

TABS

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Cover picture: Richard II at the Assembly Hall Edinburgh. This Prospect Theatre production and its ambitious tour with Edward II will be featured in our next issue.

“... and a right good captain too”

Surprise has often been expressed that Jack Sheridan the chairman and managing director of the best known stage lighting firm in the world of the theatre should himself be so little known in that world. Although no City tycoon either, his annual report always attracted attention in the press. Year by year the specialist Strand Electric Holdings group has come up with growth in turnover and profits, apparently avoiding each of the many financial crises that have assailed fertile inventive post-war Britain due to the lack of fertile invention in the post-war World monetary machinery itself.

Jack Sheridan took over as managing director after the sudden death of his father, Phillip Sheridan, the then managing director, in December 1936, just after the firm became a public company. In 1946 he became Chairman as well. The Strand Electric, as readers of the firm's history will know, was founded in 1914 and run by two theatre electricians Arthur Earnshaw and Phillip Sheridan, aided by Moss Mansell, a manufacturer of resistances and other electrical gear

mainly for the cinema. While some make it a rule not to talk shop at home this was certainly not the case in the Phillip Sheridan household. Jack Sheridan although saturated in Strand Electric as a boy never caught the theatre disease. Rather the greater influence was the import-export firm in which he spent his first seven years at work. Dealing in figures rather than directly with products and customers became his work from choice.

Looking back there can be no doubt that this was just the kind of man Strand Electric needed at the top—deliberately we do not use “at the helm”. In a sense the good ship Strand Electric has never had a helm but rather a crew of powerful and self-willed oarsmen each shoving his own in and giving a good pull or push as his own interpretation of the circumstances might dictate.

The captain stayed in his cabin charting the resultant course from figures obtained somewhat in arrear of the events. When the din of the contesting crew became too great he Jack Sheridan would summon them to the stateroom and deliver judgment or chastisement. The word “stateroom” is suggested by the nautical metaphor and not by the facts. Strand's chairman and managing director never found it necessary to build an impressive office in which to grant an audience. That important symbol—the carpet—was one chucked out by Mrs. Sheridan when she got tired of it some years ago at home. The dominant feature of this—the board room—was a large utilitarian metal office cabinet finished in that standard dark office green livery. In this tin tomb was kept the ark of the covenant—the figures—filed there by the chairman himself. The windows of his office bore no curtains—linen roller blinds kept out the sun when necessary, a task they performed more and more effectively as they aged with the passing of time.

Outside, no great car purred its way to the office bearing its burden of state—a short walk to the station to enjoy the pleasures of rush-hour travel by Southern Electric, that was the daily routine. The car was a family model and we seldom saw it. There was no side to Jack Sheridan, the mantle of power did not have to be displayed. American visitors, even the tycoons, were awe-struck by him and attached deep significance to the fact that he received them in his suspenders—braces to us. His was no duty appearance at the firm's various parties and outings. He really did enjoy them and he had a very happy knack of making them “go”, of getting on terms with everyone.

It is impossible to think of anyone more suited to run the firm during the time in question. The rest of us were more than sufficiently theatre-struck to serve the theatre-struck who constituted our customers. People like Mark Stables, Len Applebee, Percy Corry and Jack Madre, to quote but four names from the many, did not need to be reminded that the curtain must go up. Enthusiasm for and the call of the work itself was why we, who became the personalities of the Strand, did what we did and became what we became. As we grew up Strand Electric grew up and Jack Sheridan

ensured that we did not outgrow our financial strength and made us play fair with the fourteen hundred or so shareholders we had as a public company.

Was everything right always? Of course not; the crew consisted of human beings. Voices it must be confessed were sometimes raised in vexation. Strand Service was only as good as the man answering the phone, or at the end of the pen, or dozing in the stalls waiting for the rehearsal to get a move on or propping up the bar in the Lamb and Flag.

Could it all have gone on much longer? It is certain that great changes would have had to come. The time was past when the theatre's own technical devices, which grew up with the introduction of electricity to the theatre and whose growth Strand had so greatly fostered, could continue to serve our needs. We and the theatre are entering the electronic and computer age and about to leave the dimmer and switchboard one behind. The resources of a really large organisation are needed to service these times and the great overseas markets. This the Rank Organisation should be well fitted to provide.

Strand Electric remained a small, almost a family company for the right time—maybe for just a little longer than it should have done. That is over now and we can relax and say to Jack Sheridan as he retires, you suited us fine and we all have a lot to thank you for. You will not mind, we hope, if we add that you too have something to thank us all for.

Gate 69

The loudspeaker announcing the departure of Flight X101 from gate 69 conjures memories for all of us nowadays. The check-in with the cryptic under-the-counter glance for reassurance on the part of the receptionist. What do they have there? If it's a TV monitor like those which display flight information in the corridors of jet power, where the line-hold seems permanently struggling to do its job, then no wonder the journey sometimes also decides to drift. However, safely packaged with every label completed in felt tip or black crayon we are allowed to await despatch.

What has this to do with TABS? Everything, because what has just been described is all we are allowed to glimpse of the vast airways computer booking equipment, and now the theatre is casting enquiring eyes in that direction. An investigation is going on to see what the computer can do for the box office. Will this, the last bastion of what we all remember as theatre, fall in much the same way that the familiar house tabs may at any time rise to fall no more.

One must applaud the forward thinking which will remove the backward queues and the agony of booking at the head of a restive crowd. The decision whether the LH end of row S in the so-called stalls (pit really) on the third Friday-cum-Lammas day at 26s. is a better buy than the RH of row H in the so-called upper circle

(gallery surely) at 15s. 6d. on the second Tuesday after the third Sunday in Advent.

What will booking be like? Will one be able to walk into any travel agency and book a Viscount or a Viceroy seat for the old theatre in the new way. What form will the ticket take? Should it not have the whole history of this particular journey into the theatre spread out like an airline ticket with multiple carbon copies getting more and more indistinct beneath each; later to be torn off as one claims one's programme, the first act, the drink at the bar, the second act and so on. How lovely to see STATUS O.K. on a ticket for Covent Garden.

Then again the ticket should show excess baggage to be stowed in the cloakroom. By international agreement refreshments would be pegged and regulated. Between 2 p.m. and 6 p.m. tea would be served, no chance of Wyndham Theatres outbidding Moss Empires by putting in one tea bag more per gallon. What about unlimited "free" drinks for the first class stalls—that should cause the management to consider shorter opera intervals and install the necessary stage machinery to do the scene changes.

Of course we should have to check-in half an hour before curtain rise, no harm in that, at least it would avoid latecomers.

A Theatre Terminal in say Piccadilly Circus would ease the path of the foreign visitor. There he would be loaded onto a bus bearing the name of the production on its destination blind. Alas, this could still mean a walk across the wet and windy tarmac to get to the Queen Elizabeth Hall.

In looking to the future we must spare a thought for the past, for thespian archaeology. The preservation in the theatre museum of a genuine box office along with all those relics already earmarked there for posterity. A genuine theatre programme with the cast list, a note about Jeyes fluid and lighting by Strand Electric buried among the advertisements. A matinee tea and a theatre "large scotch" with a magnifying glass for inspection accompanied by the strangled music of *that record* of "the Queen" or "the King", the gender is immaterial Mr. Worthing, when they have at last finished with it of course.

What's cooked?

Perceptive readers of TABS (aren't they all!) will have noticed something odd about our Gravesend Civic Centre photograph on page 23 in our last issue. Not only did they stage the Sadlers Wells production of the opera *Samson* but they also appeared to prefer to put it on back to front. The truth is that it was a tin of Cow rubber solution—the large or double size which brought these two together. We have to confess to occasional faking for catalogue purposes but try our best to keep the pages of TABS as pure as motor driven snow.

The quest for a lighting control room which can be photographed to show the room itself, the control, the theatre and a set on the stage would tax a Parsifal. Of course in a German opera

house it is easy because many control rooms are as large as a whole auditorium over here—at any rate as large as what passes as a studio theatre. Plenty of room to get the full-plate camera at the right angle and to position the beer crates for the photographer to stand on to see what is on the ground-glass screen so that no verticals gang a-gley.

In Blake's Jerusalem, nowadays more prosaically known as U.K., control rooms are so small as to defeat even the 35 mm. camera merchants, for they recognise that in this particular case a view taken lying full length on the floor is out. Nor does a shot in which the operator occludes a large part of the lighting control with a bosom and or whiskers serve any technical purpose.

This is not to say that there are no good F.O.H. control rooms here—there are many, but it is a question of size and angle. Even Canada's rolling prairies and vast National Arts Centre give us control rooms impossible to photograph for just the same reason.

One solution adopted in the case of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, was to photograph the control in the factory and to draw in the surround honestly in pen and ink. Another method is to join two photographs or more together and garnish with air-brush. A view we had taken in the control room at the May Fair Theatre years ago has proved very versatile stock for this latter technique. The auditorium was so dark as to be unrecognisable while the set on the stage consisted of black drapes with two aspidistra tripods or were they potted palms? Every variant our computer suggested has been used—two potted whatsits of course; the left whatsit only and then the right only. Thereafter reverse the photograph and obtain three more. We have not tried turning the thing upside down, but we might, for the whatevertheyares at that distance could look like chandeliers. Return right way up again and blank out one leg from each tripod and the result might pass as a scene from *Hair*.

We wonder if anyone has noticed what we do with clouds from time to time. The sky that appeared o'er the Haymarket in June 1966 was later to turn up over the Abbey Theatre Dublin in September 1966, over the Queen Elizabeth Hall in March 1967 and over the Isle of Mull much later in September 1968. Our front cover is an awkward shape and photographs taken neat seldom fit neatly. Slicing or additions give the requisite shape and define the border at the top. Black concealing more than it reveals is as useful a principle for our front cover as it always was for lighting on a stage itself.

H. M. Cotterill

It was with regret that we learned of the death of Hugh Cotterill this September. He was for many years a director of Strand Electric and was the originator in 1937 of TABS. He was responsible for the forty issues up to his handing over of the editorial chair in September 1957.



TUPTON HALL DERBY

There seems no doubt that there lurks here and there in this country an unremarked remarkable example of theatre. This may be a particular production or a building or a combination of the two. Even with the TABS limitation to technical aspects only we have always found it difficult to keep track. Indeed it might be thought that the only safe passport to our pages is a brand new lighting installation or in these expansionist Rank Strand days—a reseating, a carpeting, or even a blackout curtaining! This your editor hastens to tell you is not so, and the whole criterion is technical interest (in the theatre not the engineering sense) with good photographs or the possibility of having some taken.*

The present example of a school theatre was only drawn to our notice when a request to sponsor the taking of photographs came over the phone, yet is just the kind of thing that gladdens your editor's heart; especially as he now finds we did the seating as well as the lighting. Among all the adaptable drama space types of thing

* This seems as good an opportunity as any to say that we welcome articles for TABS and when accepted actually pay for them!

or the play-unsafe multi-purpose halls someone has nailed his colours to the grid that isn't there and decided resolutely to have a theatre-in-the-round. Readers may know that this is not my favourite form of theatre, but how splendid to see someone have the courage of his conviction and how pleased that great enthusiast and pioneer of this form—the late Stephen Joseph—would have been.

Sticking to one form of theatre brings firstly that great stimulant to the creative side of theatre—the discipline of a framework within which to work. Secondly it provides an essential practicality to the operation—work in the sense of labour of lugging this from there to here is kept to a minimum.

