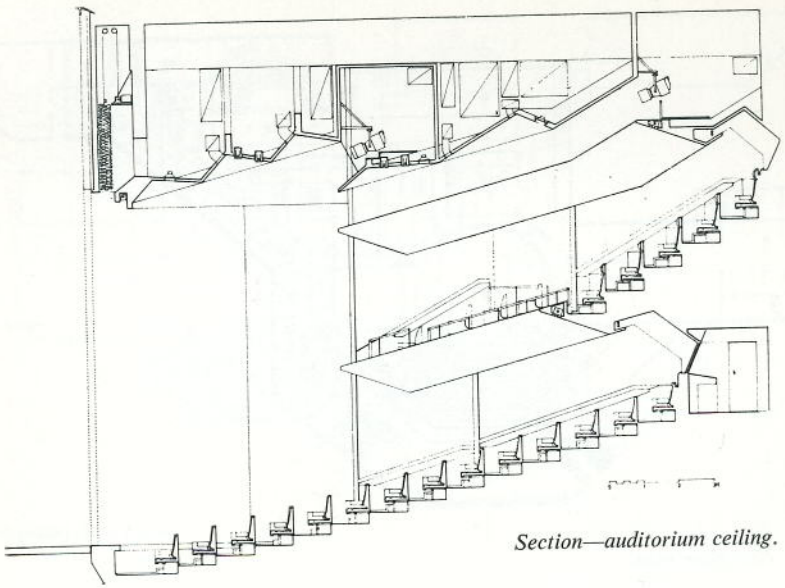


First floor plan.

1. Carpenter's shop, upper section
2. Scene painting shop, upper section
3. Side stage, upper section
4. Scene storage, upper section
5. Air conditioning equipment
6. Small stage rehearsal room
7. Rear stage, upper section
8. Main stage, upper section
9. Auditorium, stalls
10. Lower foyer
11. Small stage auditorium
12. Small stage, upper section
13. Actresses' dressing rooms
14. Actors' dressing rooms
15. Foyer
16. Cloakroom, upper section
17. Large stage rehearsal room



Section through AA above.



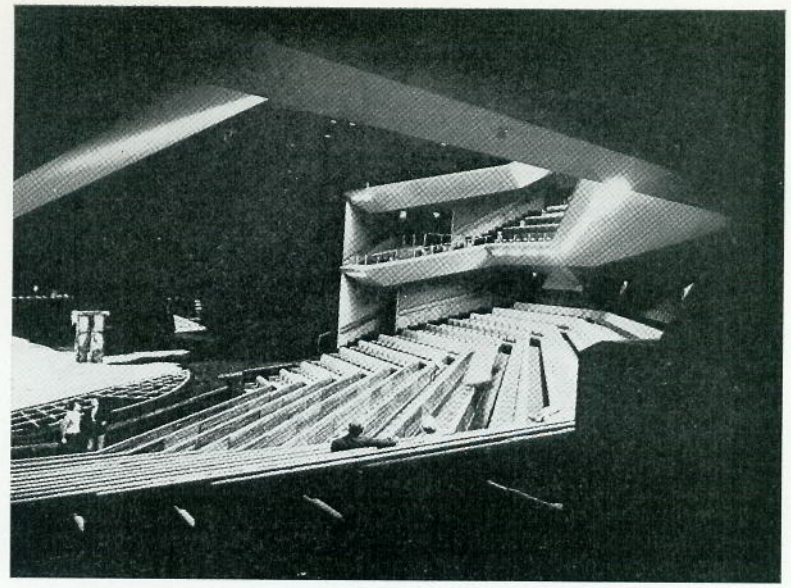
Section—auditorium ceiling.

Being entirely Finnish made the lighting control board is an object of special pride. It is described as semi-automatic and there are altogether (for both theatres) 290 thyristor dimmers. Lighting changes are effected manually or by means of punched tapes.

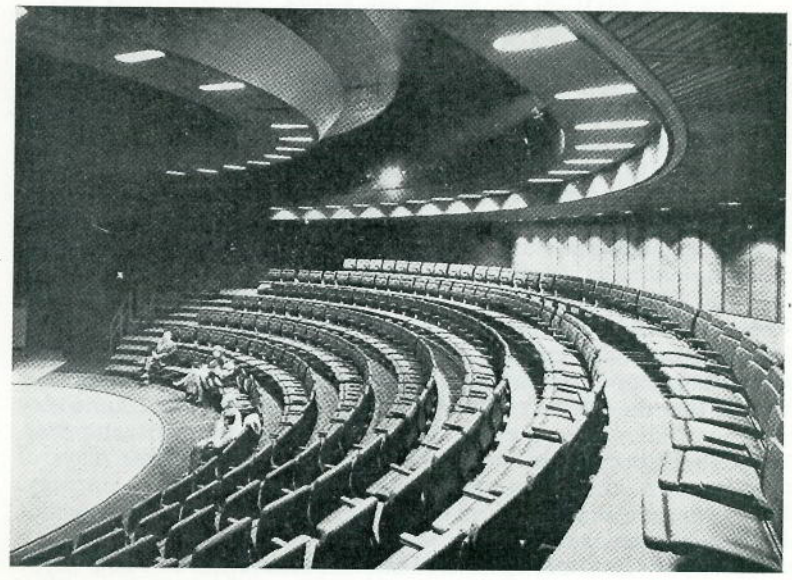
The auditorium feels intimate although it lacks a certain sense of cohesion. The reason for this is that compactness has been sacrificed to excessive standards of comfort—possibly the inevitable by-product of continental seating.

The small theatre, alas, demonstrates yet again that the adaptable theatre is a chimera. In this case circular rows of seating are arranged around a circular acting area in the form of a 14-metre diameter revolve. By adding or withdrawing radially sectors of seating and by moving about the rest on circular rails, the stage can be encircled by the seating to varying degrees. Unfortunately and rather surprisingly it is not possible to complete the circle. Thus the maximum encirclement is about a three-quarter ring which seems of doubtful value while total encirclement, i.e. theatre in the round, is not possible. By removing all but a quarter of the seating some sort of proscenium arrangement can be achieved, the proscenium opening being formed by sliding in large screens concealed on either side of the acting area. Although I have not seen the various forms of audience/actor relationship demonstrated in performance, I suspect that the flexibility of this design is of a doubtful kind and has been achieved at disproportional expense and technical effort.

Particularly attractive and well thought out are the back-stage areas, using white walls and brightly coloured doors for identification.



Large auditorium, 920 seats.



Small auditorium, 300 seats.

A most precise brief has made sure that nothing has been forgotten.

Externally the unusual thing about this building is that it has been built into the rock on a site which has almost a thirty-foot drop across it. In this way the entire back-stage accommodation is buried up to roof level and merely the front façade, forming, so to speak, the cliff face, is visible. At the rear all one can see of the theatre is its fly tower rising straight out of the ground. Only the glazed rooflights amongst which one walks indicate that the theatre and its workshops and technical spaces are below ground. Having the best part of the theatre buried has possibly simplified the architect's problem, who had merely to deal with the front of the building, but it has, of course, resulted in complications regarding access to workshops, which is by underground passage and lift, and regarding escape from the front of auditorium.

