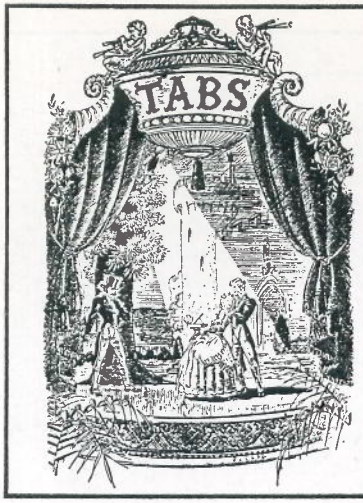

TABS

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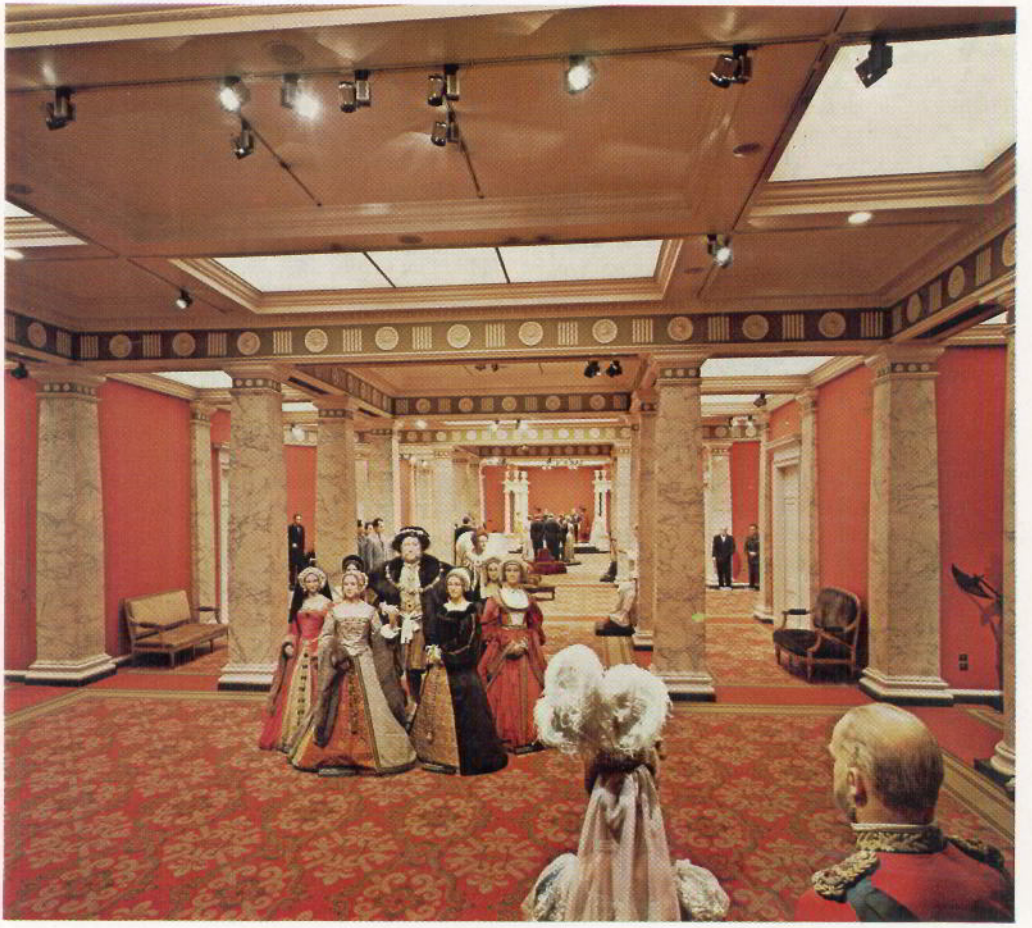

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Cover Picture: Madame Tussaud's Waxworks, London.

The Grand Hall lit with Rank Strand Minispots by Charles Bristow. Several hundred are in fact used here and in Tussaud's Amsterdam exhibition. *(See also "Wax lights" page 82).*

Over the Styx

At Great Haywood is a 14-arch bridge built by the Earls of Essex as a short cut to the hunt on Cannock Chase, where not only wolves but wild boar roamed. On this bridge, still called Essex Bridge, are recesses where the horseless humble folk could take refuge while the nobility rode by—or so the guide book tells us.

When one walks over, it is certainly narrow—a one-horse bridge if ever there was one—those recesses represent a thoughtful provision. After all in France, if Dickens is to be believed, the Aristos rode down the peasants in their path.

It is obvious we have in Great Haywood an early parallel with present-day planning. All the characteristics are there. The bridge owes its origin solely to the solution of a traffic problem. It is there to enable the private car of the time—the horse—to get to the other side of the river. Furthermore, not just one horse but lots of them nose to tail. The hunt commuted across the bridge in a rush-minute and back again some hours later, the day's work done—no question of spreading the peak traffic. There was also a parking problem—what to do with his *villeins*. This his architect, working strictly to brief, solved in a neat and economical way. The result is an efficient single lane highway with twenty-eight one-man lay-bys or parking lots. Indeed, more could squeeze themselves into the recesses if necessity arose, and many a Staffordshire family may owe its fourteenth century foundation to a rude bucolic encounter in the fourteenth lay-by.

We ourselves see this bridge as weathered by the centuries with lichens all over, and on the banks verdant foliage and those other things nature gets up to, given time. Ah! we say wisely, they knew how to build lovely things in the good old days. But what did the locals who lived and worked around here declare at night in their ale houses, muttering darkly into tankards filled with and emptied of heady brews the like of which we wot not of in our own dilute days?

As the liquor flowed in and out, oaths could have been heard in rising controversy—and "Odds Bodikins" with other dread threats be-rent the fusty air. Some would have thought the Great House (Castle?) could do no wrong. Others would have resented the brand new bridge redevelopment as a monstrosity in fair-faced stone, slashing across river and countryside with huge raw earthworks ox-dozed at each end. In an age which liked to have its cathedral and church walls painted all the psychedelic colours of the rainbow together with carvings all over the place, the bridge must have seemed harsh and utilitarian. As for the Earl of Essex who built it, and his friends—they never saw it as anything but a private convenience as they speeded across it on their way. It was the others, all the rest, who had to look at it.

So what, to draw our moral, are the essentials of any planning for human happiness, be it up the Garden or round the Circus? Maybe they are: Can it weather well, how long before it does and if it does was it really necessary? Above all, who is supposed to like it—the *moderato* group with their *lento* movement or the *agitato strepitoso con moto* lot?