To complete our story we have asked Peter Cox the drama adviser for Derby to provide some detail of this enterprise. Mr. Cox writes—

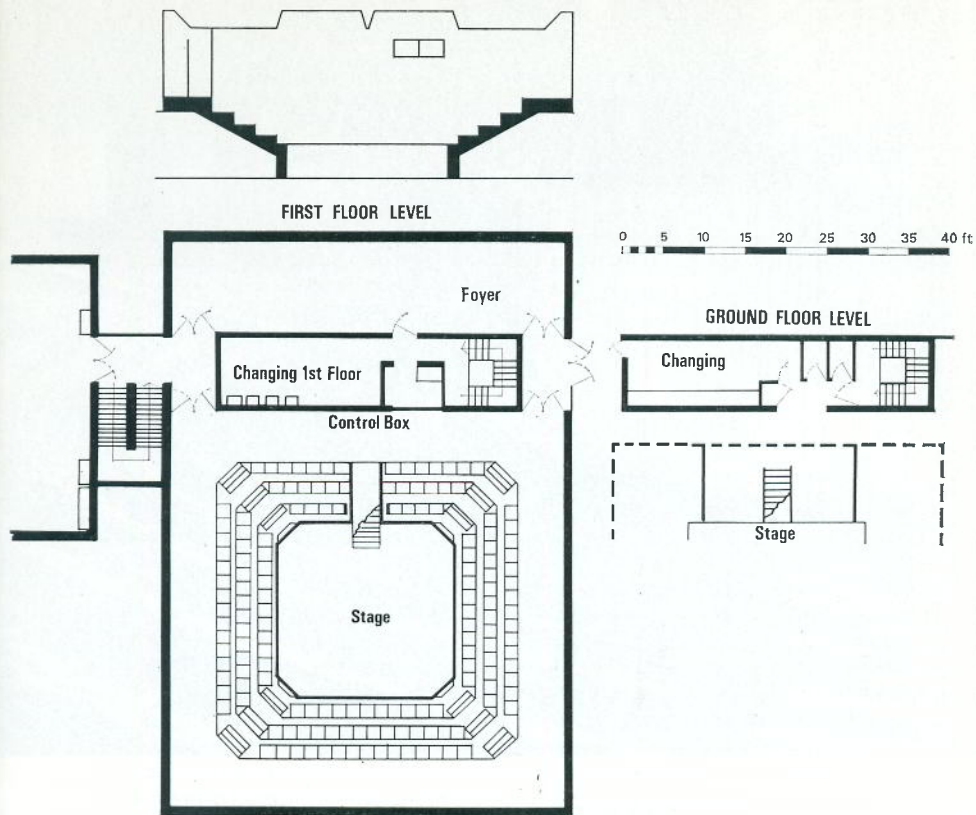
“I had only just arrived in Derbyshire when ‘in the corridors of Power’ I was informed that Tupton Hall Comprehensive School was to have a theatre; a theatre which had been planned and was only awaiting construction. Naturally the prospect was enthralling though I must admit to some disappointment when it was revealed to be solely in the round. (I believe that ideally school drama facilities should admit a high degree of flexibility.)

“There followed a series of discussions to modify the original plan based mainly from my point of view on making it an effective teaching space, and the finished product is a most happy compromise of the arguments presented. It was really at this point that one realised that the whole concept was not merely a policy decision to give this new comprehensive school a theatre, but that it had all arisen through the need for such a space due to the excellent work of the English Department under Mr. Bacon who had been experimenting with classroom drama and a Theatre Club for many years. The latest development is the appointment of a Drama Specialist on a Scale II allowance.* This is particularly exciting because every member of the existing English department already teaches drama and they now have the expertise of Mr. Walker who is in sole charge of all dramatic work in the school.

“Of course as soon as the work was completed I had to satisfy my own curiosity as to its teaching potential and during the subsequent series of demonstration lessons proved beyond all doubt that in spite of the obvious theatricalities, the space and lights available were capable of producing a wholly absorbing atmosphere. The finely trimmed acoustic was another advantage as it enabled one to be heard even in a whisper from any point in the auditorium and once one had become accustomed to both towering over and being towered over as one changed levels it was a most satisfying experience.

“There are normally 153 seats with the ability to make these up to 230 and this is a great step forward in the limiting of the size of audience before which children should perform. The perimeter walls

* We understand from those who know that in this context Scale II is a good thing



Tupton Hall Comprehensive School
 Architects: George Grey & Partners (Derby & Glasgow) in
 collaboration with the County Architect D. S. Davies, FRIBA

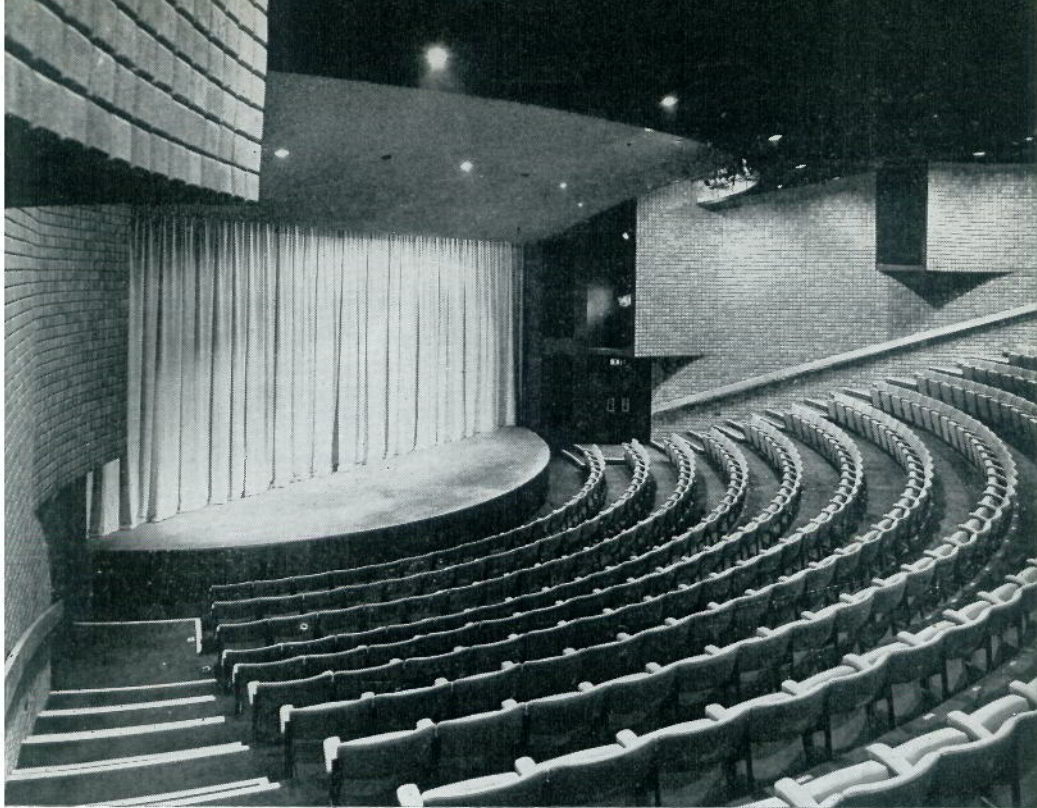
are painted a deep purple with a black grid whilst the ceiling boards are white—a risk which paid off.

“I should like to pay tribute to all concerned with the planning of this theatre. Mr. Rice, the Headmaster, Mr. Bacon, the Head of English; Mr. Shaw, the Architect; Mr. Hardstaff, Schools Planning Dept.; and Mrs. Eileen Redfern, a local teacher. They have provided us with excellent facilities not only for schools work but for local amateurs and visiting Professional companies.”

Tupton Hall Comprehensive School

Stage Lighting Circuits

Control	30 Outlets
3 Junior 8 with Master 3	12 Patt. 23
12 × 500/1000 W resistances	12 Patt. 123
24 circuits	



A TALE OF TWO THEATRES

by Frederick Bentham

There is no more important task given to an architect today than to design a theatre. The airport, the office complex, the university, the factory, the school—all these tasks pale into insignificance by comparison. If Le Corbusier ever said—and he probably did, “the house is a machine for living in,” then this condemnation, and he did not mean it as such, extends to virtually all building of today. The airport is a machine of transition—it is merely a place where we are sorted and processed to be passed on for transit by another machine elsewhere. The modern office block is as devoid of personality and as indistinguishable as one honeycomb from another. Today’s university is but an education factory and often one is hard put to tell one university from another. Gone is the early sampling of gracious living; the refectory is but a foretaste for the student of the company canteen.

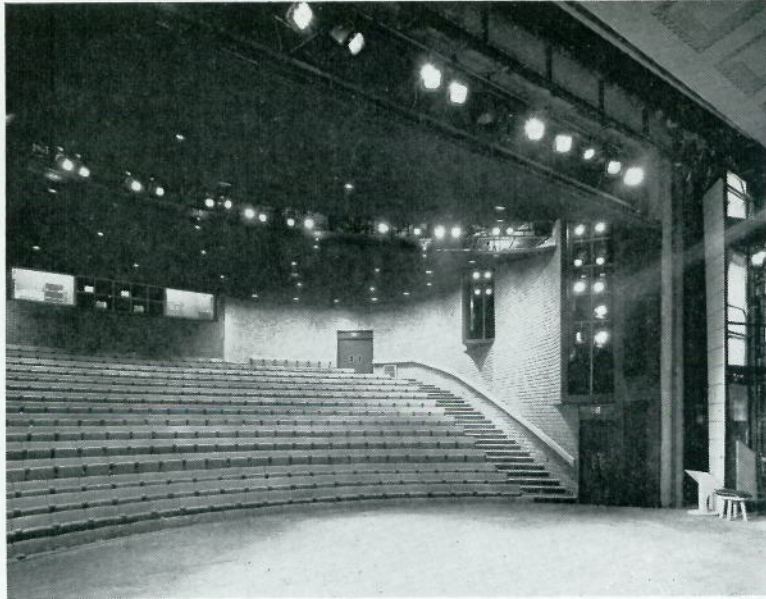
The theatre alone remains an outpost, an opportunity for architectural personality and this is the age of theatre building. Live theatre building of course. There is cinema theatre building but the cinema has either been a fibrous plaster shell or nowadays a

tent of wall drapes for showing films in. Because the show is imported in a can it does not grow in any way out of its setting—the building itself. Not so in the case of a live theatre, the building makes a contribution to every performance given there. There is no such thing as a neutral theatre building. Every theatre makes either a positive or negative contribution to each show. Being live, the audience and actors get together to assist each other in performance on each occasion. This they do whether we are dealing with an “advanced” performance with much trumpeted audience participation or a “who’s-for-tennis” play. There is no such thing as theatre without audience participation. If the audience is not ready for the show it will kill it just as surely as when the show is not ready for the audience.

From this it follows that a theatre building has to get both players and audience in the mood to accept each other. A building to do this is not a machine, it is a work of art and its architect must be an artist. The decoration of such a theatre cannot to my mind be handed over as it sometimes is to a separate designer. The stage decor provides the appropriate place for such people to make their contribution. The auditorium and the theatre itself must have the integrity and personality of a work of art. It is permanent and with us for a long time, it may even become a lone representative of our time. It must be a good place to visit over and over again, it must not stale. Yet all the while this work of art has to perform highly technical functions. The building must handle the movement of large numbers of people often in a matter of minutes only. When seated they must be comfortable and both see and hear easily. All the while backstage the ancient arts and strange equipment of theatre have to be deployed maybe by people who are visitors to the building—birds of passage. All this is subject always to the dictates of change and fashion.

Against this background let us view the latest works of two architects who are among the very few in England who have studied theatre design. In both cases my first visit was with the architect himself and I have to confess that I am always nervous when conducted round a new theatre for the first time by its architect. This arises not because I expect he will “do” me if I criticise but because his favourite bits are liable to be architectural and may worse still have their main merit in how they looked in two dimensions on the drawing board or even sketched on the back of an envelope. Basing a theatre on some geometric figure tends to this. Then again the more splendid the site the greater the risk that the theatre will be designed “outside-in”—an infallible recipe for anti-theatre.