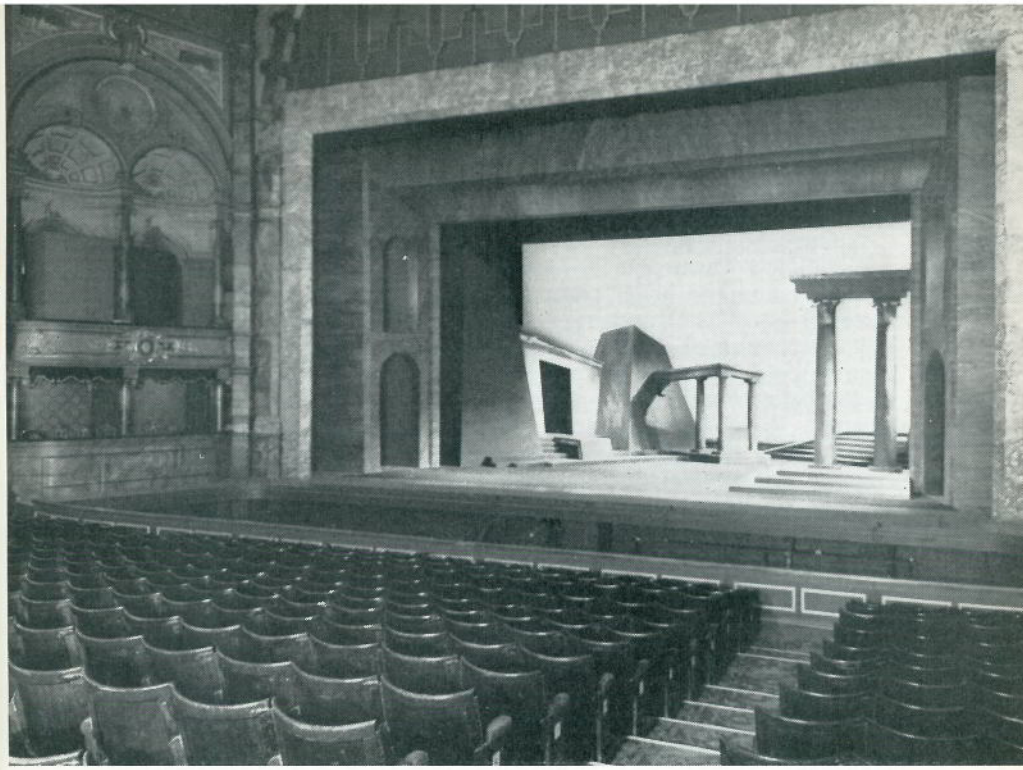
This new theatre is by our standards exceptionally well detailed and finished and uses materials which for reasons of expense one could not even contemplate here. All this has been done without ostentation or vulgarity, but even so, it is apparently regarded as offensively luxurious by some of the more money-conscious citizens. Although a great deal of money has been spent, none of it has been squandered at the expense of the production facilities. Whatever one's attitude towards luxury may be there is no doubt that this latest addition to the large number of theatres on the Continent is certainly one of the best.

SADLER'S WELLS AT THE LONDON COLISEUM

by Frederick Bentham

In 1945 the late E. J. Dent wrote a book which he entitled *A Theatre for Everybody**. It was part history of and part description of the work of the Old Vic and Sadler's Wells Theatres. It was more than anything a tribute to that extraordinary woman Miss Lilian Baylis. Of the Old Vic nothing now remains, it has been sunk without trace. At this point the reader will begin to bridle and remind me that the Old Vic is very much there, the buildings having become our first National Theatre—a great and glorious destiny, while the actors who played and trained there—whose names are legion—have spread their influence in theatre far and wide. Unfortunately these great names are not what I remember the Old Vic for. I only now realise that the plays I saw when at school must have had some very distinguished names playing therein. To me it was first and foremost the place where one could get acquainted with the plays of Shakespeare—the other source was Sir Frank Benson's company. In the twenties and thirties as I recall it was not necessary to wait for many years before there was, for example, a *Julius Caesar*, a *Macbeth* or *Hamlet* to be seen. The " roast beef and two veg " type

**Published by T. V. Boardman*



Ralph Koltai's set for "Samson and Delilah" at the Wells as staged at the Coliseum showing how the false pros. designed by Margaret Harris bridges the gap.

of standard theatrical menu was there almost at the ready—tolerably, sometimes stunningly, well served whenever one fancied or needed it. Imagine not being able to get a steak and kidney pie for years and then when at last it is " on " to find that the chef's aim has been to get an entirely new arrangement for it. The kidney forms the outer crust and the pastry is hidden significantly inside. I am not asking for an unchanged approach, though the D'Oyly Carte shows that this is perfectly possible and has its attractions. I am simply saying that one has a right to expect good plain cooking to be available and this the Old Vic provided and that Old Vic no longer exists. The amazing thing was that the Old Vic managed to have two nights of Opera as well. However, in 1931 the rebuilt Sadler's Wells theatre in Rosebery Avenue opened and the way was clear for the separate use of the two theatres. The one for Shakespeare and the other for opera and ballet.

The much, and justly, criticised lack of facilities at the Rosebery Avenue theatre as an opera house must be seen in perspective. Compared with the combined-ops at the Old Vic, to have a separate theatre must have then seemed luxury indeed. It is more than possible that had the stage and particularly the proscenium opening been bigger then the enterprise would have folded up—production costs being too high. As it was the proscenium of 30 ft. was just the

kind of width that, say, the Carl Rosa encountered on their tours in places like the King's, Hammersmith; and when the Wells toured, then their scenery fitted and did not represent a large amount to pay out to build or to cart around.

There was a return to Old Vic combined-ops when during the war the New Theatre in St. Martin's Lane housed both the drama company and the ballet company. The opera company made its historic return to Rosebery Avenue when they opened with the first production of Benjamin Britten's *Peter Grimes* in 1945. From then on the opera company has never looked back although deserted by the ballet who before long were to receive preferment, under the title of " Royal " down among the vegetables of Covent Garden.

We see in Sadler's Wells cramped into the Rosebery Avenue triangle the survival of an essentially successful method. Was the Opera Company pot-bound or did the drastic restriction automatically ensure the essential pruning necessary for opera in English to flower? Nobody knows perhaps exactly why such excellent work came forth, but everybody knows that it did. This is why some of us while welcoming the initiative of Stephen Arlen behind the move to the London Coliseum nevertheless sometimes have a nightmare in which our opera in English boasts the title of Royal Coliseum Opera or in which we have the Royal Opera House Covent Garden on the one hand and the Royal Opera House Trafalgar Square on the other—the only difference between the two being a matter of language.

These are policy matters and in TABS we must concern ourselves with planning matters and in particular with what has been done so far. Certainly in respect of the move Sadler's Wells continues in the old tradition for £130,000 is a minute sum to convert the rambling great Coliseum into an Opera House. Apart from the lack of money the obvious problem is how to adapt this great stage in such a way that existing productions conceived in terms of Rosebery Avenue still fit and do not look dwarfed. To scrap them would be out of the question. In point of fact Sadler's Wells are not unaccustomed to larger premises for not only have they mounted productions in the Coliseum before (for example in April 1959, *The Merry Widow*) but they have visited Europe several times and actually played on the enormous stages of the new West Berlin Opera and of the Frankfurt Opera among others. It is no secret that the Hamburg Opera House was the one they found themselves happiest in. So much so that a great deal of the brief for the now abandoned Wells project to build a new home on London's South Bank was derived therefrom.

Hamburg proscenium opening is 40 ft. and this is the sensible **width decided on for the Coliseum conversion. As everyone** knows the Coliseum has the widest proscenium opening and largest revolving stage of any theatre in Britain. The opening is in fact 55 ft., so the considerable reduction had to be tackled on what may be termed the false-proscenium method.

For the purpose of the adaptation John Wyckham, the theatre consultant, joined the staff of Sadler's Wells as Technical Administrator. Mr. Wyckham held this position at one time with the Royal Shakespeare Company and before that was at the Wells. He has of course contributed to TABS from time to time and is essentially a practical theatre man. A theatre consultant has to be. Others may provide the inspiration—pedestrian, stimulating or crackpot—but the theatre consultant has to ensure that the place will work when handed over to those who have to use it rather than play with it. The other person in this enterprise as far as TABS is concerned is the lighting consultant to the Wells who is of course Charles Bristow. He is the man who has come nearest to solving that formidable problem posed so often in opera of how to enable the audience to " see in the dark ". Some of these craft secrets were revealed in his article* on *Rigoletto*, a production which has very easily made the transfer to the Coliseum, the side walls of the set merely being opened out to meet the false proscenium at a greater angle.