Exodus

By the time this issue of TABS is published the Head Office of Rank Strand Electric will no longer be in Covent Garden. Since our Head Office has in fact been in that area for fifty-eight years this might appear at first to be a cause for lamentation or at least the shedding of a silent tear. Before indulging ourselves in this way we should consider what the expression "head office" covers today and it has to be admitted that nowadays it is largely an "Admin." function.

Once upon a time in our Garrick Street and Floral Street days head office meant quite literally everything—factory, sales and hire stores and all the rest. Now it

means accountants—lots of them and many kinds, filling up forms and returns, making out bills and sometimes even paying them. There are other clerical activities involving masses of paper transactions internal and external—for example providing customers with quotations and setting in motion the paper machinery which will cause their orders to be fulfilled with, we hope, some degree of expedition. None of these activities need to occupy valuable space in the centre of theatreland and we only wish more firms would follow our example and exodus to their equivalent of Brentford, Kennington, Kirkcaldy and the other locations we at Rank Strand Electric have found appropriate.

What remains? Well, the bit you usually all come to see when you have to come to Covent Garden. This consists of the Showroom and the Theatre from which practical advice, demonstration, entertainment and instruction will be purveyed just like they have always been. Indeed we hope to improve the service by holding better stocks of Cinemoid, special lamps and so forth.

By the way the TABS editorial office remains at Covent Garden and curiously enough it will be your Editor's job to double as the manager of "Your friendly Rank Strand Electric Covent Garden Branch".

Elizabeth of Stratford

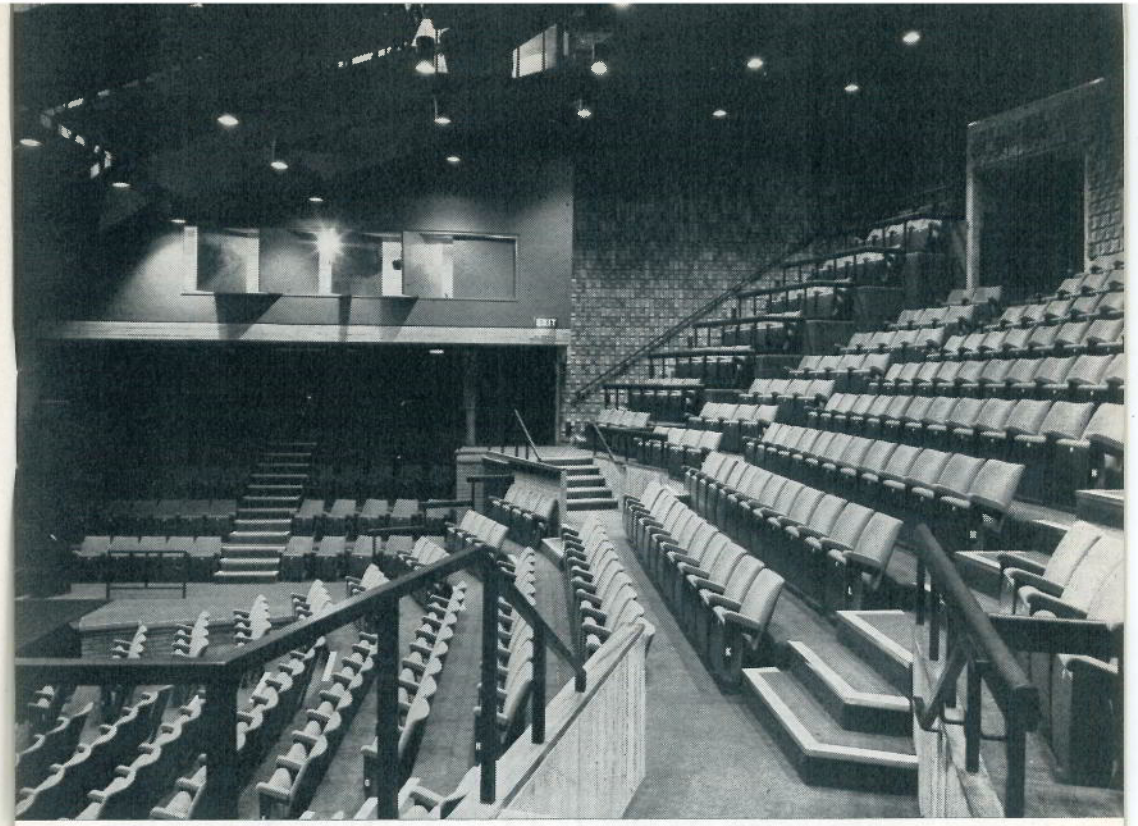
The death of Elizabeth Scott the architect cannot be allowed to pass unnoticed in our pages. She it was who in 1927 won the competition for what was to open in 1932 as the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon. Although the auditorium has undergone considerable change in the course of the intervening forty years the rest of the building is still identifiably the theatre that she designed. It is the brick entrance foyer with its box office of stainless steel, the circular staircase and above all the exterior which tells us over the years that it is the *same theatre* which we visit each time. This quality of permanence which good architecture represents is an essential backcloth before which the productions of yesterday, today and tomorrow are played. In the thirties it was attacked in the press as resembling a brick factory and it is true that the original intention was that it should be stone faced; nevertheless the theatre on its splendid site soon "belonged" and now in maturity, with Holy Trinity church in the background, it *is* Shakespeare's Stratford and the best-known theatre in the world.

Wax lights and Memories

Two new publications are now available. One of these under the crisp title of *Dimmer Memory Lighting Control Systems* deals with the three types of system at present made by Rank Strand for this purpose. The A4 booklet is illustrated in full colour and the systems are the inexpensive Memocard just installed in the Kings Theatre, Edinburgh, System MSR, the spruce up-to-date successor to IDM, in the Rotterdamse Schouwburg and System DDM whose lovable computer is now being deployed in Australia and the United States, in addition (as TABS readers will well know) to the Royal Shakespeare Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

The world-wide dispersal of Rank Strand Memory Systems is well shown by the multilingual and exciting names which constitute the cover design.

The second booklet *Minispots* deals with the new range which returns to the market backed up by Tungsten Halogen lamps of 2,000 hour life. It is these Minispots that are illustrated on our front cover as the lighting for Madame Tussaud's. The Minispots are in fact attractive miniaturised versions of profile and Fresnel spots. They really are small—so small that they are reproduced full size on the pages of the A4 brochure.



Harlow Playhouse.