The second great question is did the architect know who was going to use the theatre? what their policy was going to be? or was it left to him to think up a theatre? It can be depressing enough to find that no appointments have been made to this end when examining the brand new plans but it is not unknown for a theatre to be completely built and still this question may remain.



Thorndike Theatre: showing FOH lighting positions, the conventional No. 1 bar is in fact a bridge the auditorium side of the tabs.

The first of the two theatres under review, the Thorndike, is a theatre built for the Leatherhead company led by Miss Hazel Vincent Wallace. They are a successful eighteen-year-old company moving from their old home almost literally across the road to their new one. It is a logical growth. The architect, Roderick Ham, was fortunate therefore in having a client to satisfy who was going to be the user of the theatre. Indeed, long before an architect was appointed a delegation led by Miss Vincent Wallace visited the A.B.T.T. to get their early ideas in order.

New theatre it is, yet in fact it is a conversion of the Crescent Cinema, Leatherhead, built in the thirties. Incidentally, their old theatre was a conversion of a picture palace of an earlier era, a good omen, the company certainly appears to thrive on converted cinemas.

To use the word "converted" is hardly proper, for what one is confronted with is a new theatre complete in every way. Some of the cinema walls still stand and even backstage the odd staircase lingers on, but one sees at every turn the result of expert thinking brought to the problems of this particular repertory company by the architect and the user.

Strictly speaking one wonders if there was anything except a political point to be scored by using the existing cinema. It sounds less extravagant on the surface when launching an appeal in the first place—the right note of economy dresses the window. Mighty

little really remains and problems posed may have involved a more costly solution due to the sheer obstructive power of the old building. Yet this is not apparent—no sense of makeshift appears—and it could be that some of the oddities of this approach have stimulated the phagocytes more than a blank sheet of paper. It has left a legacy however in the narrowest of frontages on the main road squeezed into an undistinguished shopping-cum-office terrace. Still no one in a car would approach that way and one goes on to turn the corner into a minor road to see the real facade dominated by an impressive stage tower with a second entrance facing the car park.

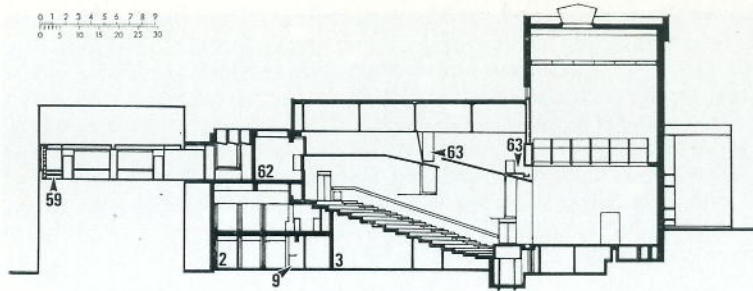
This is logical, particularly in Leatherhead—but would it have happened if circumstances had not forced this solution? Could the architect have resisted the temptation to squander the limited funds on the main but useless street frontage rather than using them round the back?

Great store is set by the social side of the theatre building and the old Leatherhead theatre had managed to provide such things under the auditorium. In the new Thorndike there is a large club room at the top of the building and a restaurant for one hundred, splendid (in a modern architectural context of course) in appearance and well equipped.

There are bars elsewhere and provision for coffee at ground floor level not only during show time but the morning variety so that the theatre does not go out of action as far as the public is concerned at non-performance times. These techniques are becoming commoner these days and TABS does not usually dwell on these areas anyway. These places even when well buried in the building do manage to be aware of the daylight outside due to the open staircase and interesting skylight solution way up top.

The new "Paralok" coat and umbrella racks provide a free service without the expense to the theatre of cloakroom staff. Lest this suggests an exchange without the mart, I had better explain that your coat is put on a normal hanger but anchored to it by a chain which is passed down the sleeve and captured by a special lock which serves your umbrella at the same time. You then remove the key and are master of your property *without* the exchange of any coin—not a slot or a saucer in sight!

The auditorium has four access points, two at the front and two at the rear. There are 530 seats all on one well stepped floor. Continental seating is used, an expression that refers to the lack of gangways and not the country of origin of the chairs. The only gangway is a wide one each side against the wall. Once there, on leaving one's row, it is readily possible to go up to the rear or down to the front exit. At one time licensing authorities here frowned on this form of seating but this is no longer so. In effect each row becomes its own gangway. This could increase the back-to-back seat spacing to an intolerable extent—after all, the audience must hang together as an entity and the last rows must not be pushed too far away from



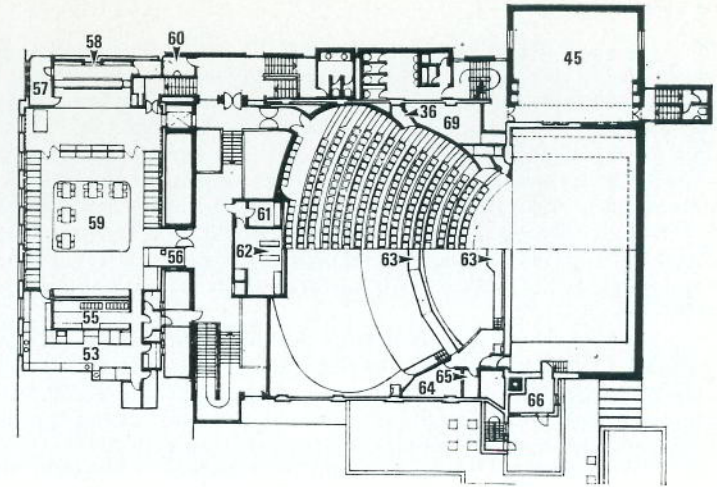
Thorndike Theatre Leatherhead: Architect, Roderick Ham ARIBA

the stage. Careful design of the seat is necessary. Deep padded backs of the lounging cinema type are out. A shallow back with the audience sitting upright in an attitude of attention, proper to the theatre anyway, is the solution. The aim is twofold; firstly to make it unnecessary for members of the audience already seated to have to get up for others to pass, a withdrawal of the legs being all that should be necessary; second there must be a really clear seatway when the audience all get up to leave. In the present case the rows are at 3 ft. centres and the back row no further than 58 feet from the house curtain line or 48 feet from the front of the forestage when used.

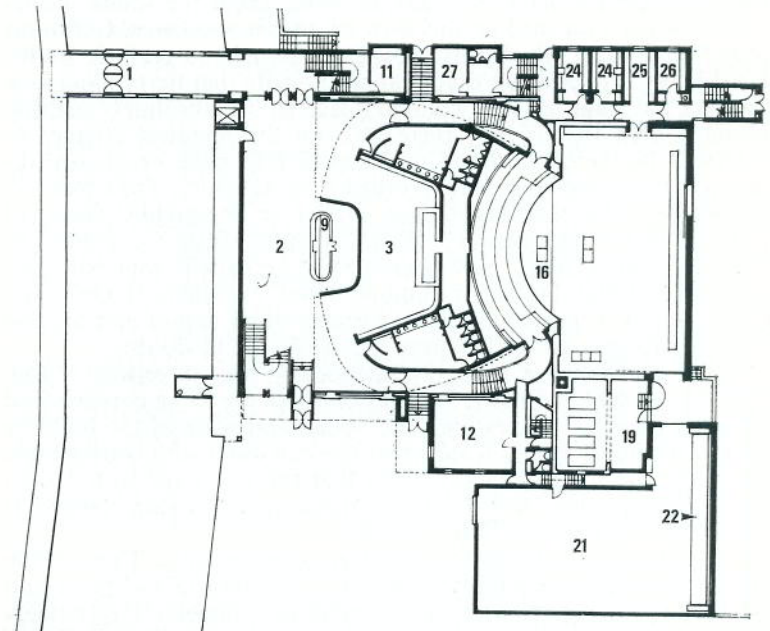
The proscenium opening has been restricted to a maximum of 35 ft. wisely, for too many schemes today assume a proscenium of much more than this. The giant opening is not a passport to freedom but rather to bondage. The Thorndike auditorium has therefore to be fan-shaped and as such subject to the usual criticism that the further the seats are from the stage the more there are. In fact the walls of the auditorium begin to curve in so that row M is the longest with 40 seats while the rows reduce considerably thereafter. This effect can be clearly seen from the plan but there is another effect of the curved walls which is most felicitous, one of those things to take away in the head but difficult to show properly in our photographs.

A problem of an auditorium of this size all on one floor is that it can appear far too wide for its height. The fact that the proscenium is not over wide helps reduce the risk, but it is the treatment of the front of house lighting positions, particularly the side wall slots, that is so interesting. These are neither pushed back flush into the wall nor hung from it. The side walls curve to take in the side slots and echo the curves at the rear of the auditorium already referred to. These curves stop well clear of the gangway which passes under them but they do break up the expanse of wall. The lighting bridge across the auditorium, a magnificently spacious affair to A.B.T.T. standards, performs the same duty in respect of the ceiling.

The lighting consultant was Richard Pilbrow, and there has



Thorndike Theatre second floor plan



Thorndike Theatre ground floor plan

- | | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|--|
| 1. Entrance lobby | 25. Property store | 60. Lavatory for disabled |
| 2. Main foyer | 26. Stage manager | 61. Sound control room |
| 3. Coffee bar | 27. Musicians | 62. Lighting control and projection room |
| 9. Box office | 36. Stage lighting slot | 63. Lighting bridge |
| 11. House manager | 45. Casson Room | 64. Dimmer room |
| 12. Committee room | 53. Kitchen | 65. Batteries for safety lighting |
| 16. Forestage orchestra | 55. Servery | 66. Electrician |
| 19. Boiler room | 56. Restaurant manager | 69. Wardrobe store |
| 21. Workshop | 57. Club manager | |
| 22. Paint bridge | 58. Club bar | |
| 24. Dressing room | 59. Restaurant | |

been included a lighting bridge within the ceiling edge just in front of the fire curtain which in effect brings No.1 spot bar forward and provides access into the bargain. This can of course only be done when the ceiling as here runs down to the working height of the stage. The ceiling is textured plaster in brown the main decorative effect coming from the top lit brick tiles on the walls, the orange seats and gold house tabs. Before leaving the auditorium it is important to mention that particular care has been taken to ensure that the disabled can attend in their wheel chairs. All too often theatre design has assumed that playgoing is the right only of the sound in wind and limb.

Roderick Ham, greatly daring, decided to do his own acoustics, and the result certainly seems satisfactory. During Dame Sybil's first night however I became aware of traffic noises which became quite fidgeting, particularly as one lorry was circulating the neighbourhood apparently emulating Bruce in trying to find a parking space. Actually Bruce was well and truly parked, it was the spider that was trying to do so. I found myself thinking, "poor old Rod he may have got the acoustics right but what about the sound insulation?" when it dawned on this slow wit that it was David Collison's sound equipment which was providing this all too realistic traffic. Here surely is once again that strange anomaly that never mind how abstract the stage set it is commonplace to use absolutely realistic sound effects. In this play there was not the remotest attempt to represent the neighbourhood of Dame Sybil's park bench realistically yet the traffic noise was recorded from actuality. The effect was far worse than *that* nightingale record in Respighi's *Pines of Rome*. What is the answer? Would some "Music Concrète" or "Bruits Electronique" have been better? Perhaps if done with real care and restraint, but to my mind no "Son" would have been even better. Surely it is not too much to expect of an author and his cast that the precious gift of language should be left to do this.