It is one of the features of the Coliseum that although it probably has the largest stage in Britain—about the same depth as Drury Lane and Covent Garden but much greater width—there is negligible storage space off and the understage is cluttered up with the great triple revolve structure—more appropriate to a transport museum than a theatre. This monster has been ignored and in the present exercise lies slumbering below in a manner that it has become all too accustomed to in its 64 years of existence. Upon the stage discipline of the space has been imposed by the false proscenium, bounded by a lighting bridge running up and down stage either side and a large white cloth used up-stage as a flat cyclorama when necessary. This latter flys out, it is not a permanent obstruction; nor indeed are any of the other structures though they look and feel permanent enough. The many socket outlets along the side lighting bridges are in fact but plug-in extensions from the flys so that the whole structure can if necessary be removed. From stage front to tab line there is 4 ft. 6 in. of no-man's-land. From there to upstage of the false proscenium 8 ft. 9 in. This constitutes the setting line though the false pros. itself is sometimes clothed appropriately for a production. The temporary limit is 32 ft. upstage of this.

Out front there is a further 18 ft. represented by the orchestra pit before the front row of seats is reached. These stalls of 20 rows have always been unusually fine for a theatre of this period having steps instead of the usual pitiful rake. The fact that there is 32 ft. from front row to setting line eases the reconciliation of such a wide house to a 40 ft. opening. The new orchestra pit will take 110 musicians. Although it extends 3 ft. 6 in. further under the stage two rows of stalls had to be sacrificed to enlarge it—a stern reminder of the difference between an opera orchestra and that for the musicals which used to be housed here. The orchestra floor is 8 ft. below stage

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floor level. The width of the area between the two side lighting bridges is 60 ft. Beyond this the rest of the great stage is used for packing and storing scenery and four productions in repertoire with one in rehearsal are to hand in this way. The permission to do this was conditional on the installation of a special sprinkler system. Certainly no-one can say that the present arrangement leaves any waste space around about. Parkinson's dictum " all work expands to fill the space available " would seem to apply until it is remembered that only one production could be housed on the stage at a time at Rosebery Avenue.

In considering the lighting it is perhaps best to begin with the main bridge. This forms part of the false proscenium structure and is, to say the least, spacious, being 4 ft. deep. The structure of the false proscenium pushes the lighting well upstage. To get over this a line of Patt. 223 1 kW 8-inch Fresnels hangs immediately under the bridge and these are accessible via hinged sections of the floor. The lens risers are blackened (colouvred) to reduce scatter on the proscenium.

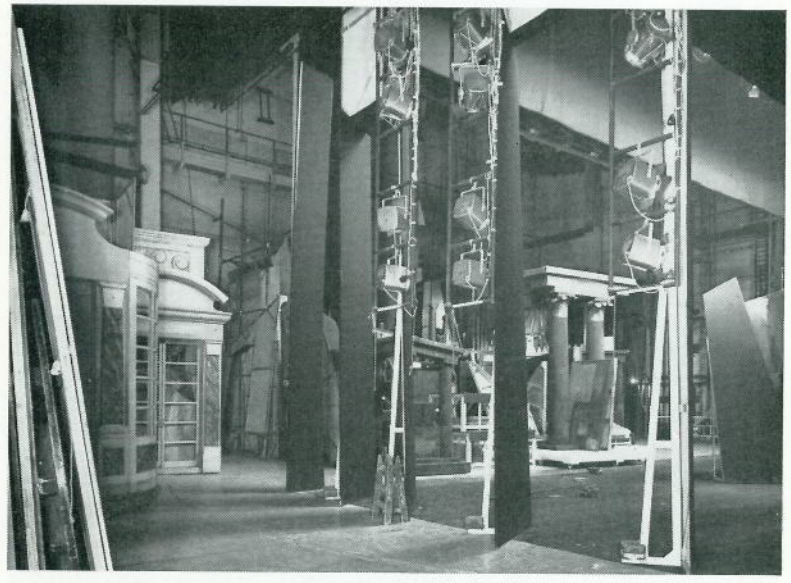
The main lighting hangs over the upstage edge of the bridge, some of it on scaffolding stubs so as to be well clear for vertical work for example. The stubs can be withdrawn when necessary. Mixed up among the expected lanterns were a few Patt. 137 baby floods which suggested some extremely subtle Bristow lighting levels on the regions 23 ft. below, but in fact housed the photo-flood lamps for that inevitable lightning in *Rigoletto*.

The sides of the false proscenium provide some large perch platforms integral with the structure. Really excellent are the booms on the upstage edges—lanterns, access ladder and guard rail all complete as a unit. First-class and compact enough to be used in many situations. They are also used out in the auditorium for example where the height of 50 ft. gives extra force to the parachute type harness that goes along with them. The man clips himself on to the nearest rung and both hands are free to service the lantern. Quite apart from convenience there is always just that chance of electric shock and I say this with the memory of a recent tragedy in another theatre where a shock threw a young man off the ladder to the stage floor below. It was the fall that was ultimately responsible for his death not the electricity which, as it often does, jerked him clear.

The side lighting bridges are at a height to allow the running of 24 ft. flats under; it is of course nice even if seldom found, to have lighting galleries quite separate from those used for flying. In this case they are essential, for one is tempted to say that the actual fly galleries are miles away. Certainly they would be useless as a lighting position for the 40-ft. opening.

If production cost and elaboration is to be kept down there must be some permanent masking set up and down the sides. In the grand manner a lot of scenery is made just to do this and in an exterior a cyclorama is driven all around from an immensely

Auditorium of the Coliseum showing F.O.H. lighting positions. The spots at gallery level are illustrated in close-up on page 17.



Backstage at the Coliseum with production area of the stage on the right. Beyond this and to the left can be seen stored scenery.

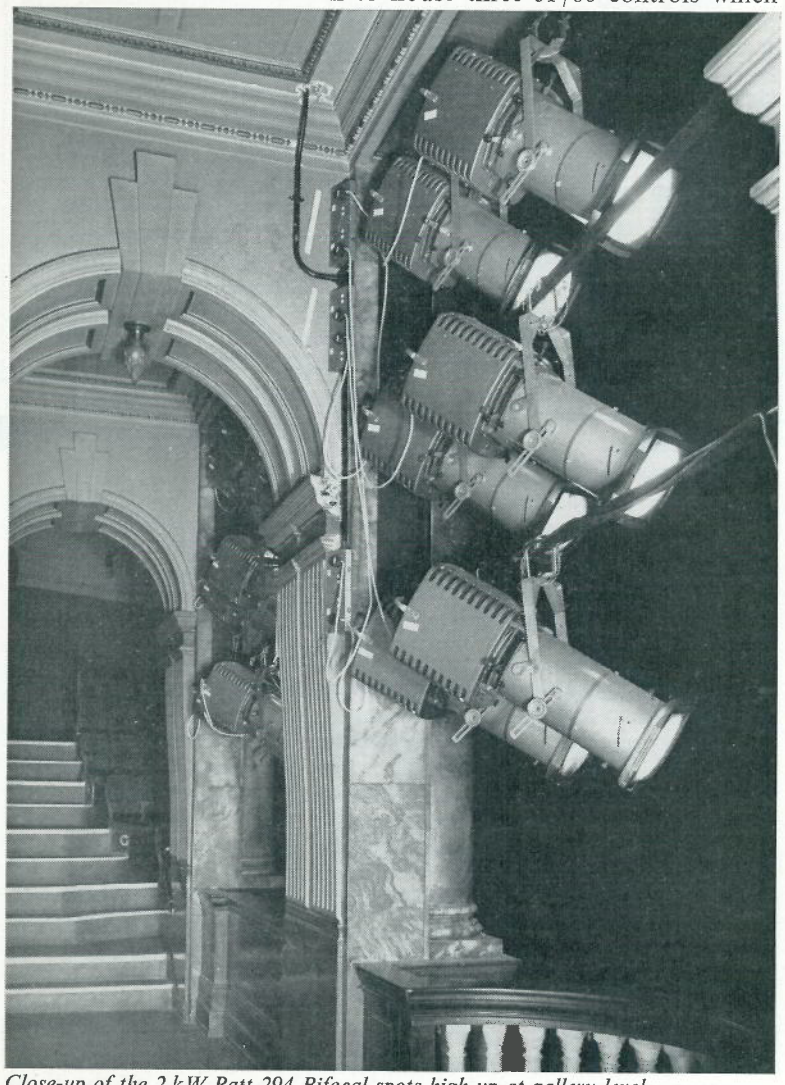
high circular track from prompt corner to O.P. There is already an ambition to stage the *Ring* cycle at the Coliseum one day with a cyclorama all round and in that case the side bridges would be removed and the side lighting return to the theatre fly galleries. I have sat in the front row of the East Berlin Opera well to one side and yet the cyclorama has masked from top to bottom and right around. The décor can then be a matter of production needs and masking only a slight preoccupation. Of course if a plain cyclorama is not suitable then projections can be used, or painted cycloramas substituted. It is not unknown for these vast expensive painted backcloths to be scrapped and a new one ordered to satisfy what appears to be a mere whim. I hate such financial indiscipline.