Adaptability in Essex

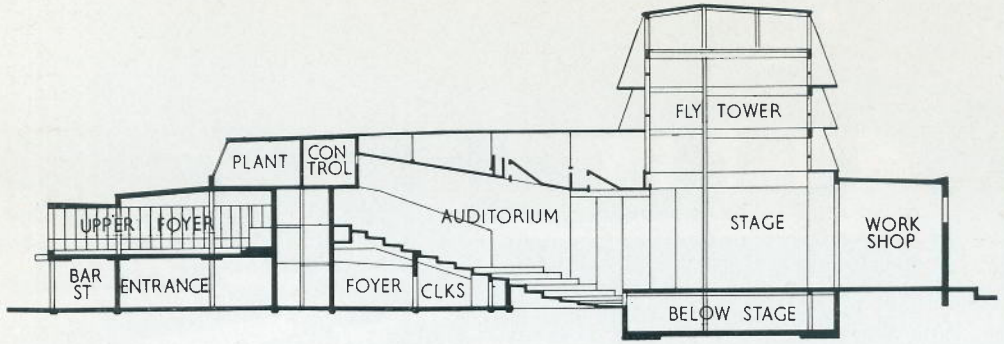
Francis Reid

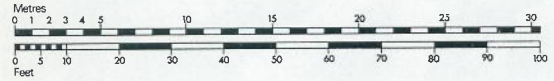
The Association of British Theatre Technicians burst into life some ten years ago with an international conference on *Adaptable Theatres;* since then it has resolutely turned its back on adaptability and declared firmly, "One theatre form, one building!". This attitude is an understandable reaction to the pre-ABTT civic hall with flat floor and token stage and to the rumoured goings-on in some American University drama studios. (On a personal note I regret to say that the ABTT seems to stand in some distaste of my own favourite theatre form—the mechanised Stadttheater complex which makes me and my children wish that Norwich was, theatrically speaking, in Germany.)

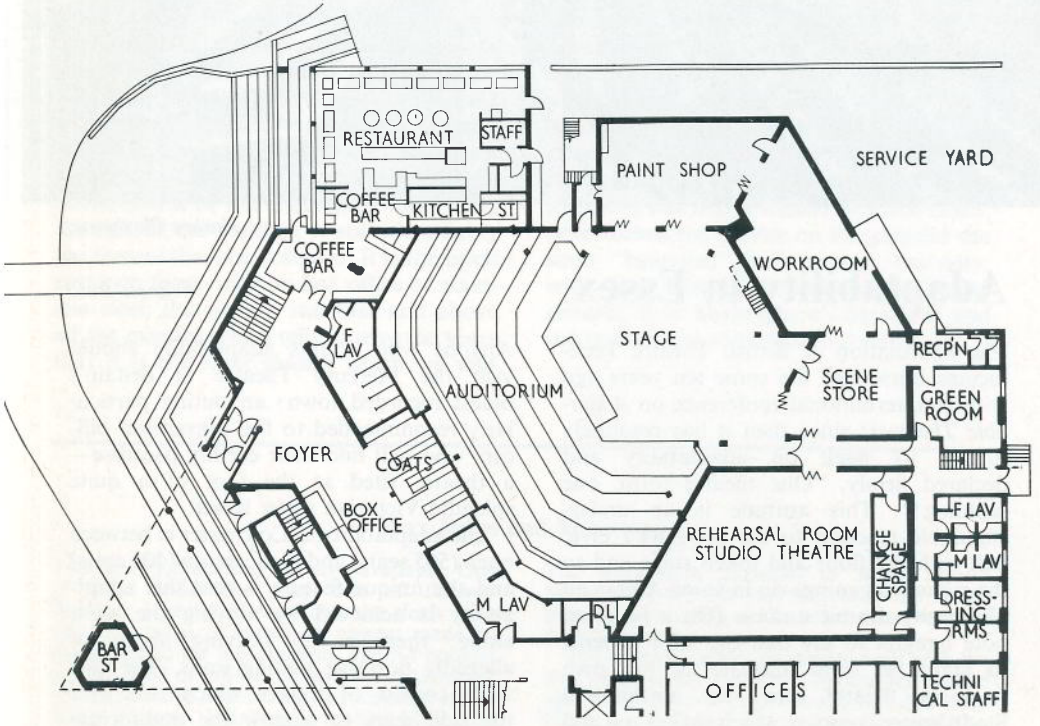
However Colchester has built an adaptable theatre (see page 86) and it works. Anyone who doubts adaptability should visit the Mercury Theatre in Britain's oldest recorded town; an outing particularly recommended to fire prevention officers who will find their earthly paradise—a theatre sited at the foot of a quite splendid Victorian water tower.

The adaptability at Colchester is between open (505 seats) and proscenium (409 seats) and the unique feature is that this adaptability is achieved by moving the walls alone; there is no heaving about of allegedly portable seating units. The side walls consist of towers which ride *over* the side seats to narrow the auditorium focus to a proscenium shape when required.

These towers carry lighting equipment and the facia panels can be either removed







Colchester Mercury Theatre plan and section. Opposite plan showing adjustable periaktoi walls.
Architects: Norman Downey Associates.
Theatre Consultants: Christopher Morley and Theatre Projects Consultants Ltd.

or angled to form conventional lighting slots. The towers adjacent to the stage can support scenery and provide entrances or balconies. For open stage work the colour and texture of the tower facias is continued around both stage and auditorium to enclose audience and players in a common environment. Indeed all these panels are replaceable and so the entire decor of both stage and auditorium *could* be changed to suit a particular production.

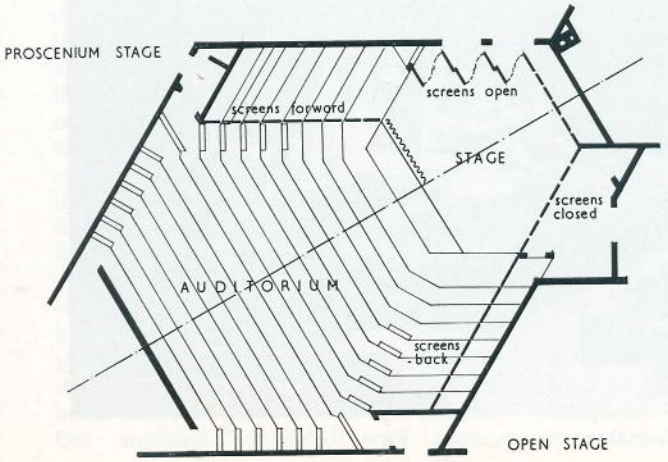
This is unlikely to happen at Colchester however, for the whole project has about it a welcome (if unusual) air of financial sanity. In planning the move from their previous home of some thirty-five years (a primitively converted art gallery) the law according to Parkinson has been thoroughly excluded. It is somewhat unusual in these times to find a theatre Director declare, "*The size of the stage an all other accommodation had to stem from the number of staff who could be afforded*", and "*The hexagonal stage plan was chosen partly for its aesthetic and partly for economy; a rectangular open stage forty feet wide would have been expensive to dress scenically and the upstage ways off at the sides seem a long march for actors*".