The Thorndike is primarily intended to play three-weekly Rep with the resident company. In addition there are to be concerts and films with the B.F.I. blessing. The design and scale of the building with its ancillary spaces is such that one can use it with considerable flexibility and it confirms my belief that the end stage with a non-stressed proscenium and a well equipped spacious stage behind is the most "adaptable theatre" of all.

The plans can speak for the stage arrangements. There is the now usual orchestra pit forestage lift. The siting of the paint and workshop provides acoustic separation of the completest kind namely open air while ensuring an easy and dry transfer including cloths off the paint frame direct into the stage. This transfer position also provides the get-in for visiting companies. When things were well advanced the desire was expressed for a studio theatre—one of those spaces in which space is most noticeable by its absence. This has been accomplished by giving the rehearsal room a separate entrance to be used by the public. The result is the Casson Room.



Gulbenkian Centre University of Hull: View of theatre arranged for proscenium type production. The fixed seating area has been brought into service with movable seating tiers in front and the floor opened up for the first rows. The proscenium is formed by the periaktoi units.

The second theatre is quite different. Although built by another professional theatre architect, Peter Moro, it is not intended for use by professionals. It is the students of the Drama Department who will derive the benefit. Readers of TABS will remember Peter Moro's description of his intention in these pages.*

The problem was to provide without any makeshift a theatre adaptable to many forms. This particular building is like no other and from the moment one sights it among the multi-period campus (not the best periods perhaps) it strikes a note. Particularly interesting is the way in which the high fly-tower forms a natural part of the roof. Unlike the Thorndike this building is able to make a complete impression as one approaches. Externally it appears compact—internally it covers a lot of ground and houses not only a theatre but a television studio and a whole range of what are known today as audio-visual services. Only the scenic workshops are shared. However TABS is mainly concerned with theatre so let us concentrate on that aspect. A neat touch here is the use of blue for the doors to theatre services and yellow for those of the audio-visual side.

This is an adaptable theatre and readers by now must be well aware that I like people to choose a form—any form—and stick to it. However occasionally there may be justification for an adaptable form—particularly where study is concerned. In other words adaptability may be good to study ideas of the past but is a rotten discipline for ideas of the future.

There are three ways to complete adaptability—the first is the empty space in which one pushes things around; the second is

*TABS, Vol. 25, No. 4, December 1967.

the adaptable auditorium and the third is the adaptable stage. The present example belongs to the last and further endorses its claim to be the successful method.

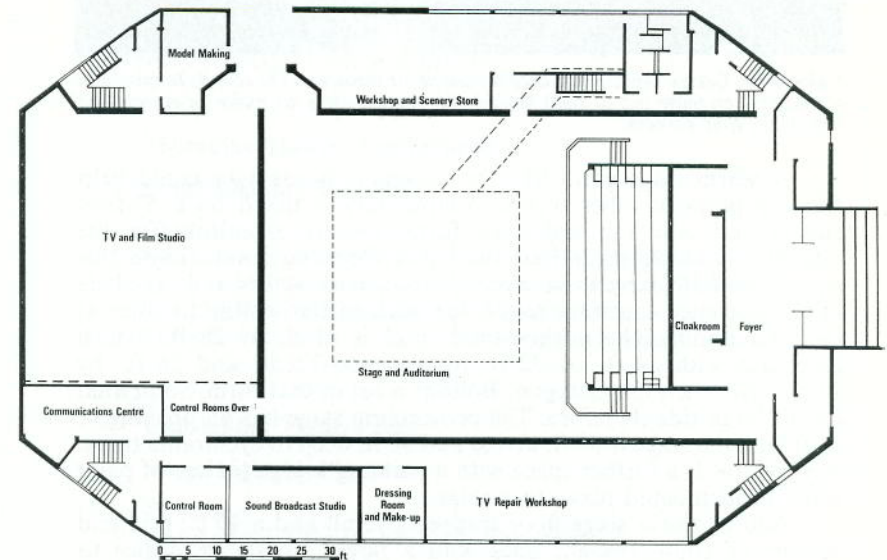
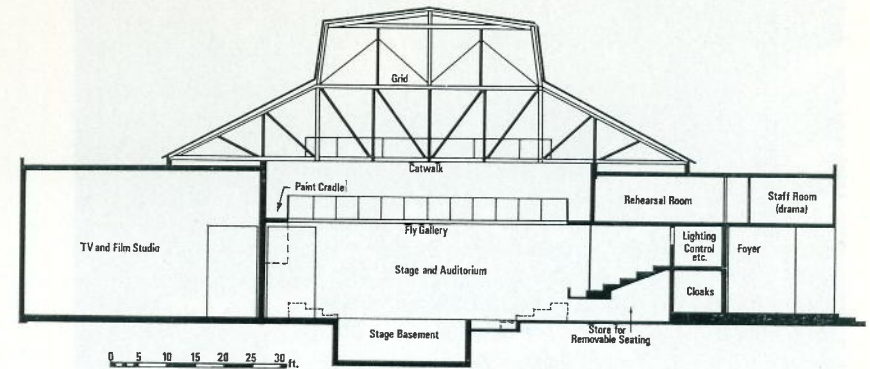
I prefer the adaptable stage if for no other reason than the fact that it recognises that the most difficult item of all to move is the lighting equipment. Anyone can shove around, with or without power assistance, great chunks of seating and what-have-you but just you try moving the stage lighting around and re-hanging and re-directing all the spotlights needed today. The stage has always been the workshop part of a theatre and as such is the most adaptable area of even the most rigid of proscenium theatres. It is that form incidentally which will display the mark of makeshift when included as an item in an adaptable theatre. For example a proscenium stage without a full grid may be deprived of the very reason for its existence—the ability to shift scenery easily.

Thus instead of beginning with theatre-in-the-round or a thrust form one should begin with the proscenium form and adapt to others and that is exactly what happens here at Hull.

There is a fixed terrace of seats extended forward by two sets of removable seats—one set of retractable bleachers at floor level and the other set requiring removal of some of the floor and setting the front rows down at that point. This gives the essential stage riser (and therefore separation) without the need to excavate and protect a token orchestra pit as in the LAMDA form. The entire main area of the hall becomes the stage covered by the full flying grid. The audience—housed under these and all other conditions—is 200. It might be thought that since three rows of extra seats are placed round the other three sides of the stage that the theatre-in-the-round form would seat more and be overbiased to one direction into the bargain. To avoid this the fixed seating terrace is designed so that its seating rows can be ignored. The back of each of the blocks of bleachers is formed as a low wall. To help in the adaptability everything including the seating is black. Not of course a very cheerful, although practical, prospect. The house tabs for the proscenium form are however a very satisfying shade of tangerine. The proscenium at the sides and above is not formed of acres of curtaining. A rigid framed border is lowered in as a header and a pair of periaktoi towers (with lighting positions) are trundled in to form rigid sides. To form an open end stage the towers are not of course required. A cyclorama track just below the grid completely encompasses the stage.

House lighting for the fixed seating terrace is from shielded downlights together with a back-illuminated rail running up the side of the two gangways. This pulls the proscenium form nicely together and I doubt if visitors will realise that it is an adaptable theatre. Incidentally the seating and retractable terraces for in-the-round are then stored beneath the fixed seat terrace.

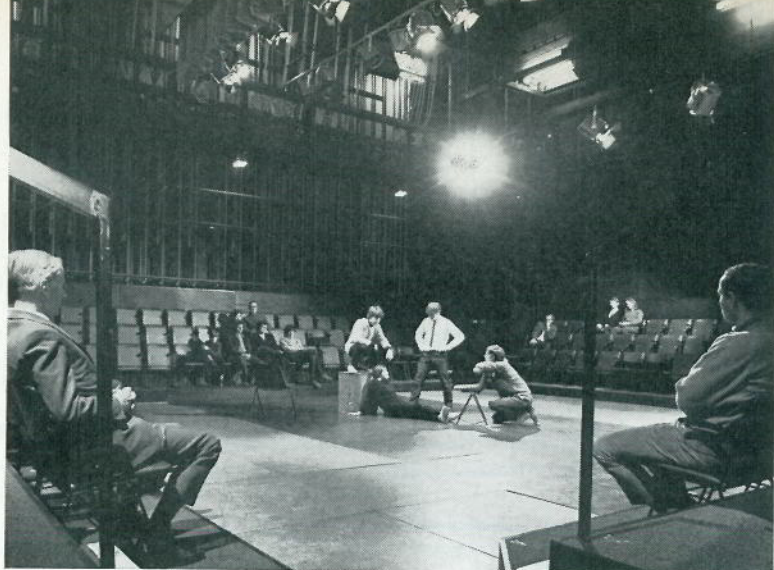
The in-the-round form will need careful rigging of selected stage lights to provide for the house lighting of equal conviction.



Gulbenkian Centre, University of Hull
Architects: Peter Moro and Partners

I would like to have seen a similar back-illuminated rail to that of the seating terrace around the four bleacher boundary walls to this form. This would draw the eye down from the lofty grid areas above and give an impression of permanence and hold things together. It is remarkable how the fact that the house lights move with and are part of the ceiling in the theatre at Limoges¹ removes all sense of makeshift when it is lowered to cut out the top tier and reduce the seating capacity.

¹ TABS, Vol. 24, No. 1.



Gulbenkian Centre Hull. Stage area arranged for theatre in the round. In this form the actors can move out of sight behind the seating tiers to make an entrance at any of the four corners.

A warm stage cloth like the tangerine house tabs could help friendly plays in other forms. Adaptability is based on a 57-foot square and only the end stage forms require extension (for the audience) outside it. Indeed the other forms are well inside this square so that under these circumstances both actors and members of the audience can walk round the back of the seating to enter at the four points. The in-the-round stage is 31 ft. by 28 ft., which compares with 24 ft. by 22 ft. at Stoke-on-Trent² and 26 ft. by 17 ft. 6 in. when the Octagon, Bolton³ is set in that form. Somewhat on the large side therefore. The proscenium stage has an opening of 30 ft. and the stage is 57 ft. across and 32 ft. deep to cyclorama track. Beyond this is a further space with a painting bridge (in lieu of paint frame) which could play other roles.

Add to this a stage floor trapped overall and a 40 ft. grid and 30 sets of counterweight lines with a power assistance device to avoid always having to load and unload. A nice-sized fly-cum-lighting gallery all round and plenty of space above the grid. An 80-channel 3-preset control with patch panel making it up to 100 circuits plus lots of lanterns. Incidentally, Richard Pilbrow is lighting consultant again with his Theatre Projects team on this and sound—to ensure instant availability of traffic noises? Excellent workshops, wardrobe, dressing rooms and all the rest.

Yet while attending a photo call I was more than a little disturbed to find little evidence of enthusiasm for all these Gulbenkian goodies. No real excitement—to move a chair for the photo call a student savagely kicked it several times to make it drag its way across

² TABS, Vol. 20, No. 2. ³ TABS, Vol. 26, No. 1.

the stage. Not an expensive chair but it was a new one in a brand new building. Is it all too perfect? This cannot be asked of all university theatres! But it can be asked here and in some others—is the equipment too lavish? Are we not in danger of emulating those doting parents who having lashed out on expensive super perfect scale toys find their children tiring quickly and turning to the old tins, battered wooden bricks and other improbable objects which allow their imagination full play?

The Gulbenkian theatre in Hull University is not intended for a regular or visiting companies. The seating capacity is too small and there is the Middleton Hall anyway. It is not for students taking up theatre as a career but rather for students taking a drama course—presumably for some blessed piece of paper at the end. Can any theatre be too good and too well equipped? One thing is certain the Gulbenkian Centre would make an excellent place for training theatre technicians and many theatre companies might well envy its design and equipment. It is to be hoped that not just the University but Hull itself will benefit.