However these strictures are not appropriate in the Sadler's Wells context. A double layer of black drapes on and off stage of the side lighting bridges forms a light trap so to speak or rather reduces the chance of direct vision off-stage as crowds move on and off. The object of bridges of this kind is to place side lighting anywhere but of course it still has to be masked. One says " of course " and then remembers that this is by no means the rule nowadays. However, within the style of the majority of opera productions it is a rule which cannot be broken. In this case it is achieved by a series of black panels running on a track over the leading edge of the bridge. Each has a cord operated brake and the lighting man takes the brake off and positions the panels appropriately when setting his lanterns. These light sources are over 24 ft. up and to cover lighting needs lower down a series of 6-way vertical ladders running on separate tracks are available. These are parked at the downstage end each side when not in use.

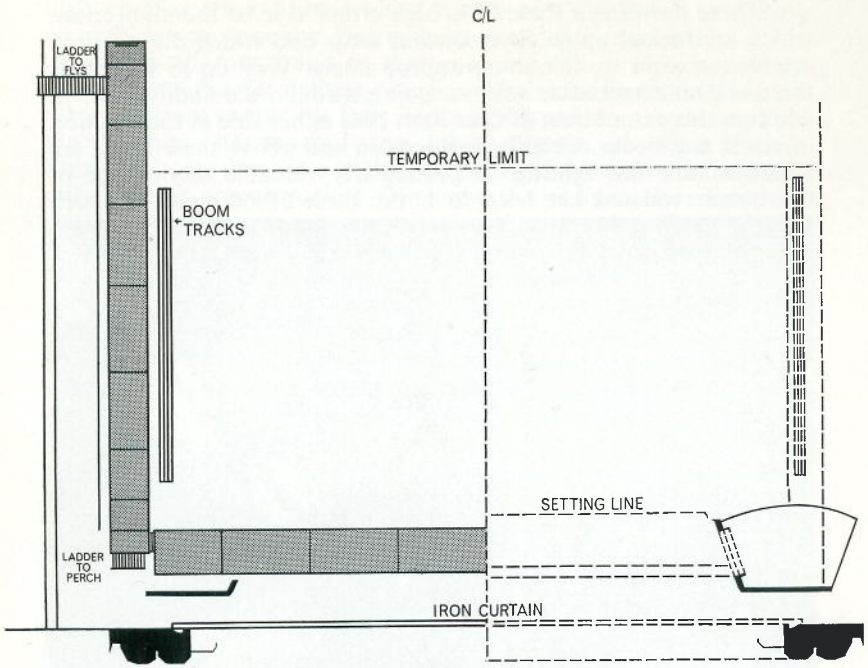
Over the stage hang three compartment battens which have not only to provide light but to become a suspension for other overhead lighting—the theatre's own hanging centres not being so convenient as the Wells in this respect. A flood batten looks after the sky cloth and one upstage of this, reversed, acts for transparencies.

The lighting from the front of house gives a good range of angles and is extremely important in view of the No. 1 position being forced upstage of the main bridge. Long-range 2 kW profile spots are essential in a lot of the positions in this large house. This in Strand language means Patt. 293s., but Charlie Bristow suggested that he would prefer the eight shutters of the Bifocal principle, and rather to his surprise this idea was welcomed, for I had been wanting to extend it to larger lanterns than the 1 kW Patt. 264. The result is the Patt. 294. The value of being able to mix hard and soft profiles in the one lantern now needs no advocacy from me, for in spite of the extra cost and the complication of double the number of shutters there are now lots of them about, but the Coliseum is the first to specify the larger version. Apart from mixed beams the advantage of being able to get a softer edge without frost or break-up glasses on the lantern front is that scatter in the auditorium is greatly reduced.

There are fifteen Patt. 294s high either side of the auditorium which are locked up to cover certain areas and which do not need attention except to colour up appropriately. Way up in the dome there are nine accessible without going through the auditorium. In addition there is a boom of four Patt. 264s either side at the junction of circle and boxes. Certain positions in and above these latter are also available for lighting. A particularly valuable service one of the boxes rendered has been to house three JP/60 controls which



Close-up of the 2 kW Patt 294 Bifocal spots high up at gallery level.



Composite plan showing false pros. and lighting bridges.

together give three presets on 180 channels. This is a temporary arrangement due to the suddenness of the final go-ahead in May to open in September and rehearse from August. Control will be taken over by a 240 channel IDM/DL with 250 instant dimmer memories. This is in the near centre box at the back of the stalls which once housed my Light Console. Although the room has been enlarged, once again we find our ingenuity taxed to fit the control into the space. *En-suite* is an observation-cum-effects projection room and then a BBC control room.

It is of course a feature of thyristor dimmer controls that not only are they very compact—half the old servo-dimmer bank room has been released for other purposes—but they are compatible with respect to several systems of control. Not only this but they can be worked simultaneously from more than one desk. One of the temporary JP/60 controls will be retained but altered to give 240 channels one preset instead of four to sixty. It is mounted on the O.P. perch backstage so that it is not necessary to use the main control out front for setting lights.

Large installations have been with us for some time now, after all the Light Console of 1952 here had 216 channels but the great unease came at plotting. Indeed, in the case of the C/AE at Covent Garden in 1964 one wondered in that awful period in which the operator was getting used to one's new masterpiece, if the thing

was not being a sight too clever. In the case of IDM/DL the instant magnetic memory should remove all terrors from plotting. There are literally 250 automatic presets which instantly commit to memory what levels all the channels are at and provide them again instantly on calling up the cue number.

Although I no longer think of controls in organ console terms so directly as I used to, inevitably the parallel is still there and I find myself comparing a large installation to an organ specification once again. There as here they come in all sizes and the giants at the Royal Albert Hall, Royal Festival Hall or St. Paul's may have to lend their resources to the same music as confronts a small job of some eight ranks of pipes only. London has three really great repertoire lighting installations—at Covent Garden, the Palladium and here at the Coliseum. The middle one may seem the odd man out, but basically it is capable of repertoire in the strictest sense. Each has 240 dimmer channels. Yet the day after clambering around with Wyckham and Bristow for the purposes of this article I found myself arguing at a meeting that the absolute minimum of channels for a stage lighting control was not *half a dozen* but *eight*. No wonder the art of stage lighting is still of such absorbing interest.

London Coliseum—Sadler's Wells Opera

Stage lighting circuits		
	FOH:	64
	(5 *changeover to Effect Box*)	
	Downstage Bridge:	30
Control	Flys left:	20
IDM/DL 250 instant presets and Tape Programmer	(*feeding left bridge*)	
	Flys right:	54
240 Dimmers:	(20 *feeding right bridge*)	
190–2 kW, 46–5 kW, 4–15 kW	Cyclorama:	4
	Cyclorama (Bottom)	4
600 kW, 240 volts.	Leftstage Tower:	20
	Rightstage Tower:	20
	Stage Dips:	24
	(6 *changeover to Revolve*)	

Change of colour

For many years now there have been three essential colours to know when having anything to do with electric wiring. Red for live, black for neutral, and green for earth. In the interests of international understanding, a difficult territory readers will agree, the European countries have settled on the following new colours—brown for live, light blue for neutral and green with yellow stripes for earth. We in Britain, believe it or not, are Europeans and in consequence these colours are likely to turn up anytime now and it is therefore just as well to know what they stand for. When in doubt don't touch anything!