In its proscenium form the opening is 29 feet—again a dimension which achieves an economic aesthetic without resort to compromise. There is a grid which has provision for 15 counterweight sets (with 5 installed) which can spot anywhere. The front 5 feet of the stage remove to form an orchestra pit (said to be for eight to ten players but which, with careful organisation of rostra in the understage area, would probably be capable of holding more).

Workshop accommodation is limited, storage virtually non-existent and the site provides little possibility for future expansion. This is not a problem as long as the Mercury continues its present policy of three-weekly "rep" but would make for difficulties in any future change to repertoire.

Economics have unfortunately reduced the lighting control to a System SP (80 ways on the desk, 60 dimmers so far installed). Just as I cannot see the need for an expensive memory system in anything but the grandest theatres (national theatres with international aspirations) I cannot see how in a building of the stature of the Mercury, lighting can be done on any system simpler than a Threeset.

I know that budgets are tight and I must therefore confess that I am becoming just a little bit dismayed at the escalation in grandeur and cost of working-light systems and their related magnificent control panels; the first memory-working-light-control-panel cannot now be far away! As a consultant I would not dare voice this protest for fear of incurring the wrath of theatre workers condemned to a Dickensian gloom, but as a round-the-clock stage labourer I am personally quite happy with a handful of lamps or tubes controlled from a couple of odd switches on the wall.



Another cost area in lighting which diverts electrical money away from production lighting to less essentials arises from what is to me the too rigid application of electrical regulations to a theatre context for which they have not been specifically drawn up. Take for example the standard but costly provision of switching and sub-fusing of 25-amp

outlets to an alternative four 15-amp outlets *in the same box*. Yet such a permanent 15-amp outlet on the wall frequently feeds several lanterns via cable splitters! To me it all seems an area of illogical expense.

But back to Colchester! The important fact about the lighting is that provision has been made for lanterns in the right places. With three ceiling bridges and side walls literally consisting of lighting positions, when you stand on stage and look in any direction that you would wish to find a light source—Wow! there it is.

The Mercury has the now obligatory built-in Studio Theatre. I feel just a slight unease that so many of our new theatre studios are under the wing of our civic theatres. Healthier perhaps for the future if a town's experimental theatre were separate. I realise the advantages of a balanced civic theatrical diet but in theatre as elsewhere it is the reaction against the established order that pushes the art forward. Difficult if the action and reaction are under the same managerial umbrella—but a churlish thought when the studio is as good as the Colchester one: just a nice high, galleried space with no permanent features other than a decent lighting grid and a Mini-2 desk with a long, long cable.

All in all, I feel that Colchester has scored a bullseye. They have built themselves a theatre where they can give an openstage treatment to the many many pieces that profit from such a canvas; but when I went to the Mercury to see *Present Laughter* I was pleased to find that the walls had taken up a position to focus my attention on the scale of the comedy. For Nöel Coward is surely precisely the sort of piece that does not work when set in an island defined by light—within dark acres through which the actors must stride to enter.

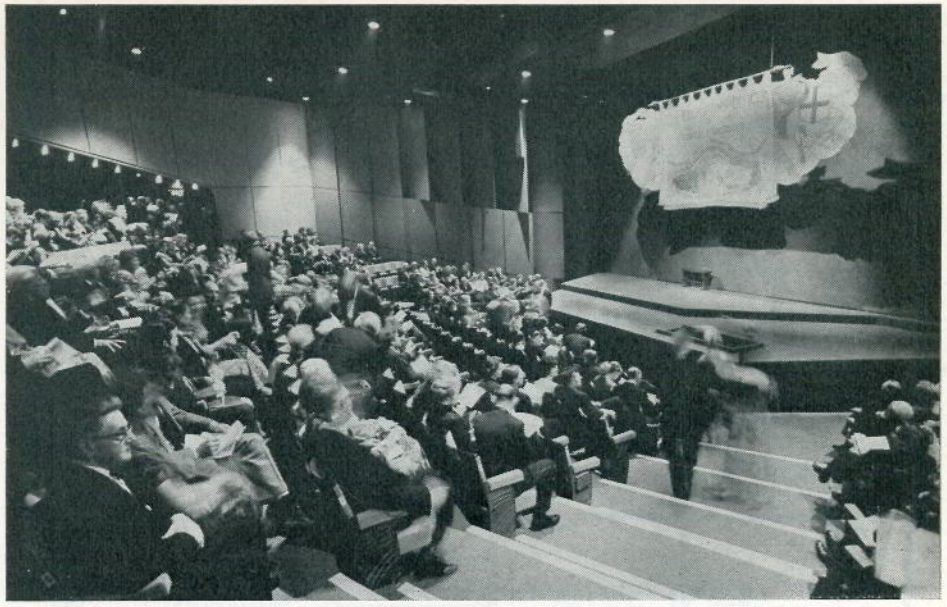
Colchester has certainly achieved adaptability but on entering the Harlow Playhouse, I had an immediate but persistently uncomfortable impression that this other new Essex theatre has had adaptability thrust upon it.

When you sit in the Mercury at a proscenium performance, you would not guess that it was an adaptable theatre unless perhaps you were a theatre technician. At Harlow (see photograph page 83) the empty side seating blocks remind you that the Playhouse adapts by physically removing the thrust stage and substituting rows of seating or an orchestra pit. By doing this Harlow gains an extra degree of thrust in wrapping more of the audience around the stage sides. Or does it? For those of the audience close to the stage it certainly thrusts more but for the majority, who sit facing the stage in conventional rows, I suspect that the general feeling of thrust is no greater than at Colchester. Seating at Harlow is 436 in the proscenium form and 424 in the thrust.