Thorndike Theatre Leatherhead

Stage Lighting Circuits

Control

80 Channel 3 Preset SP
72 × 2 kW dimmers
8 × 5 kW dimmers
184 kW 240 volts

FOH Bridge and Slots 20*
Prosc. Bridge and Slots 20*
Fly and Dips 40

*Patched to alternative positions.

Gulbenkian Theatre Hull

Stage Lighting Circuits

Control

80 Channel 3 Preset SP
76 × 2 kW dimmers
4 × 5 kW dimmers
172 kW 240 volts

60 Gallery
10 Floor
30 Patched from
10 dimmers

Audio Visual Centre Hull

Lighting Circuits

Control

60 Channel 3 Preset SP
60 × 2 kW dimmers
120 kW 240 volts

60 Circuits
distributed over grid

ABSTRACTED LIGHTING

I have long ago discovered that when a set is perfectly lit from the pictorial point of view, it is certain there will not be enough light for the action of the play. One can be equally sure that when enough light has been added for the action the pictorial quality of the set has been in a great measure disturbed. So there is created a perpetual battle between the desire for the perfect stage picture and the desire for the perfect performance, and by performance I do not only mean that of the actors, but the play as a whole.

. . . there is also a desire to guard against working on cliché which is so inevitably a result of experience and is such a dangerous master whether it be in writing, in acting or in stage lighting—"This is a good way of doing it, it worked well before"—hence the new angle is not discovered, time is saved but another opportunity dies.

. . . in a scene in which the accent of the light is concentrated on a limited area and achieves the most exquisitely modulated chiaroscuro, that the producer has distributed the action all over the stage, or at least one important piece of action takes place in a now dark corner where even with due allowance for theatrical convention, no light could possibly fall at that time from those windows. Therefore, although he may not be as intense in his knowledge as the expert in all departments, I think it an advantage for the producer to light his sets, provided, of course, he is in sufficient sympathy with his artist. But then I am working on the assumption that if the producer is not in sympathy with the design, has not indeed passed it, he will not be working on it. This again probably explains why I prefer to work in my own theatres, for unity of design can only be obtained when it has been forged on a common anvil.

. . . elaboration is not necessarily efficiency and, although effects may be achieved with complicated equipment with less difficulty, the result is not necessarily better; any more than one hundred pounds worth of photographic equipment can necessarily turn out a better photograph than can be achieved with one small camera, a dish-developer and a knowledge of how to use them.

. . . that two-edged sword—the footlights. Gordon Craig denied their usefulness and complained that it was an unnatural source of light; but indeed every source of light is unnatural in the theatre, and for a certain type of glamour floats are indispensable. Next there is **Spot and Flood Lighting**, in which the main source of light is direct and controlled and built up to a focal climax by the spotlights; floods being used for binding the light and for basic

colouring; and here I am a believer in controlling the texture of shadows. That is to say—even if a natural shadow is flung by an object hit by a spot I believe in colouring it discreetly with the floods; the painter controls the colour of his shadow, which is only relative darkness, and this I also try to do.

Lighting is half darning; knowing where not to put your light, and this is why I place my faith more in the spot and flood system than the batten, but to me the ideal stage is like the inside of a camera—a magic blackness that we can light as and where we will.

All lighting has two functions, the one utilitarian and the other aesthetic. It matters profoundly not merely that one should see without stress or strain but that what one does see has the essential quality of truth. The lighting designer who fails to appreciate both requirements is not an artist and should not be entrusted with the job of lighting the stage. He need not be a technician electrically but he must be a technician theatrically.

If the producer relies on the independent artist to devise his lighting he must establish at once a community of ideas between them. Whether that community is well established or not the lighting artist must acquire for himself by careful study of the play, by frequent attendance at rehearsal and by consultation with those responsible for the design and construction of scenery and costumes, a complete appreciation of the moods of the play. Until he has that **appreciation he cannot** properly decide what effects he wishes to achieve and until he has made that decision he cannot select the means by which he is to secure achievement.

Whatever the limitations of the equipment, the first need is the understanding of what effect is required. Then, and then only, will it be practicable to decide where the light is required, at what intensities and with which colours. The lighting artist will not need to be told that colour filters obtainable are not restricted to Red, Green, Blue and Amber. He will know the full range and will **select his colours with a nice appreciation of their effect on costume and scenery.** He will obtain plans of the stage settings and prepare his own plans showing the disposition of the lighting and the positions in which it is desirable and practicable to place his equipment. If he is in the fortunate position of being able to use the stage well in advance of the **dress rehearsal he will try many experiments practically before he begins to link the lighting together.** In almost every case he will find it an advantage for a lighting plot to be committed to paper before the actual lighting rehearsal. The practice of hurriedly decorating the back of a cigarette packet with curious hieroglyphics during

the pauses at the dress rehearsal may be popular but it cannot be guaranteed to be efficient or foolproof.

The lighting artist will regard his plot as the conductor regards the musical score. The conductor would not expect the orchestra to take down the notes on paper at the actual rehearsal and it is obvious that much time will be saved at the lighting rehearsal if the operator has a preliminary plot from which to work.

Just as the producer maps out the actors' moves before the rehearsal begins and alters them as the scene develops before his eyes, so the lighting artist will modify his decisions when the imagined scenes become realities during rehearsal. And the lighting rehearsal is quite as vital as the word rehearsal. It is often possible and sometimes necessary to spend a considerable time on lighting what appears to be a simple show, as the artist is never deluded into a state of complacency by the fact that a cultured sensitivity to lighting and colour is still far from universal. Somebody can always be depended on to applaud his efforts however inappropriate they may really be. Like all other arts, that of stage lighting has its own fashions, prejudices, traditions and jargon and the real artist will explore all but will avoid slavish adherence to any. He will for ever be striving for that consummate achievement that brings the glow of exaltation . . . and the poignant pang of its impermanence.

Colour is an accessory to form, and whereas we can go far with form minus colour (as in black and white photography), colour minus form is quite meaningless. Certain exponents of colour lighting would do well to remember that the most colourful scene in nature turns out to consist largely of soft neutral colours, when reproduced as a painting. The greenest of Spring scenes gives the artist little chance to use green paint neat and undiluted.

It follows that at a pinch, we could dispense with colour filters altogether in our stage lighting, relying on directional modelling from our stage lanterns and variations in intensity to give expression; the installation required being a collection of individual spots and floods with dimmers. On the other hand, a stage with magazine battens and footlights, giving an even flood of all-over colour in any of a hundred or more hues, would be deadly monotonous even if an exciting colour such as yellow, magenta or peacock were used. As a matter of fact, without suitable contrast there would be difficulty in appreciating the colour at all.

No one has suggested that provided the various colours used by Turner were issued ready-mixed in carefully labelled tubes, the ordinary mortal could paint a Turner sunset. For a man to suggest such a thing would give us leave to doubt his sanity. No one surely seriously imagines that the mixing of colours is the real difficulty—it is what to do with them when mixed.

The wide range of filters available is a great boon to the Theatre but, whatever we might like to claim they are certainly not going to enable an unskilled man to produce colour masterpieces. There is precious little virtue in No. 20 Deep Blue or No. 7 Pink other than that brought by their proper application to the right place and in the right amount.

(TABS Sept. 1946)

Abstracts 1 to 6 Hilton Edwards

Abstracts 11 & 12 Frederick Bentham

(TABS Dec. 1947)

Abstracts 7 to 10 Percy Corry

TWO MINOR THEATRES

by Brian Legge

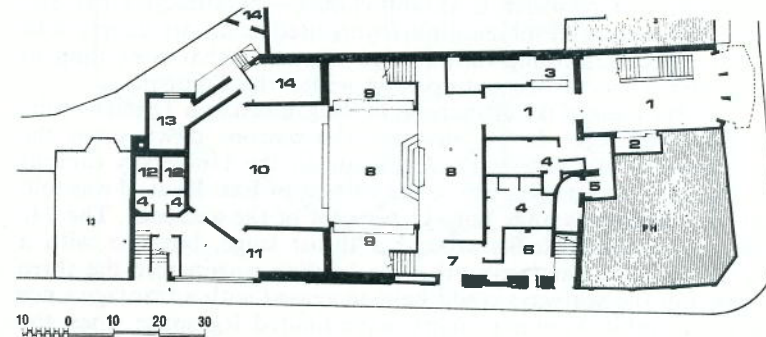
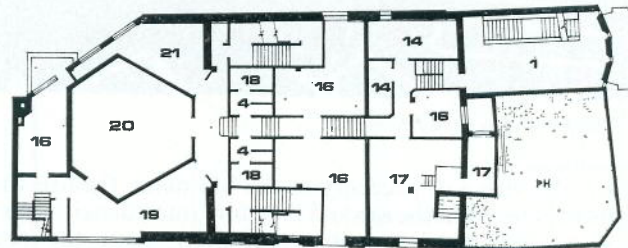
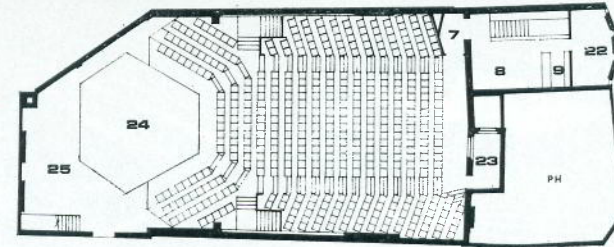
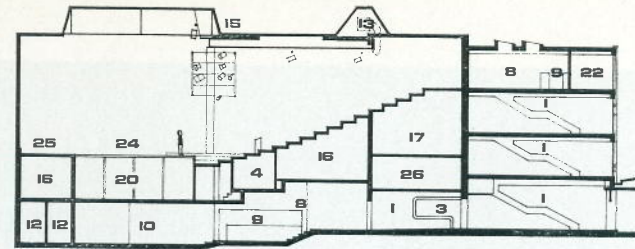
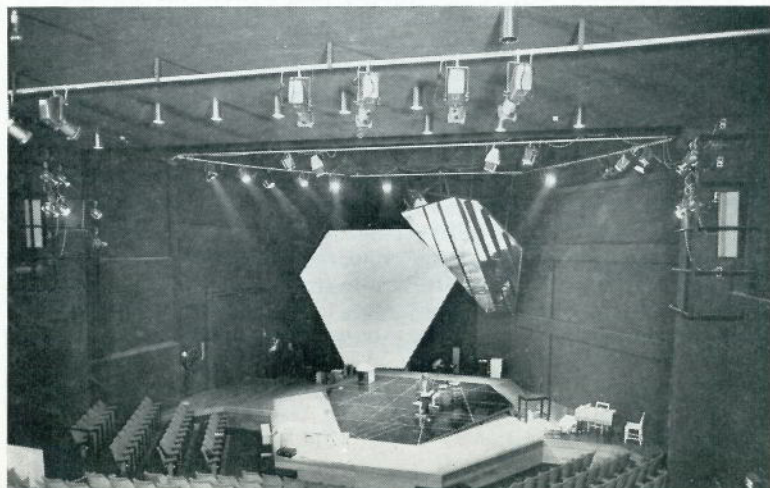
Dr. Doran, Clement Scott and other bewhiskered gentlemen of the last century who wrote about the Theatre often used the term "minor theatre". I propose revival of the phrase to describe small theatres which fall short of present-day standards of ancillary accommodation and facilities necessary for repertoire or for the touring companies of national institutions. Such theatres are adequate for their more limited, and more local, horizons. The Nottingham Playhouse and Phoenix at Leicester would not have received such unjust comparison of costs if the Phoenix had been accepted as a minor theatre. The new Greenwich Theatre and the Gulbenkian Theatre at the University of Kent at Canterbury both fall into my revived category; both have well-established competition nearby; Greenwich is only 5½ miles, or 15 minutes, away from the greatest concentration of theatres in the world—London's West End. The civic-owned Marlowe Theatre at Canterbury is, and has been for many years, the home of one of our steady and reliable repertory companies. Unlike my own borough, just double the distance of Greenwich to the West End, neither Greenwich or the Gulbenkian have attempted to best the competition, but have sensibly sought to provide something different to attract a new, and probably younger audience. The Greenwich Theatre is built on the site of an old Victorian Music Hall but the only link with the past is in the names of the theatre's restaurant and coffee bar, Barnard's and Crowder's respectively; these are the names of two publicans who ran the Music Hall at different times. The new theatre is an end-stage with some nominal pretensions to a thrust stage. One of the walls enclosing both auditorium and acting area converges at the stage end leaving practically no space outside the acting area. This apparent lack of width is emphasised by the considerable height over the acting area, a height which springs from the very steeply tiered auditorium. The