MUSIC HALL—1968

THE BATLEY VARIETY CLUB

by Percy Corry

At the bidding of BBC 1 a varied selection of Leeds citizens occasionally put on their hired Victorian costumes to aid and abet the alliterative efforts of Leonard Sachs to revive the Good Old Days of the late lamented Music Hall. While it is true that most of the old music halls have disappeared it must not be assumed that variety has died: it has merely changed its address. Only eight miles down the road the Batley Variety Club and its nightly audience of anything from 1,400 to 1,750 are proving that the modern version of Music Hall is very much alive.

Batley is one of the West Riding's woollen towns with a population of 40,000 only but its near neighbour Dewsbury, two miles away, has another 53,000. Within a radius of ten miles are Bradford, Huddersfield, Leeds and Wakefield with a collective population of something like a million. And the Batley Club has a very large car park.

About 12 miles away in Barnsley it was only comparatively recently that the demolishers and developers dealt with what had formerly been the Surrey Music Hall, a typical Victorian annexe to

a pub.* In a hundred years or so Music Hall has travelled full circle as well as the 12 miles to Batley.

The Variety Club is an impressive commercial version of what has long co-existed with the variety theatre, that typically north country institution, the Working Men's Club, at which the horny-handed sons of toil, their wives and their families could (and still do) sit around in their collectively owned premises, drinking their pints and munching their crisps as they were entertained by the rising—and perhaps the falling—stars of variety. It was not by accident that the North has produced so many top-line comics. Most of them had to serve an arduous apprenticeship working the Clubs. There were, and still are, the recognised Club circuits with their own booking agents happy to provide performers for the usual percentage reward.

The decline of the British Empire . . . and the Hippodrome, of course . . . created a vacuum that had to be filled. The proletarian cabaret of the club was not in decline and it was realised that in this field there could also be a bourgeois market to be catered for, with particular emphasis on " catered for ". Commercially organised clubs at which one may sit at reserved tables to eat, drink and be merrily stimulated by theatrical and TV " personalities " have appeared all over the place. Even London has its *Talk of The Town* whose enlargement of the long-established West End cabaret is a glossy metropolitan version of club entertainment.

The Batley Club members clearly have democratic catholicity of taste. The wine list—headed: " DRINKS. Ask Your Waitress in Green "—begins with pints of draught mild and bitter, then runs through the whole gamut of gargles, including Moet et Chandon and a dozen other wines. The Menu—" Ask Your Waitress in Black "—offers a modest selection of sandwiches and varied accompaniments to chips. Alas, no fish! But there is Scampi and Chips.

The Club membership fee is only 5*s.* 6*d.* per annum. Members and their guests (a maximum of two) may normally reserve tables by paying from 9*s.* to 11*s.* 6*d.* each (non-members 2*s.* extra), the price obviously varying according to the drawing power of the star attraction: there are also 400 unreserved seats at 7*s.* 6*d.* A recent hand-out notified bookings of Jimmy Edwards, Eartha Kitt, Joe Brown, Cilla Black, Lulu, Frank Ifield, Frankie Vaughan, and others of the current galaxy. For the exceptional booking of Louis Armstrong that hit the headlines in the national press (the Club has a lively and adventurous managing director in James Corrigan), capacity audiences paid prices ranging from 45*s.* to 25*s.*, with unreserved seats at 20*s.*

The impression on entering the auditorium is a colourful one of quality and comfort. The tiered floor is divided into compartments, each accommodating about 30 people seated four or six to a table.

**The gas batten from the Surrey Music Hall was salvaged at the last minute and was illustrated in* TABS, *September 1968, Vol. 26, No. 3—"Stage Lighting in the 19th Century".*

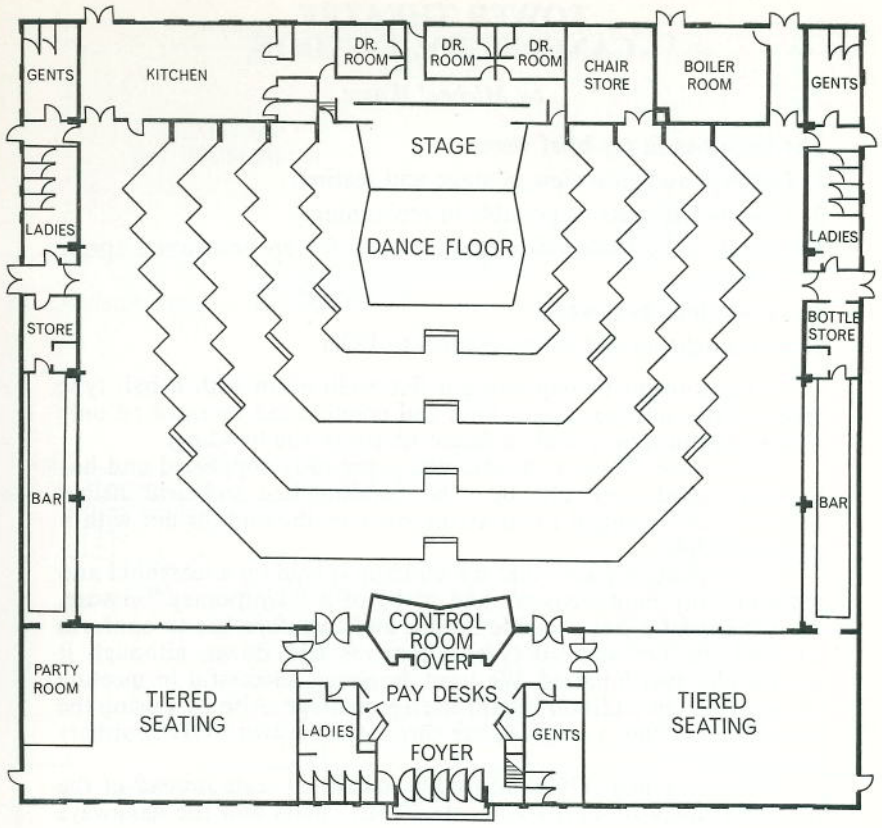
The unreserved seats, without tables, are in tiered rows at the rear. The main tiers are necessarily deep and the sight-lines to the 3-ft. high stage cannot therefore be uniformly good. This fact is obviously acceptable for entertainment that normally relies mainly on amplified sound but could be a disadvantage for performances of vital visual importance. The need to accommodate a large number of people seated at tables makes it impossible to apply the normal formula for theatrical sight-lines.

Batley Variety Club.

The Club has a thrust stage, 34 ft. wide at the rear, reducing to 18 ft. at the front and augmented by an apron when required. The acting area can be enclosed by electrically-operated main tabs fitted to a curved track. At the rear of the stage are curtains on which attractive changes of colour lighting are projected. The acting area is lit exclusively by Profile and Fresnel spots suspended from the ceiling which is about 15 ft. above the lowest level of the auditorium. There are probably very good economic reasons for keeping the height of any new building to an acceptable minimum, but it was felt that in this case an extra foot or two would have improved the overall proportions, assisted in the siting of the stage lighting equipment and also increased the effectiveness of the illuminated colour patterns in the ceiling panels.

The operator of the thyristor dimmer panel and the sound console has an excellent view of the stage and auditorium from a control room at the rear which also houses the follow spots.

This form of theatre has its own particular planning problems which may need the kind of detailed study that has in recent years



Plan of Batley Variety Club.
Architect: H. W. Curry A.R.I.B.A.

been given to the more orthodox forms and to the cinema. The Variety Club quite obviously meets a modern demand and is an expanding proof that theatre doesn't die or fade away; but it does change. Perhaps it doesn't change fundamentally. British theatregoers have always regarded theatregoing and eating as complementary. It is not likely nowadays that the theatre's atmosphere will be saturated with the smell of oranges. The rustle of chocolate and ice cream wrappings has taken over. Is it possible that in time the chocolates and ice cream will be superseded by the scampi and chips? Will some future Orlando's cry "Forbear your food a little while" take on a new note of urgency or despair when Stratford's stalls are supplied with fodder? The wine list could doubtless include Malmsey from the butt or Sack by the pottle to impart a little academic snob value. We shall see.