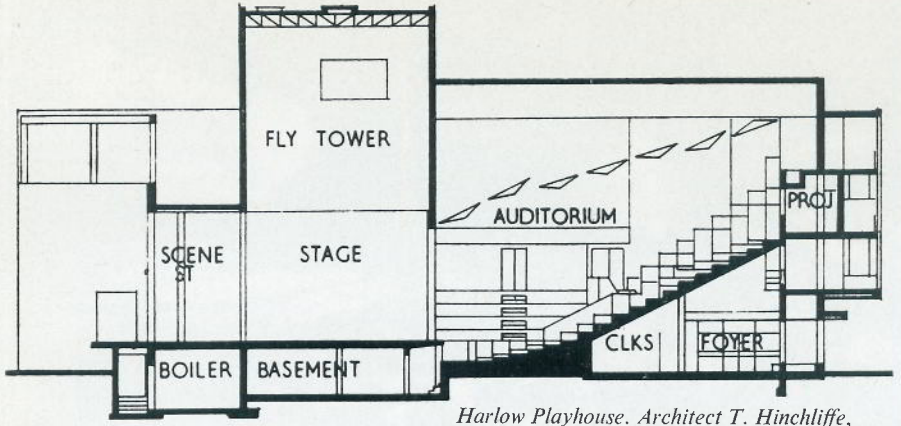
As a theatregoer, Harlow appeals to me enormously, not because of its auditorium but because of its programme. I will now stand up to be counted (if not actually shot): For me most straight plays work better on Television than in the Theatre. But anything connected with music, however remotely—be it opera, musical play, music hall, pantomime, or whatever—is a disaster on the box and requires the dimension of live theatre. There! Harlow's programme is full of the widest possible range of goodies; it is in effect an Arts Centre but has the wisdom not to call itself by that pretentious title.

The stage area is well laid-out for the job in hand: generous wing space, grid, docks, workshop, paint frame, etc. Good auditorium bridges, although the side seating blocks restrict side FOH lighting from each side to a single gallery. The proscenium moves on and off stage between narrow limits which appear to be tied to sight lines rather than production requirements and it is a pity that this proscenium does not carry lighting units on its travels. Lighting control is again by SP when it should be at least a Threeset if not a Lightset (strange that the studio should have an SP 30 when a Mini-2 18 would be adequate). The studio theatre is interesting if not appealing: a sort of ballet-rehearsal

Colchester Mercury Theatre—The Caretaker.



Colchester Mercury Theatre—The Recruiting Officer.



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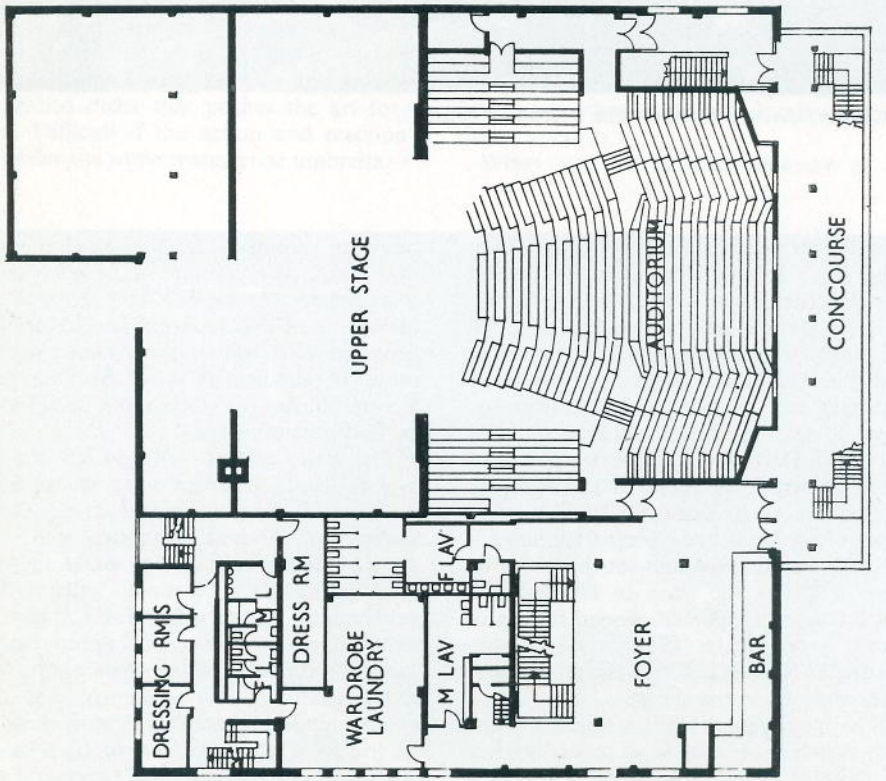
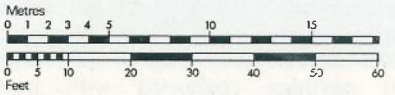
Harlow Playhouse. Architect T. Hinchliffe, Harlow District Council. Consultant—Lighting and Electrical—Peter Jay and Partners.



First floor plan



room with low ceiling from which seating units can be lowered on winches.

All good efficient planning; it's just that the Romantic in me rebels against such a functional auditorium. But as theatregoer (by far my favourite job in the theatre) I warm to all the splendid audience facilities in both these theatres: bars, restaurants (don't miss the Lasagne in Colchester), loos, exhibition areas are all a vast improvement on the gallery stairs of my youth.

Colchester Mercury Theatre

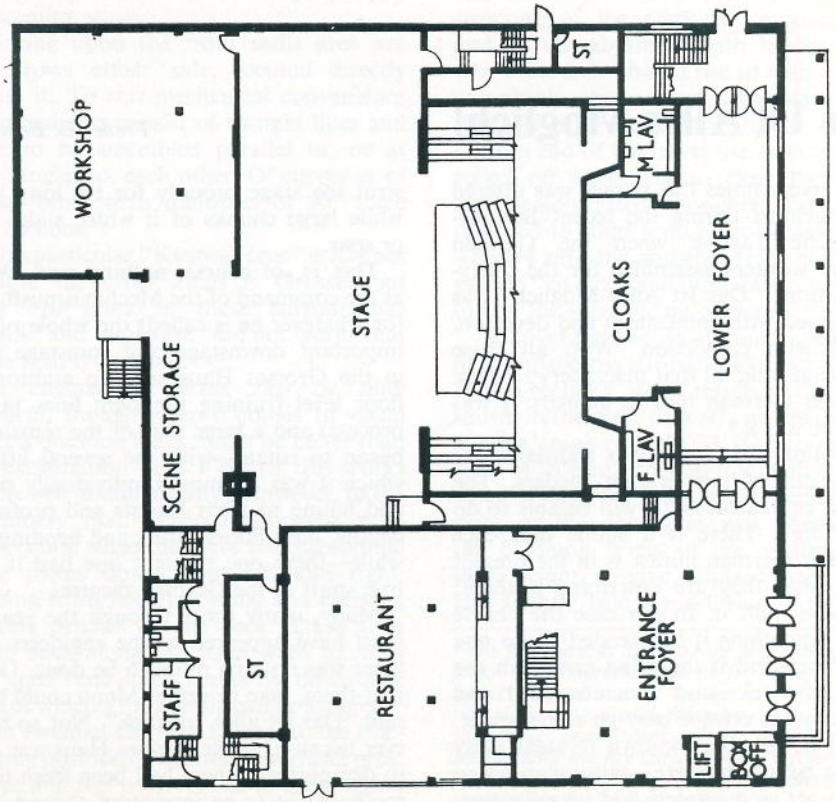
Stage lighting circuits:

F.O.H. Bridges	18
Towers	8
STAGE	12
FLYS	14
DIPS	8
CONTROL SP/80/3-preset	
DIMMERS 56 × 2kW	
4 × 5kW	
Changeover circuits	20

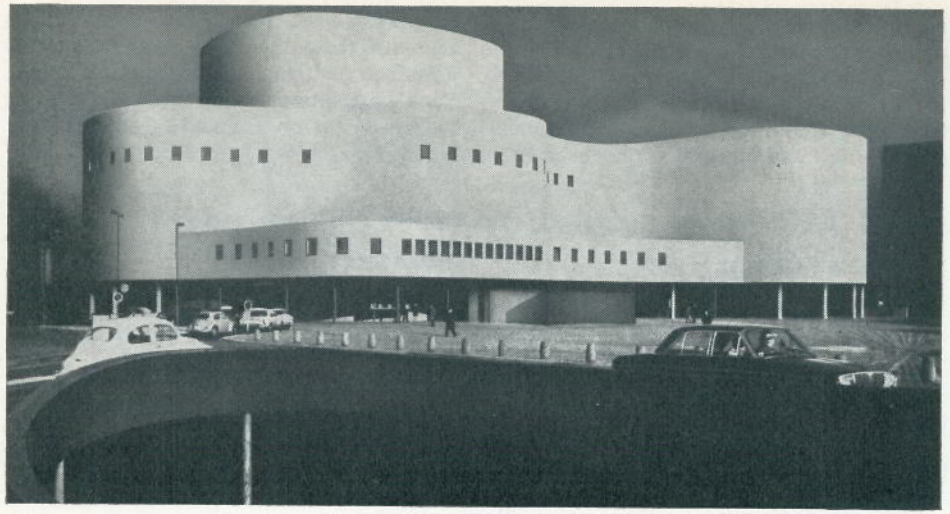
Harlow Playhouse

Stage lighting circuits:

F.O.H.	17
PERCHES	10
STAGE	36
DIPS	17
CONTROL SP/80/3-preset	
DIMMERS 56 × 2kW	
4 × 5kW	



Ground floor plan



Das Ist Alles Möglich!

Frederick Bentham

Many many times this phrase was uttered at Düsseldorf during the recent Bühnentechnische Tagung when the German Theatre workers assembled for the thirty-eighth time. "Das Ist Alles Möglich" was proclaimed with enthusiasm and devotion, indeed with conviction. With all these technicians and all that machinery to back the great German theatre industry it was true—or was it?

It is time the phrase was translated for the benefit of less erudite readers. The English equivalent is "It will be able to do everything". There is a subtle difference here. The German phrase is in the present tense; what they are describing is there; they have built it. In our case the phrase covers something it is intended to do one day. When and if the thing arrives in the shape of bricks and concrete, steel and electricity the creator may go rather quiet. In fact he has been known to steal away months before the birth—putting an ocean or two between himself and his offspring. Not so in Germany: there he remains to strut the stage proudly for his long hour while large chunks of it whirl, slide, sink or soar.

This is, of course, nothing new. When at the command of the Mechanismusführer (or whatever he is called) the whole of the important downstage and forestage area in the Grosses Haus sank to auditorium floor level (ruining the sight lines in the process) and a large part of the remainder began to rotate—with the several lifts of which it was composed individually rising and falling to great heights and profound depths, their floors tilting and bending the while—there one thought one had it, the true spirit of the German theatre!

Many, many times through the years it must have appeared to the engineers that there was nothing more to be done. Of all that-there, man or rather Mann could have said "Das ist alles möglich". Not so however because, as the Kleines Haus was able to demonstrate, there had been fresh fields mechanically to be conquered—to wit—the auditorium. This is a studio. The four walls alone represent the work of the architect—for the rest the technicians claim responsibility. Our old German friends—the rolling stages, lifts, podiums, and whatnot are here deployed for the benefit of—or at any rate to move—the audience.

The form of the Kleines Haus in the Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus is not unlike that of George Izenour's Loeb Theatre, Harvard of imperishable memory. There in 1961 he built what seemed to some an aweful warning. It was not "contained" but ravaged America and—in more or less the same "adaptable" shape—has turned up elsewhere. Now here it is in Düsseldorf. A large number of the rear seats, in the present case eleven rows, are fixed to face a mechanical playground comprising the front stalls area of seven rows and the end stage itself. This latter has some pretensions to being a fully-equipped proscenium stage.

Gazing upon the front stalls area are four rows either side, focused directly across it. To suit mechanical convenience all ingredients consist of straight lines and have to be assembled parallel to, or at right angles to, each other. Of curves or of angles other than multiples of 90° there can be none.

This particular "Kleines Haus" is Kleines because the other Haus is Grosses but with 320 seats in these surroundings "small" and "intimate" are not words that come readily to mind.

In engineering terms *Das ist alles möglich!*, though when it comes to visual effect a question mark might be better than the exclamation (and I gather this works just as well grammatically). However, to the machinery first. When functioning as a proscenium stage there are two substantial wing pieces down front left and right, running from floor to ceiling and carrying lighting perches on the back. These then hinge back along the stage walls to form an "open" end stage, across the downstage edge of which a fire curtain can be lowered.*

An essential German adjunct to the side-lighting positions is the usual overhead pros. bridge and this is motorised to drop in and out. In the dropped-in position it could be used to light the stage when the front stalls are replaced by stage. There is a motorised pros. border which conceals the lighting from view and roughly speaking both this theatre and the other one tend to assume concealment of the lanterns—not always very successfully. Over the front stalls area there is a square formation of bridges which is again motorised to drop in and out —considerable rise and fall being provided. The lanterns on the bridges are quite enormous. It is charitable to assume that they are old ones re-used from somewhere in order to save money. Surely they don't still make them as big as that—even in Germany.

All seats are stepped—in the permanent rows with a nice riser but in the movable ones quite inadequately. At the touch of a button the seven front-stalls rows rise up to such a height that the fixed seats behind and the side seats get a splendid view of the structure of the platform carrying them and of the abysmal depth below. Quite why these seats should rise so high remains completely obscure—as is the stage when they have! Presumably at the extreme bottom end of the travel the seats could be rolled off altogether to clear the decks. As demonstrated however they were returned to stage level to be detached and wheeled off—the audience-right half being pushed "en bloc" and turned for repositioning on the stage facing outwards.