The Greenwich Theatre.

sightlines from the 426 seats cannot be faulted but somehow the proportions of the building fight against the focusing of attention on the acting area; the eye too easily wanders aloft unless the actors positively rivet the attention. In the first production, *Martin Luther King* by Ewan Hooper the theatre's director, this unfortunate tendency was not helped by the use of slide projection from the one, rather far forward, lighting bridge to way above the actors' heads. Concentration is not helped by the exceptionally high intensity of the maintained lighting. The whole of the acting area is trapped in equilateral triangles to allow different levels, or entrances from below to be created. The only permanent access to stage level is by a staircase rising from below in the upstage right corner, or through the principal entrances to the auditorium. These entrances are relatively low in the seating tiers, thus losing, for the majority of

Rehearsal at Greenwich for Spithead.



The Greenwich Theatre. Architect: Brian Meeking ARIBA

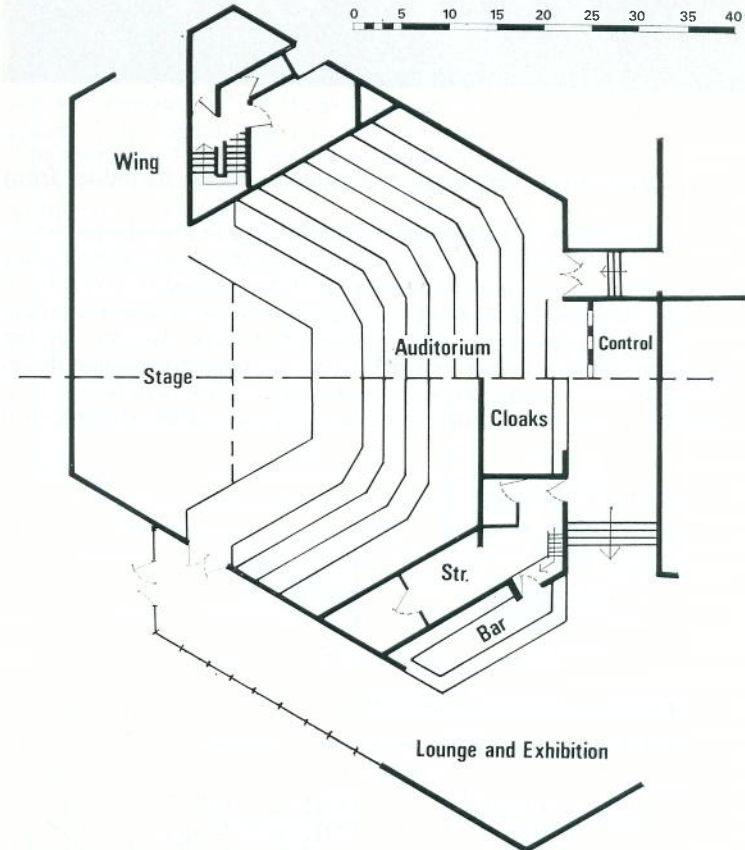
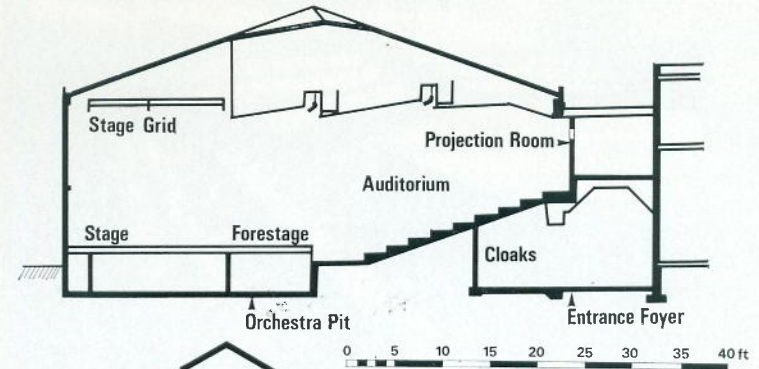
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|---------------|---------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Foyer | 10. Restaurant | 19. Green Room |
| 2. Pay Desk | 11. Kitchen | 20. Trap Space |
| 3. Cloaks | 12. Staff Locker | 21. A.S.M. |
| 4. W.C. | 13. Heating Chamber | 22. Manager's Office |
| 5. Electrics | 14. Store | 23. Control Box |
| 6. Wine Store | 15. Lighting Bridge | 24. Removable Stage Area |
| 7. Lobby | 16. Dressing Room | 25. Fixed Stage Area |
| 8. Bar Foyer | 17. Plant Room | 26. Wardrobe |
| 9. Bar | 18. Showers | |



Gulbenkian Theatre University of Kent.

the audience, the virtue of necessity at the Mermaid Theatre where everyone has to enter from the top and therefore immediately becomes accustomed to looking downwards. In many ways the actual auditorium at Greenwich is an anti-climax—the attractive bar and restaurant areas, and the multiple foyers used as an art gallery lead you to expect something rather more exciting. What is exciting so far is their policy of originating plays within the Company.

Not the least of the attractions of the Gulbenkian Theatre of the University of Kent is the view for the patrons down upon the cathedral city of Canterbury. Although on the University campus the theatre is very much open to the citizens of East Kent—I was told that the students average only 15 per cent of the audience. The 342 seats are in three blocks around a thrust stage, but one with a scenic wall. The gangways are wide tending to separate the three blocks, but the seatways could have increased with advantage since the comfortable Viscount chairs leave limited leg space when the tread spacing is less than generous. There are two lighting bridges following the shape of the seating tiers—the walkways above the auditorium ceiling are bisected by ventilation trunkings but these have been bridged. Access to use the Patt. 264 Bifocal Spots is far from comfortable as the suspension barrel is so far forward and low relative to the walkway; this would seem to arise from the provision of removable panels to isolate the lighting equipment on the auditorium side of the roof void. However there is no doubt that the



Gulbenkian Theatre, University of Kent. Architects: Farmer and Dark, London, S.W.15 (Above) section, (below) composite plan showing two levels.



Gulbenkian Theatre.

bridges, despite their faults, are preferable to access by ladder from below.

The thrust stage is trapped and in fact can be removed completely to form an orchestra pit. This would seem to be an unnecessary elaboration since all seats are focused to this area and would leave a very large moat between audience and a shallow stage. There are also two large traps in the permanent acting area. In spite of the thrust stage there is wisely provision for scenery and a scene dock. The dressing rooms are somewhat crammed into two levels in a corner left between the auditorium plan and the overall architectural space.

Greenwich Theatre

Stage Lighting Circuits

<i>Control</i>	FOH	24
60 channel 3 Preset	Bridge	10
All 2 kW dimmers	Flys	16
120 kW 240 volt	Dips	10

Gulbenkian Theatre, Canterbury

Stage Lighting Circuits

<i>Control</i>	FOH rear walls	3
60 channel 3 Preset SP	FOH back bridge	15
4 × 5 kW dimmers	FOH front bridge	16
22 × 2 kW dimmers	Flys	18
34 × 1 kW dimmers	Dips	8
98 kW 240 volts	No Patch	

IS THE JARGON REALLY NECESSARY?

by Percy Corry

The current patter of theatrical pundits can be rather tiresome. In the course of any discussion about contemporary theatre it is a safe bet that somebody or other will be piously impressive about the "challenge" of *communication, involvement, participation, commitment, alienation, dedication* and God-knows-what all. There seems to be an inference that the jargon underlines newly discovered shattering truths that must be proclaimed with evangelistic fervour or at least treated with reverential awe.

There are also those extravagant claims made for the virtues of "improvisation" . . . the Do-It-Yourself Drama that will supersede the aristocracy of the individual dramatist. The arts must be democratised. Let Drama be created by committees and Music be composed by computers! Salutations to the Brave New World of mediocrity! Let all "conventional" theatres be abolished! What need of the sterile "separation" of stage and auditorium? There must be "free spaces" in which actors and audience may share contrived "happenings", freely uttering those tedious four-letter words with adolescent bravado and, maybe, disrobing *en masse* to create a wonderful "togetherness". (The enthusiasts for this communal concupiscence would appear to have mistaken Aldous Huxley's prophetic warnings for inspired advocacy.)

All the blether about communication, participation, involvement and the like is merely a jejune attempt to rationalise elemental truths. Theatre in one form or another is as old as *homo sapiens*. Ever since men began to live in groups there have been those who had the urge and the ability to speak, sing, dance and mime before an audience of their fellows who were delighted to have them do so. The performers performed because they *could* "communicate", *could* "involve" their audiences and *could* induce them to "participate" when they wanted them to. This ability is a basic essential of the performer's art and technique no matter what may be the geographical distribution of those involved, no matter whether the audience is silently receptive or vocally and physically active. The "all together boys and girls" is a bonus to and not a substitute for the solo turn.

In the comparatively sophisticated theatre of the last two thousand years the most important creative artist in the theatre has been the dramatist and still is. Creating drama is an exacting and difficult art demanding at least a touch of genius; and Nature is not outstandingly profligate in the gift of genius. Any fool can write dialogue. . . and lots of them do. . . but the result does not make any significant contribution to Drama. It is, of course, Drama that makes Theatre, not the reverse, and the great dramatist is a rare phenomenon.

There are good arguments why the non-great should have a bash if they feel the urge. As Chesterton or somebody else said "if a

thing is worth doing it is worth doing badly" which is justification for most of the amateur theatre and much of professional theatre. But there is little justification for the present dewy-eyed enthusiasm for mediocrity that masquerades as art. A great sculptor like Epstein may command admiration for three-dimensional grotesqueries but it is difficult to understand the solemn satisfaction with which the knowing ones accept stark geometries or bits of twisted rusty iron when ostentatiously exhibited by the cynical (or deluded) non-artists. A Picasso may with justification skilfully organise disruption of form and colour but one winces with dismay when a school kid's immature daub can be seriously accepted for exhibition by a Royal Academy apparently deluded by the anonymity. Pinter may use his mastery of dramatic dialogue to enable good actors to create theatrically significant characters from verbal incomprehensibility but this does not justify a popular delusion that the incomprehensible has virtue because it is incomprehensible.

There is also some merit in improvisation used as a kind of keep-fit acting exercise, a limbering up in preparation for a real job, or perhaps a bit of good clean fun at a party. We did the same sort of thing years ago: we called it playing charades. Skill in acting does not imply an ability to devise dialogue and drama. In truth most actors are pretty dumb unless they have a playwright's lines to utter and the chances of a group of improvisers producing a couple of lines of theatrical significance are about a million to one. A spot of improvisation at a drama school has its usefulness and may even have its own wry humour induced by the self-conscious reluctance of a few inexpert students to scythe the imaginary corn and bring in the invisible sheaves with the right touch of ecstatic abandon demanded by the "dedicated" leader with a nice taste in leisure wear.