TOWER THEATRE
CANONBURY, LONDON

by Michael Warre

The priorities in my brief were:

1. Improve audience view of stage and seating.
2. Lose as few seats as possible in replanning.
3. Provide a movable front row to allow for an occasional apron stage.
4. Leave stage as it was.
5. Move lighting and sound control to FOH.

The problem of improving a flat auditorium with a hall type stage to give adequate sight lines and comfort can be resolved only with sufficient money and sufficient height of the building.

The Tower Theatre Appeal was generously supported and has to date raised over £10,000. The building had sufficient height to allow for a control room at the back of the auditorium with a passage below.

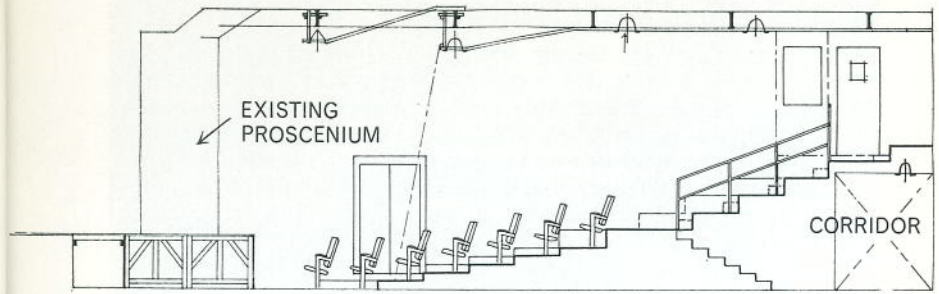
The difficulties were that the building is held on a leasehold and therefore any improvements had to be of a " temporary " nature. Also the theatre has a public licence and therefore has to conform with all the fire and safety requirements laid down, although it seats under two hundred. We were, however, successful in meeting the brief and in addition rebuilt the apron stage. Also by raising the auditorium ceiling a much better throw for the two FOH spot bars was achieved.

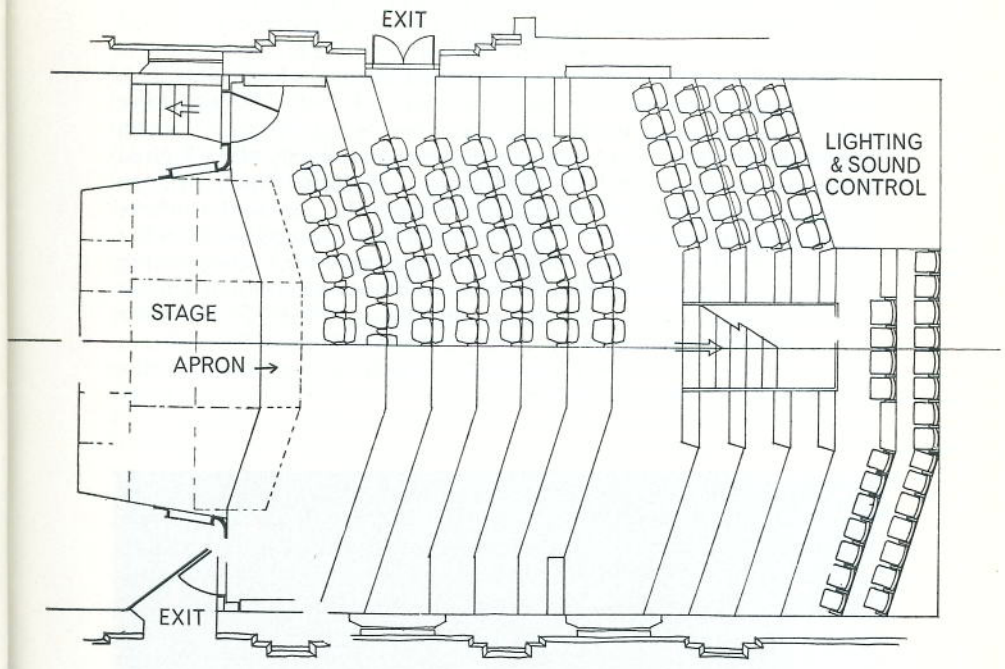
There are now 170 comfortable individual seats instead of the old solid block of steel frame, stackable, chairs and the gangways give much easier access to the seating.

The theatre is in continual use by its well-known amateur company with a large membership and high standard of production. I think it would have given more range of possible future presentations to have pulled down the proscenium and made an end stage—but this was beyond my terms of reference and budget. Meanwhile I look forward to seeing many productions in the future as good as their opening presentation of Farquhar's *Love and a Bottle*.

Tower Theatre, Canonbury, London

Stage lighting circuits		
Control	FOH:	12
JP/40 3 preset	No. 1 Bar:	12
40 2 kW dimmers	No. 2 Bar:	6
80 kW 240 volts	Perch R:	2
	Perch L:	2
	Dips:	3
	Cyclorama	3



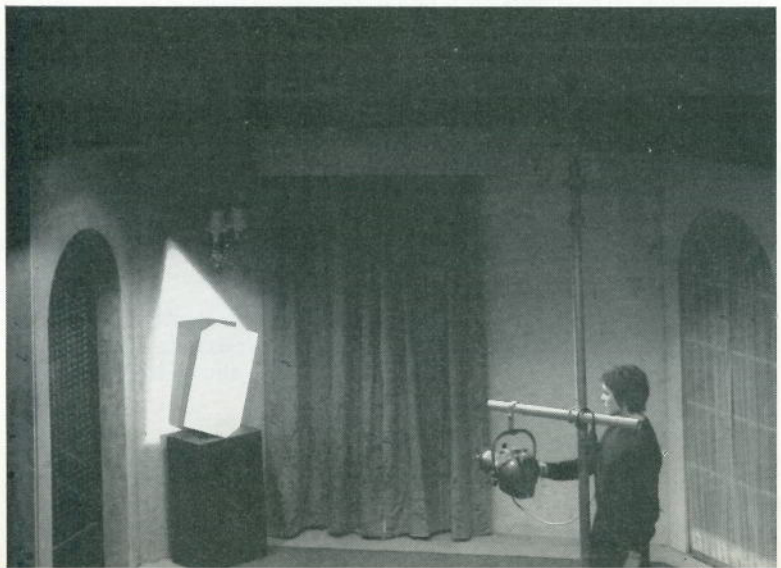


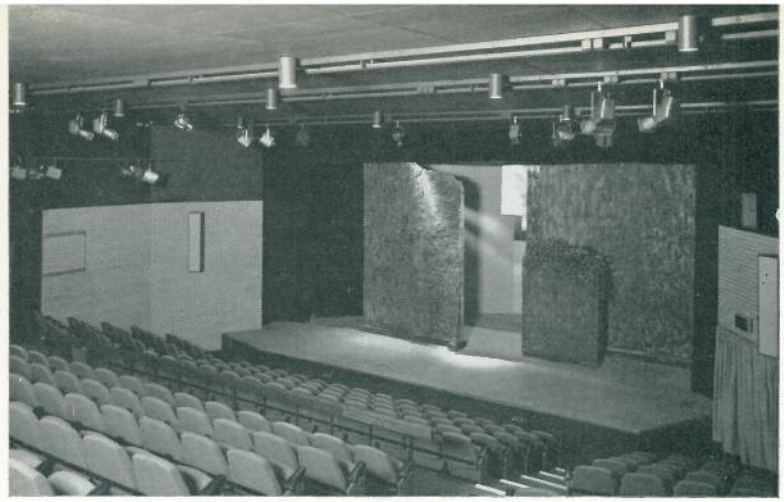
Tower Theatre, Canonbury.
Seating plan and section of ceiling.

TWENTY-THREE

For some time now the famous Patt. 23 has become priceless. This we regret for it is a value that is set on anything that is unobtainable. However, by the time these notes appear supplies should have begun to flow again, but you will be asked to pay more for the lanterns due to the extra facilities incorporated as standard.