To cover the niceties of shunting involved in the space the left-hand bloc was moved as two sections. What results is the layout shown in the plan, page 93; we are left with a large stage roughly 33 ft. square. This can, of course, do everything that it did when it had the seats on it, seeking the skies or the depths at will. Presumably the common levels of use would be at table height, to give a raised stage effect, and slightly below auditorium floor level,

**The fire curtain in this case is made of fibreglass. This material has at its bottom edge a metal channel section acting as a trough. As this rises the material folds into it in a manner somewhat reminiscent of a venetian blind. Incidentally the fire curtain in the Grosses Haus is provided with some means (not specified) of sensing where the floor beneath it is, to accommodate itself to the varying positions of the lifts.*

to give the proper sunken theatre-in-the-round effect. This latter would make lighting much easier but to see the stage properly would be difficult due to the poor rake of the movable seating. It was claimed, probably with justification, that lights could be put anywhere and the void of the roof above did seem to provide a lot of positions—all accessible from gantries. Also hovering way up there was a large glass-fronted aquarium for the lighting and other controls.

A curious feature in this in-the-round position is the large gaps between the seats on the stage and the side seats—as the plan shows. These are necessary in order to afford the audience access in this arrangement. It was said that the place could be changed from end-stage to in-the-round during the Interval and we saw this done.

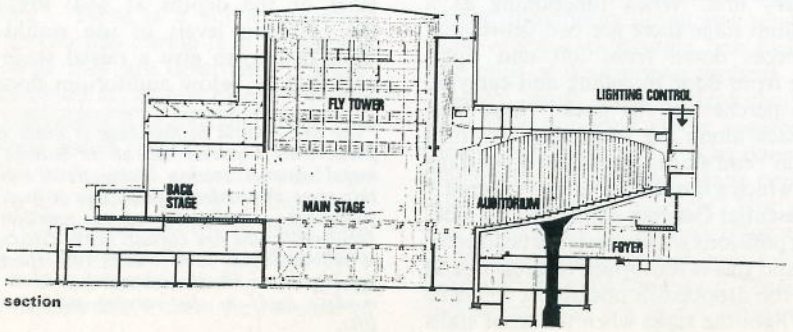
Quite what you do when you come back and find that your seat is no longer where it was remains a puzzle. It is emotionally disturbing in an orthodox theatre when in the rush back from the bar one discovers that someone else has accidentally taken one's seat. Imagine the horror of sneaking back after the lights have been lowered to find oneself in an unrecognisable theatre. Perhaps there should be a Transit Lounge where briefing of those located in the mobile areas could take place.

Mind you, we cannot criticise Düsseldorf alone in this for we hear of the intent to interval-spin the auditorium in our own Winter Garden Theatre in Drury Lane. The Winter Garden of course rotates rather than shunts its audience and has already been described in TABS.*

At Düsseldorf there was a model of a quadruple revolving auditorium. It consists of a fan-shaped front area of fixed seating confronting a stage while the encompassing rear wall of the auditorium is made up of four revolving cylinders. Each of these cylinders contains 200 seats and can either face away from the main stage and commune with itself as a lecture theatre or turn round at a touch of one to four buttons (according to taste) to join in the activity on the main stage thus adding a further 800 in increments of 200. This one gazed at—or this one did—and began to say "Aha! All very well on a model but . . .". Then I became conscious that the walls of the stand formed a large photo-montage implying that the place had been built! Sure enough it has and there are several installations large and small in the United States no doubt rating as two, three or four cylinder auditoriums.

To return to the Düsseldorf Kleines Haus there is no doubt that mechanically the place works but on an occasion such as this Technical Conference one was looking at machinery all the time. There was no chance to get the feel of the place when inhabited by actors—nor would their audience be quite the same as the plurality of engineers here present—filling the place to the rim.

*TABS Vol. 28 No. 2



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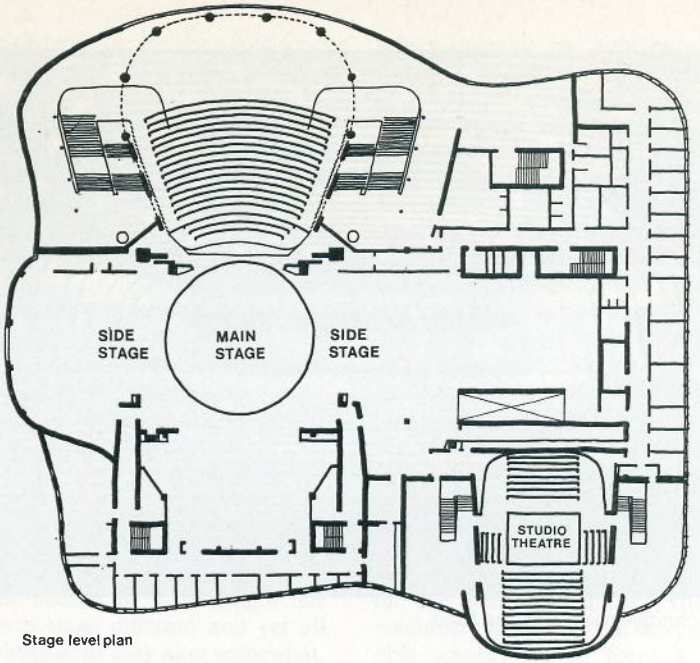
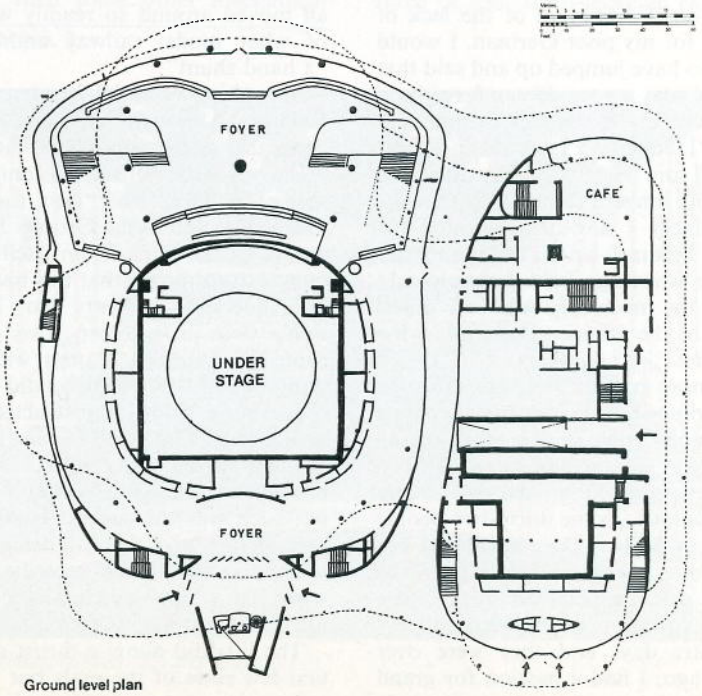
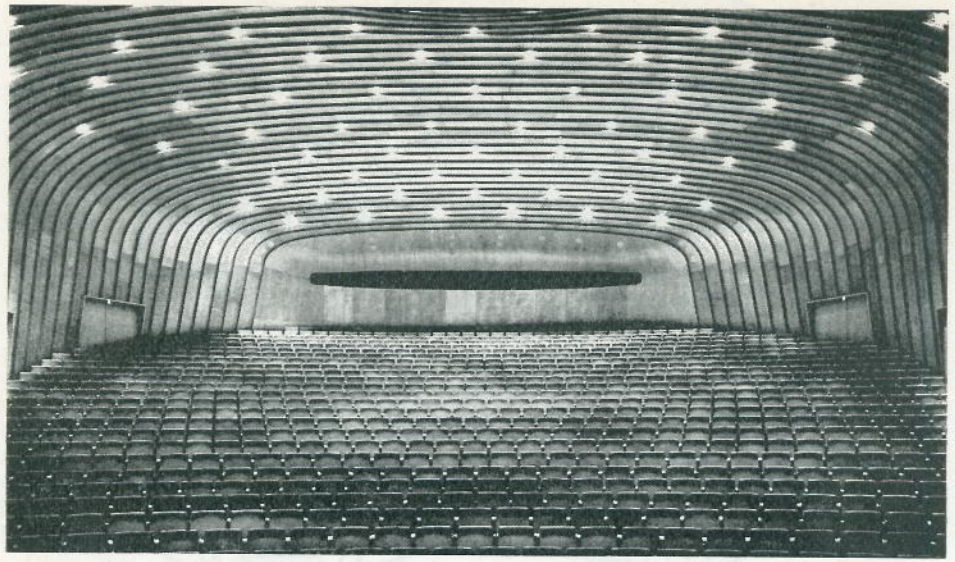