It should also be admitted that it can be very interesting to experiment with "actor/audience relationship", to play in the round or the half-round, to thrust or to retreat, to play with or without scenery and so on. All forms of theatre are valid and all forms can be good, bad or unbearable: the acceptability depends on the standard of performance, the quality of what is being performed and a discriminating use of the facilities and limitations of the particular form adopted. It must be accepted however, that the varied forms have conflicting physical requirements. The craze for "adaptability" for its own sake should be contained within practical bounds. It is too easily possible for the subsidising authority to be conned into accepting adaptability as having special virtues and some curious planning of theatres and "drama spaces" has resulted.

The theatre, like all other forms of communal activity, probably needs the extravagance of the revolutionaries to prevent it from fossilising; but it also needs a sense of proportion. Fortunately the basic principles of theatre are sound enough to survive and possibly benefit from the superficial experimenting of the earnest minority. Or are they? Is there, perhaps, a danger that the live theatre may be theorised out of existence? It's a chastening thought.



AURORA AUSTRALIS I

by Denis Irving

"Everybody has his own theatre, in which he is manager, actor, prompter, playwright, sceneshifter, boxkeeper, doorkeeper, all in one, and audience into the bargain."

The Australian entertainment world is not quite as short of manpower as that of Augustus William Hare, but in a young country of three million square miles and 12 million people there is certainly a shortage of personnel and finance, and even if these were available plentifully, the audiences have to be encouraged away from the outdoor leisure activities more commonly associated with Australia. As a step towards this journal's endeavours to become more international, I thought readers would like some comment from Australia. The lack of funds for the performing arts, is indicated by comparing government assistance in various parts of the world, e.g. the subsidy to the Stadsteatren in Malmo last year was some 20 per cent higher than the total to all theatres in Australia for the same period. Largely because of this, the technical side of productions tends to be considerably simplified—less machinery is used on stages, and the number of lanterns, dimmers and lighting cues **reduced** to a fraction of those used on equivalent overseas productions. Despite the problems, legitimate theatre is very active, and



Alexander Theatre, Monash University, Victoria.

audiences in Melbourne and Sydney can see most of the shows that play in London West End or on Broadway, covering the whole gamut from large musicals to plays by Albee, Orton, etc. These are played either in commercial theatres built between the two world wars (mostly still using their original grand master boards) or converted meeting halls.

Having recently visited a number of theatres in the U.K., Scandinavia and North America, it becomes evident to me that Australia is still working on a technical "scale" of equipment several orders lower than these countries, particularly when related to the artistic standards. For instance, a stage in the London West End which would be fitted with 120-way modern control for medium sized productions, would consider itself fortunate in Australia to have a 70-way grand master board—the lighting tends to be less subtle, not because of inability on the part of lighting designers, but because of restrictions imposed by the lack of equipment. It seems strange that managements insist on importing productions with faithful copies of the sets, costumes and orchestration, but allow the lighting to become a travesty of the original.

Some of the older houses have fallen victim to the wreckers' hammers, but a few of these will be rebuilt later as part of major redevelopments. J. C. Williamson Theatres will be acquiring the site of an existing cinema in Sydney, and redeveloping this by the construction of a multi-storey building which will include two live

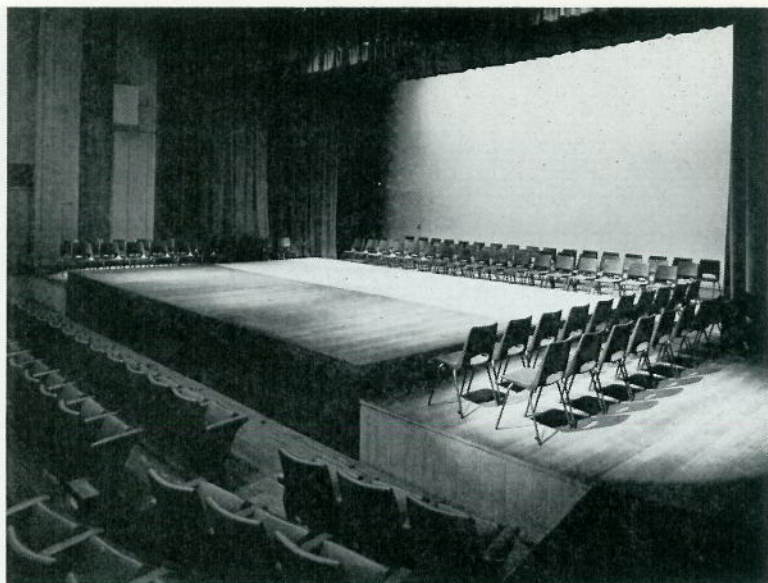


Alexander Theatre.

theatres, but the majority of theatre design and construction at present is by academic or civic bodies. An exception is the 619 seat theatre just finished in Brisbane as part of the State Government Insurance Office building. It is roughly equivalent to the new Thorn-dike Theatre in England.

University building activities are proceeding apace throughout the country both as expansion of established institutions and the foundation of new ones. Theatres often form part of these programmes, either as facilities intended as part of the Students Union, or, more rarely, as faculty buildings. In Victoria, we have two which form an interesting contrast, i.e. the Alexander Theatre, Monash University, and the Melbourne University Union Theatre.

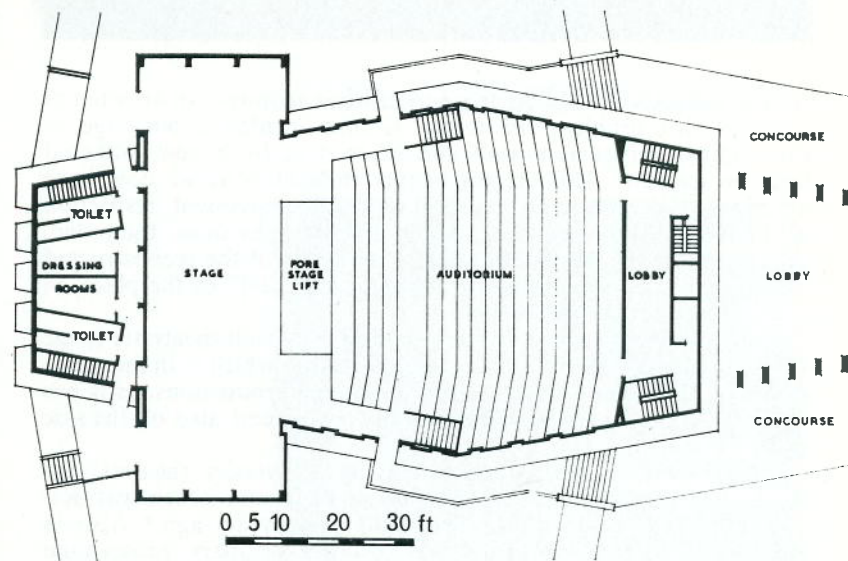
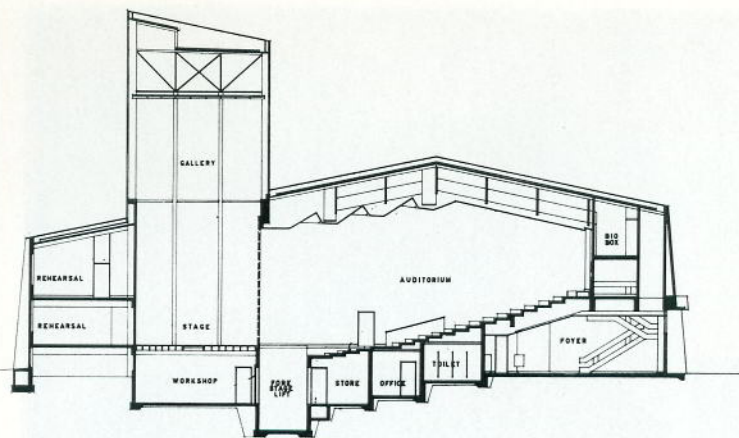
The former is officially defined as a "Public Lecture Theatre" (largely in order to conform to the requirements of the Australian Universities Commission). It was built under the auspices of the English Department and is a proscenium style theatre but lacking a true proscenium as such and having a degree of flexibility for some occasions. This is shown in the photographs and drawings and is provided by the use of a fore-stage lift together with a 1 ft. portable rostrum in conjunction with an arrangement of a cross aisle and side aisles at stage level. The rows of seats between the cross aisle and the stage are removable and the well thus formed can be filled in to give a large end stage if required. In practice, the theatre is reasonably satisfactory excepting that most users endeavour to put



Alexander Theatre.

conventional sets stretched to fit the 50 ft. opening without any form of false proscenium, giving a rather incongruous effect. A point of criticism is the existence of two doors in the rear wall of the stage which rather prevent its use as a cyclorama. These could not be further apart due to the architect's insistence on retaining the basic plan shape. In his defence, it must be said that the original drawing showed a fixed curved cyclorama which satisfactorily masked these doors. Control of the stage lighting is by means of an SP60 in the control room at the rear of the auditorium in which is also situated the master console for a fairly complex audio and intercommunication system which was built by the theatre's own staff. Seating capacity varies from 500 to 700 depending on use, the higher figure being achieved by putting some seats on the stage.

The same architects, Messrs. Eggleston, McDonald and Secomb were also responsible for the re-modelling of the Union Theatre at Melbourne University. We show three photographs, one taken of the original theatre and two showing the theatre after the re-modelling, which in fact took place in phases, as the auditorium floor was relaid and new seating put in some time before the revision of the ceiling and proscenium structures. This final reconstruction took place because of alterations to the remainder of the Union building and not out of dissatisfaction with the theatre as it was. University theatres are frequently used for lunch-time film shows, and one perpetual headache was that sets had always to be designed



*Alexander Theatre, Monash University, Victoria.
Architects: Eggleston, McDonald & Secomb.*



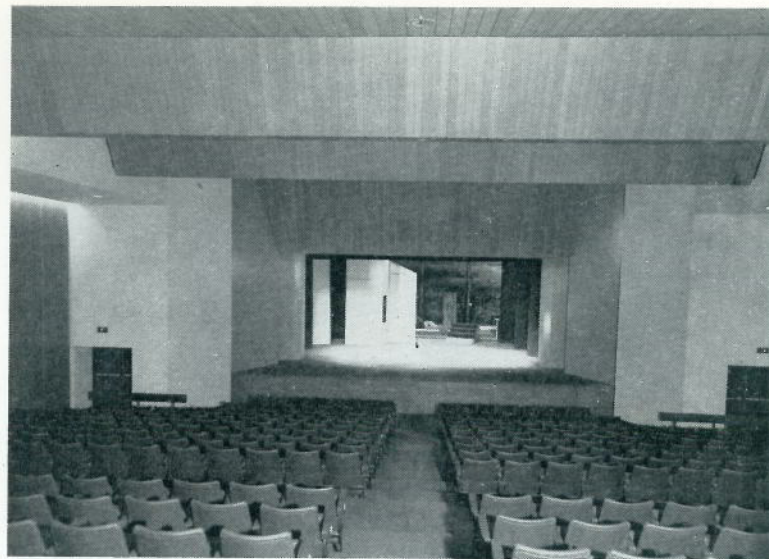
so that the screen could be dropped in when required. In an attempt to solve this problem the screen is now located down-stage of the original proscenium wall and masked in by a new timbered false proscenium. This creates further difficulties as we now have an effectively very thick proscenium with consequent restriction of the front-of-house lighting. As the photographs show, the reduction in ceiling height and the modern materials of the reconstructed theatre have caused a complete change in the "feel" of the place, in some minds not for the better.