The sudden drying up of supplies is due to failure of the complicated tools which provide the pressure die-castings from which the Patt. 23 is made. It is a pity that this should have caught the production department bending, but it did, and the first mass-produced stage spotlight in the world—now an institution—failed to appear for the first time since it was introduced in 1952. Your Editor has not asked anyone to count the things at this touchy time but he suspects that probably some 75,000 have been supplied since then. Of course the tools have worn out before, but this time we have taken the opportunity to declare that each and every Patt. 23 shall have built-in shutters at the masking gate. This new model is known as Patt 23 II since certain parts are not interchangeable with its predecessors. Once it is assumed that all Patt. 23s will have built-in shutters these can become very good shutters—much better than those in the old Patt. 23/S which could only allow limited cramped movement. In Patt 23 II each of the four shutters in the gate can be angled 45° either side of normal. This means that where as is so often the case, a Patt. 23 II is used with crossed beam to the opposite side of the stage no difficulty is experienced in compensating for the distortion should a profile edge need to be lined up to appear as vertical or horizontal. For the present the new Patt. 23 II can be converted to narrow angle by using the Ref. 355 funnel front, but it is intended to produce in the next six months an improved narrow angle version as a modest follow spot.





LYRIC THEATRE AT BELFAST

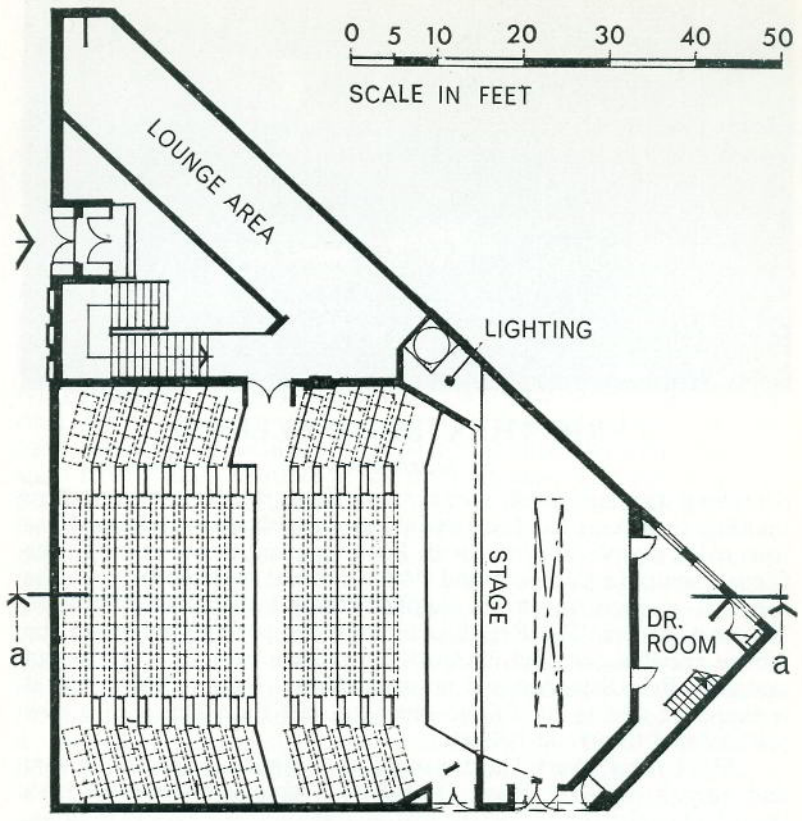
by Martin Carr

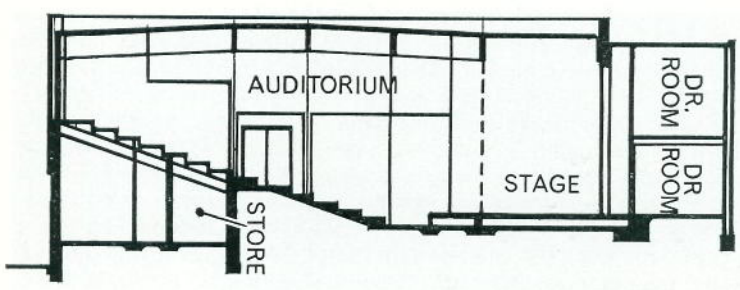
Searching through back numbers of TABS it seems that theatre building in Britain has been mainly an English affair. Scotland has featured a couple of times with Pitlochry, and, more recently, the Close Theatre in Glasgow, and Wales has had mention twice in the form of projects yet to be fulfilled and once in the completed Newport theatre. The Republic of Ireland has done well, with the Abbey, the Peacock, and the Cork Opera House, all of lavish design and cost. But Ulster has had no mention that I can recollect, and it is therefore nice to be able to record at last the opening of a new professional theatre in Belfast.

The Lyric Players Theatre owes its existence to the enthusiasm and energy of Mrs. Mary O'Malley, a lady renowned in Irish theatrical circles for her determination and desire to get things done. For the miracle of the Lyric Players Theatre is not only that it was built at all, but that it has been completed and is now in use only seven months after work commenced on the site.

For many years the Lyric Players have performed in a minute theatre built on to the back of Mrs. O'Malley's house, with a seating capacity of about 50; and yet I gather that performances of Shakespeare with sixty in the cast were not uncommon. But although wonders were frequently performed on that tiny stage, it became clear that a proper theatre base was essential if the company was to develop to full professional repertory status. So several years ago a site in Belfast was purchased, and planning began in earnest.

The chosen site has presented many problems, for it is awkward in shape, restricted in size, and the subsoil is all sand down to 50 ft. The planning authorities were unfamiliar with the problems of theatre design, having had no experience in the subject to guide them, and put forward curious and undesirable requirements on so small a site such as car parking for a dozen cars within the site boundary. Fortunately this was later withdrawn. The first plans were prepared





SECTION a a

Lyric Theatre, Belfast.

by an architect member of the theatre's Board of Trustees and the ABTT consulted. Although the auditorium of this scheme was of particular interest, being asymmetrical in design and offering in potential a marvellous intimacy for 350 seats, it was later withdrawn. The architect had been over-enthusiastic in attempting to cram many desirable theatrical quarts into a very small pint-sized site.

A period of gloom followed, and my own interest in the project was re-aroused by a request in April to undertake the design of stage lighting and sound systems for a new scheme. Upon inquiring of the programme for construction I was more than a little staggered to be told that building had commenced, and completion was scheduled for October 1st, of this year! Would I please hurry with my plans as delay on the stage installations could hold up the whole building programme.

The building is very simple, with an auditorium of 305 seats, pleasantly raked, which has a nice sense of contact with the actors. The stage is basically open end in form (and what else could it be on this site), and the playing area is limited by the site boundaries. The vestige of a proscenium is there at the sides, but Mrs. O'Malley does not hold with such things, and clearly the arrangement of the stage will provide a challenge and, one hopes, a stimulus for imaginative producers and designers. Masking will present problems if any realistic scenery is attempted, but the stage is by no means as difficult as some designers would pretend. A " house style " will develop in due course, just as it develops in other repertory theatres.

The technical facilities are limited by budget restrictions, but the bones of a useable installation are there. Lighting control is by a Strand JP 40 desk and JTM dimmers, with a small patch panel, giving 60 circuits in all. In the auditorium the roof structure provides three excellent lighting angles, but over the stage the shallowness of the acting area may present some problems.

The sound system is by Stagesound Ltd. and provides twin amplifier channels, twin tape machines and a gram turntable; there is also a stage manager's desk with intercom and cue light communication.

The control position (stage left) is not quite what one would have asked for, but the planning authority refused permission to cantilever a box over the pavement outside the rear of the auditorium, and the management did not want to lose any seats. At least the operators are in contact with the stage and, by peering round the house tabs, can see both apron and upstage areas—albeit not at one and the same time. The JP desk can be moved into the stalls for rehearsals, a separate plug point for the control lines being provided.

The public are rather better served than the actors and technicians, for they have a pleasant bar overlooking the river, and adequate cloakroom facilities. Backstage space is very much at a premium, but the architect and the management are both aware of these

problems and live in hope that further adjacent land may one day become available.

With this theatre it has been very much a case of " costly thy habit as thy purse can buy . . . " The purse in this case running to about £70,000. Many of the fixtures and fittings have been provided at cost or as gifts by local firms and the total does not seem unreasonable. Earlier I wrote that the project has developed out of the enthusiasm of Mrs. O'Malley; so it has, but one should not forget the many other people and firms involved, notably Col. A. G. Johnson, the Administrator, who has admirably controlled building costs and tempered enthusiasm with practical common sense, whilst at the same time extracting the necessary money and gifts out of a not always willing local population. Praise is also due to Sir Alfred McAlpine and Son (Northern Ireland), who not only provided the building at cost, but included the services of their own architect, D. M. Johnson. In handing out praise, one must not forget the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, who donated a handsome sum out of their by no means lavish budget. Let us therefore congratulate the Lyric Players on their new home, and wish them every success for their future development.

Belfast Lyric Theatre

Stage lighting circuits	FOH: 16 fixed 11 patch
Control JP/40 3 preset 40 2kW dimmers 80 kW 240 volts	Flys: 12 fixed 10 patch Dips: 11 patch
Cord and Jack Patch. 12 dimmers to 32 circuits	(Five stage circuits can extend to FOH)

★ ★ ★ ★

CORRESPONDENCE

Sir,—There are two points I would like to raise concerning the article by Mr. Martin Carr on the University College Theatre in the June issue of TABS.

I think that Mr. Carr must have been furnished with some out-of-date information concerning the stage lighting circuits. There are in fact 35 changeover switches and these, together with duplication of some of the outlets will allow a maximum of 51 circuits to be used in the F.O.H.

The other point Mr. Carr raised concerning the lack of F.O.H. side lighting positions is, I think, more than justified.

I was called in to advise on this lighting layout rather late in the building of the theatre, but I was able to persuade the architects to include some lantern fixings at intervals around the front of the circle where I had arranged for sockets to be installed.

The position at present is that the sockets are there, but the lantern fixings are not yet in place. I trust that the Contractors will be installing these as soon as possible.

Yours

ROBERT STANBURY

BOOK REVIEWS

" Baroque Theatre "—Margarete Baur-Heinhold, translated by Mary Whittall, photographs by Helga Schmidt-Glassner. Thames and Hudson. £8 8s. 292 pp., 16 colour plates, 191 black and white plates, 146 text illustrations.

The author's delimitation of baroque theatre is 1580 (Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza) to 1792 (Teatro La Fenice, Venice) which is roughly the span the art historian chooses for high baroque and rococo. But with one curious omission, Margarete Baur-Heinhold treats with the whole span of theatre in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—plays, actors, scenery and architecture—not just the magnificent court spectacles and gilded cherubs which immediately come to mind.

The value of this book lies chiefly in its superb illustrations, beautifully presented, and its documented research. If you cannot afford the quite reasonable price, demand that your local library supplies it for you (libraries, remember, are better subsidised than theatres).

The period 1650 to 1800 was a time of great international exchange of ideas. From the separate traditions of Shakespeare, Molière, Calderon and early Italian Opera, there emerged a universal tradition patronised by both enlightened absolute monarchs and an intelligent bourgeoisie. The scenic artist family of Galli Bibiena, for example, worked from Barcelona to Potsdam, from Sienna to Vienna and to London. Companies of English and French actors toured all Europe and left in their wake the inspiration for national theatre traditions where none had existed before: in Holland, Scandinavia, Germany and Russia. By the nineteenth century each tradition became isolated and only recently in this century has this flexibility and cross-fertilisation reappeared. This is the parallel between 1768 and 1968.

This book tells in detail of the theatrical tradition that created those theatres that survive today: Sabbionetta, Vicenza, Cesky Krumlov, Versailles, Gripsolm, Drottningholm, Bayreuth and Munich. Only the last two are made up of tier upon tier of boxes, all the others display an actor audience relationship much closer to Denys Lasdun and John Bury than to the essentially nineteenth-century proscenium and a flat-on shelf arrangement, rightly disposed of today as picture frame.

But this deduction you, the reader, must make yourself, for the essential character of **these theatres is not emphasised by the author who does not seem** to have noticed, for example, the vital difference between the original Residenz Theatre (section on p. 183) and the lavishly restored present version (copiously illustrated) which is that, Bristol fashion, the stage has lost the front 12 ft., the main acting area where the actor was encircled 200° by audience.

To whet the appetite: descriptions of baroque lighting—a darkened auditorium **as early as 1765 in Vienna and technical information on the dimmers of** 1638; the care taken by architects on sight lines and masking in seventeenth-century Italy showing that the perfectly designed semicircular auditorium can give *every* seat good visibility; the information that, except for the grandest occasions, scenery was often simple and stylised with all the accent on the costumed figure on a bare stage; the amusement that the present-day architect has nothing really new to offer for, besides many " National Barbicans ", you will find the circular drum form pierced by an opening (Paris Odeon 1779 not Nottingham 1964) and even the latest " experimental " Sir Basil Spence–Sean Kenny project for Sussex University in a design by Josef Furttenbach, 1650 (a central area with three of four stages at the perimeter). Surely theatre design since Shakespeare and Monteverdi has been a constant tradition interrupted only by the nineteenth-century picture frame and the best of the plans for theatres of the future are not surprisingly reworkings of the well tried and accepted eighteenth-century playhouses.

The omission? The Georgian playhouse, far from baroque in decoration, but clearly demonstrating in its design the two parallel traditions of intimate 200° encirclement for the spoken word and the opportunity for heroic spectacle on

the deep back stage. The illustration of ' a London eighteenth-century theatre ' by Niccolo Servandoni from a collection published in Leipzig is grossly misleading and shows a theatre entirely filled by what must be masked Viennese. This apart, a book for every present-day theatre architect and technician.

IAIN MACKINTOSH

" Play Safe "—A guide to standards in halls used for occasional stage presentations. Greater London Council. 3s.

The biggest problem facing a company presenting a show in a hall without full stage facilities is often that of what the safety officer will or will not allow. Most companies are aware of the problems of fireproofing scenery and properties but what of the many other problems such as how much scenery can be used on the stage, where may smoking be permitted, and so on?

The G.L.C. has now published a booklet which has been devised as a guide to the precautions which they consider necessary at public performances. Unlike most " official " publications, this one is written in English which all can understand and which sets out a brief guide to the regulations as they affect companies performing in " occasional " halls. The booklet starts with notes on the choice of premises and looks at the advantages and disadvantages of various types of hall for public performances. It continues with the requirements for seating and gangways, with diagrams and notes on suitable seating layouts and methods of fastening chairs together as required by the authorities.

The next section deals with the stage and, apart from a puzzling reference to " Avenue Theatre ", has some sound advice on scenery, tabs and suspension equipment and also notes on the making of a temporary orchestra pit. Scenery and properties are dealt with and a short look is taken at projected scenery. A chapter on effects lists the usual common sense precautions—which are surprisingly often ignored. Dressing rooms and facilities are considered along with comments on the problem of obtaining satisfactory discipline with children in a cast—in my experience, it is quite often not only children who are a problem.

The chapter on lighting deals not only with stage lighting but also with safety lighting and temporary installations. A warning is included about the dangers of both home-made apparatus and temporary installations when not in the charge of a competant electrician—which could well be heeded even by some professional companies. A useful section deals with management of the hall. Many amateur shows have been spoilt for me by bad house management and the booklet details the requirements for both this aspect of management and also for the " housekeeping " backstage in so far as safety precautions are concerned. Appendices describe how to apply for an occasional licence in the London area, the conditions usually imposed and names and addresses of fire prevention officers in the London area are also listed. A set of notes at the very end of the booklet gives two recipes for fireproofing solutions and a list of materials for scenery which are accepted by the G.L.C. in various forms of production.

All in all this is a very good booklet and well worth the sum asked. As is pointed out, it does not claim to be an exhaustive set of rules but only a guide to those rules. As such it is a very useful aid both to amateurs when preparing for a performance in a multi-purpose hall and also—although perhaps to a lesser extent—to those professional companies using open stages. Clearly as a G.L.C. publication, this booklet is an accurate guide only in the London area. However, since many authorities' rules are based on those of the G.L.C.—although frequently less exacting—it will be a useful guide when dealing with these other authorities and should find a place in any amateur stage director's bookshelf—and that of not a few professionals as well.

PHILIP EDWARDS

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