In another part of the same building is a small theatrette (page 40) originally designed for film presentation but which is in fact quite usable as a small end-stage theatre for simple productions, as it has lighting bars mounted in recesses in the ceiling and also on the side walls.

Melbourne is not alone in having University theatres, the Adelaide University has rather a fine small theatre which was described in TABS when it was first built some years ago.* Also in Adelaide, Flinders University has a fairly ordinary proscenium theatre but is unique in that it also possesses a drama teaching studio some 40 ft. square with a tubular grid 20 ft. above the floor on the lines of the St. Mary's College, Twickenham, England. It is provided with a JP.20 control system with a patch panel distributing the 20 dimmers to some 40 outlets in various parts of the ceiling.

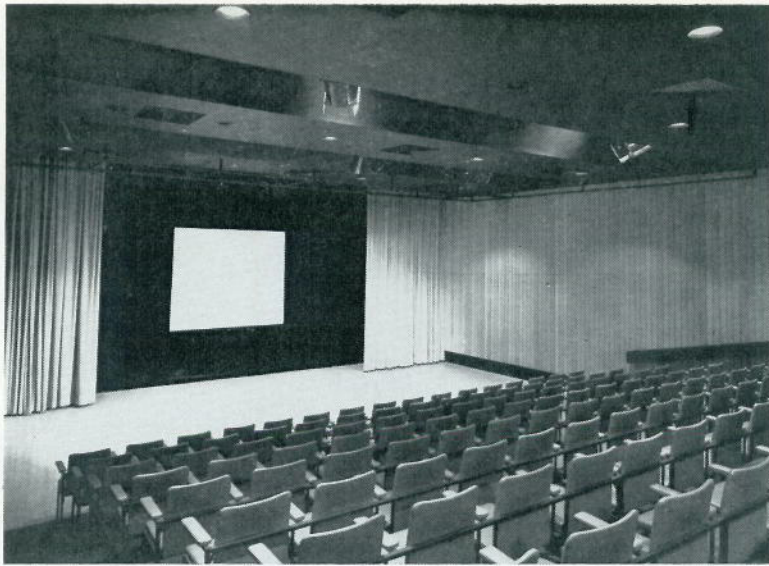
By far the most adventurous is the University of Western

*TABS, Vol. 17, No. 1.



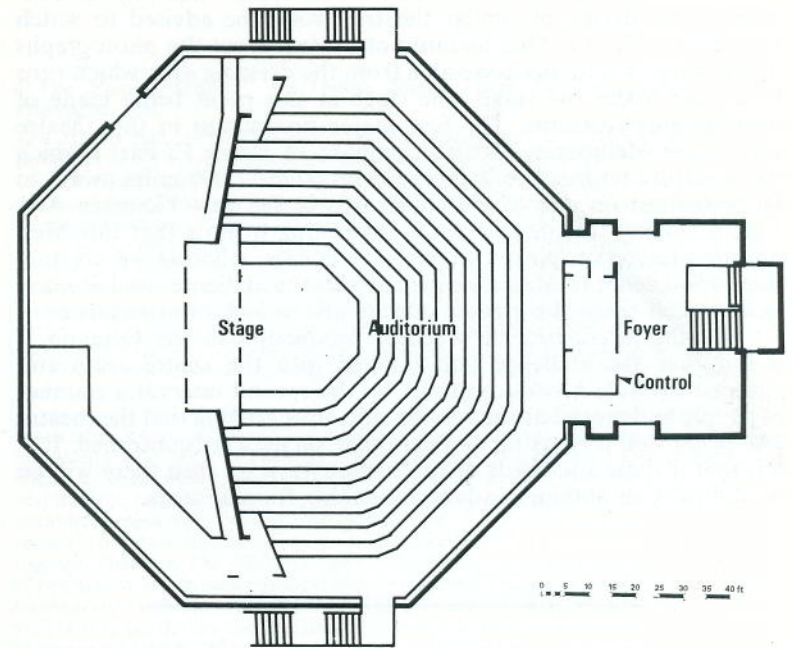
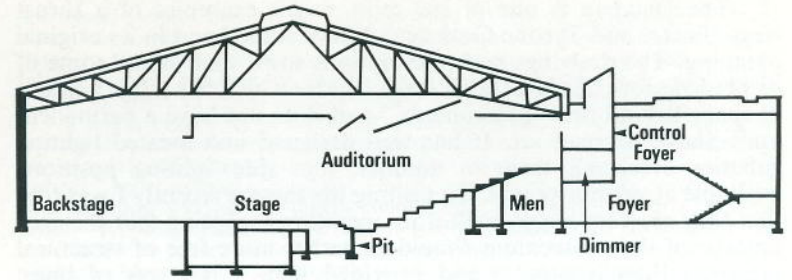
Melbourne University Union Theatre. Opposite page original theatre 1956. This page as remodelled 1969.





Guild Theatre, Melbourne University Union.

Octagon Theatre, University of Western Australia, Perth, see also photograph page 33.



*Octagon Theatre, University of Western Australia, Perth.
Architects: Hill and Parkinson in association with R. K. H. Johnson.*

Australia in Perth which employs a staff member whose sole job it is to co-ordinate the design, construction and operation of all its theatre buildings. It now possesses an open-air theatre; a replica of the Fortune Theatre (to which Percy Corry referred in his comments on Australia some time ago*); an early proscenium theatre which is one day due for replacement, and its latest acquisition, the Octagon Theatre.

*TABS, Vol. 22, No. 4.

The Octagon is one of the most recent examples of a thrust stage theatre and Tyrone Guthrie did have some hand in its original planning. The drawings and photographs show that unlike some of its predecessors this is a thrust stage theatre which has a fair amount of space behind the "proscenium" and does not have a permanent built Shakespearean set. It has well designed and located lighting galleries overhead, three in number, plus side lighting positions available at various points. On visiting the theatre recently I was told that they are very happy with it in operation excepting that the area upstage of the proscenium should be rather more free of structural members than it now is and provided with a few sets of lines. Although the lighting positions in the ceiling are well sited the access to them is restricted somewhat by the roof trusses and anyone considering the design of similar theatres would be advised to watch this point in future. One feature not evident from the photographs or drawings is a tunnel accessible from the dressing area which runs to a floor under the stage—the stage at this point being made of demountable rostrums. The first major production in this theatre was by the Melbourne Theatre Company of *Henry VI* Part I which subsequently returned to its home town (some 2,000 miles away) to be performed on one of the courtyards in the new Victorian Arts Centre Gallery. Incidentally, it is interesting to note that this Melbourne production played to capacity houses, whereas we are told that in Sweden it is musicals which attract the audiences and Shakespeare which needs the greater subsidy due to lack of attendance.

During attendance at a recent production in the Octagon, I found that the audience had booked into the centre seats and spurned the side blocks, however by the second interval a number of people had moved around to the side, thus proving that the theatre was being well used as far as peninsular stages were concerned. It is felt that if these standards of production keep up then there will be no difficulty in obtaining advance booking for side seats.

BOOK REVIEWS

"Meyerhold on the Theatre" Edward Braun, Methuen, 336 pp illustrated. 75s. In 1905 the pioneer spirit was alive and well and living in Russia. "Meyerhold on Theatre" demonstrates all too clearly that rebellion against established styles of acting, design, lighting and theatre form is not the brain child of the sixties and that directors who rush into print must always run the risk of boring the pants off their readers.

This collection of essays and speeches reveals Meyerhold as a fascinating and vibrant *homme du theatre*. The fight against naturalism (the Moscow Arts Theatre) and his work towards a three dimensional drama created a new movement which progressed directly to Brecht, Brook and Grotowski.

His experiments lead him to techniques reminiscent of the dance: rhythm and visual presentation become as important to him as his dealings with the actor. But sometimes he went too far. The failure of one production was attributed to the harsh full up open white lighting which was intended to reveal fully the inner meaning of the play intellectually rather than emotionally. Recent attempts to repeat this experiment have met with similar results.

It seems likely that he came full circle and towards the end of his career realised that the performances of trained actors in carefully considered settings, using traditional techniques were better than the free "release of the creative instinct" by emotional enthusiasts. How ironic it is that having come to terms with tradition and his old enemy Stanislavsky, he should die in a Moscow prison—probably murdered. Perhaps if Isadora Duncan had lived longer, she too might have come full circle, but she could hardly have influenced the theatre more than Meyerhold. It is a pity that this book does not communicate any charm or wit—they were certainly present in his work.

ROBERT ORNBO

"The Picture Palace" by Dennis Sharp, Hugh Evelyn, London. 224 pp illustrated. 75s.

The author has set himself an almost impossible task—to tell the story of the buildings of the cinema age in one book. To an *aficionado* of this very special form of architecture and décor to even attempt such an undertaking is equivalent to setting out to climb Everest in a pair of tennis shoes—and don't let any Himalayan specialists among TABS readers tell me this is the correct 1969 climbing gear!

The obvious comparison that must be made is with Hall's excellent American book *The Best Remaining Seats*. Probably the great strength of Ben Hall's history is that he selected the career of one master showman S. L. Rothafel—"Roxy" himself—as the central theme of this work. Dennis Sharp has started his story earlier—right at the earliest age of the cinema, has spread his net wider and has continued later—up to today in fact, and has made it far less personal.

He is strongest on the English provincial cinemas of the 20s and 30s, and there is a good deal of new material, including some really excellent interior photographs here. Unfortunately, the subject largely defeats him simply by its size and richness. After all this is a book that by its very title will appeal to the enthusiast who will require real detail. The type of reader I have in mind is a friend of mine who has in the entrance hall of his new house a section of that resplendent red, green black and gold carpet carrying the proud shield, with heraldic supporters, bearing the motto "P.C.T." I trust you will all instantly recollect these initials, famous as L.N.E.R. or P. & O., stand for Provincial Cinematograph Theatres. The subject is dealt with in far too general a manner for this type of enthusiast, while other readers may find fourteen pages of rather similar cinema photographs and plans for the Midlands in the late Thirties rather a hurdle. What makes this particular section even more extraordinary is that the text actually criticises architects' offices that operated on the conveyor belt principle, while the accompanying photographs and plans only confirm that it is unnecessary to drain a goblet of Algerian *vin ordinaire* to know its quality—one example of this type of architects' work would have been enough. Real enthusiasm for the subject only appears as fitfully as "truant beams of sunlight filtering through the Roman pergola"—I quote from Mr. Sharp's reprinting of the programme notes of the Regal, Marble Arch. And Mr. Sharp even calls this deathless phrase "ridiculous". I fear this judgment finally condemns him as a man who could not really do justice to his subject.

However, there are interesting facts and new photos, and this book may well introduce people to the entirely fascinating mixture of architecture, art, décor, furnishing, light, movement and sound that links the early Super Cinema with the latest "layer-cake triple"!

RICHARD HARRIS

STOP PRESS

We have been working in North America as Strand Electric since 1959 from Toronto and for the last four years from Minneapolis as well.

Rank Strand Electric have recently acquired Century Lighting of America. Century have been just as much part of the U.S. theatre scene as Strand in the U.K. Their trade name 'Lekolite' has gone into the language and it is commonplace in the theatre there to ask for a 'Leko' rather than for a 'spotlight.'

In the United States the new company will be Century Strand Inc. and the Canadian company will be Strand Century Limited. It is too early yet to detail "What's in it for the customer?" but it is hoped that our next issue may be able to give more information. We have also asked Ed Kook, who founded and ran Century Lighting until he handed over to the Lighting Corporation of America a few years ago, to write an article on its history. Incidentally this will not be the first time he has written for "TABS".