Stage level plan

The Schauspielhaus, Düsseldorf. Ground and stage level plans. Note location and arrangement of Studio Theatre. Architects: Bernhard H. Pfau. Consultant—Stage technical equipment: Willi Ehle.



Ground level plan



Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus: Grosses Haus.

At question time one engineer got up to say that in Switzerland they would not be allowed to do this because of the lack of safety. Alas for my poor German, I would have loved to have jumped up and said that "In England alas we would not have been allowed to because of the lack of money!" muttering "I hope" as I sat down—for I am not at all sure that this money discipline is with us any longer. The truth is that the more machinery I saw demonstrated the unhappier I became—and it did not matter whether the whirrings (and I should add that in fact the machinery was very quiet) took place in the Kleines Haus or in the Grosses Haus.

We all know grand things are expected in Opera Houses but the settings for *Faust* we saw demonstrated on the stage of the latter were for Goethe not Gounod. The much scenery was large and the many changes ingenious—some thirty-two people being used as well as the machinery, but whether it was the poor lumière or the absence of cast (present on a son tape only) the evocation was always of my model theatre days and they were over forty years ago. I had a passion for grand flights of stairs, large chunks of three-dimensional scenery, inclined planes and all moved around so readily with the aid of what model railway enthusiasts call "a hand shunt".

Something essential in atmosphere was lacking. Although all the lights were concealed as far as possible, the result was neither realistic nor impressionistic—it was scenic. A look back into the past was justified as well in the Grosses Haus by the nature of the auditorium itself. It seemed quite extraordinary that this had only been built a couple of years ago. There on a single floor in eighteen rows of uninterrupted continental seating with excellent sight lines 1,038 people could sit directly confronting with unobstructed vision a proscenium 15m wide by 8m high. Many changes could take place around the proscenium line with lifts and all the rest but such was the camera bellows style of architecture and the conformation of the seats, that there could never be any getting away from the looking-at notion. The place was just like a cinema.

The lifts did allow a thrust out into the first few rows of the seats but there could be no sense of embrace by the audience—the effect would be wholly one of centre seats replaced by a chunk of obstreperous stage. Nothing seemed to have a human scale and it was not with surprise that one read (or rather had read for one) in the special Conference Number of *Die Bühnengenossenschaft 7/8* of a "Mass Redundancy Scandal" and "Our theatre system in a crisis".

I have become very fond of late of my thesis* that "*lighting begat lighting and equipment begat equipment and they are unlikely to fertilise one another. But unlikely though this is, it is even more improbable that lighting exists to serve the play or the audience—if that is what or who the play is there for. Most developments seem to exist as a means of gratifying those that use them*" and there can be no doubt that what we see in Germany is this in an extreme form. Decade after decade of large stages has gone by—each stage different and yet all the same. Dimensions may alter somewhat, the arrangement at stage level may not be able always to conform to the left stage, right stage, rear stage cruciform formula but if not, then some other mechanical device would be substituted—like the colossal revolve at Frankfurt or the deep-sinking, double-decked lifts at Hamburg and elsewhere. Of course such things have their uses when playing repertoire and it is nice to get rid of the set rehearsed today and bring it back tomorrow without the flogging of scenery on to trucks that goes on in Floral Street outside our own Covent Garden. There, incidentally, intervals may have to be long and the first-act scenery may even have to leave the theatre before the second act can get on.

These things the mechanical stage is designed to circumvent; it also facilitates use of that stage both for production turn-over and as a fluid playing area. But it would be interesting to know how often the full facilities are used. Unusually for Germany the scenery for this particular theatre is neither constructed nor painted on the premises. In any case, whether machinery is used in the service of change-able scenery or to form a changeable auditorium, it seems to me that what I wrote in 1966 still applies, namely you "grind and torture the auditorium into three or four strait-jacketed caricatures of

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Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus: Kleines Haus.

supposed theatres of the past and future".†

The Kleines Haus in Düsseldorf was not a studio theatre. Liven it up as you may (and we have a photograph of it with a lot of balloons hung up) it is unlikely to rise; machinery makes a rotten leaven. Nor can I imagine that such an architectural monument—and this one is particularly grim—will lure the youth in from outside. For all its peculiar shape it is still Grandpa's theatre. True, Grandpa could never have built it that way—there is a shining tour de concrete force in the shape of a tree holding up the entire auditorium—but it is his theatre nevertheless.

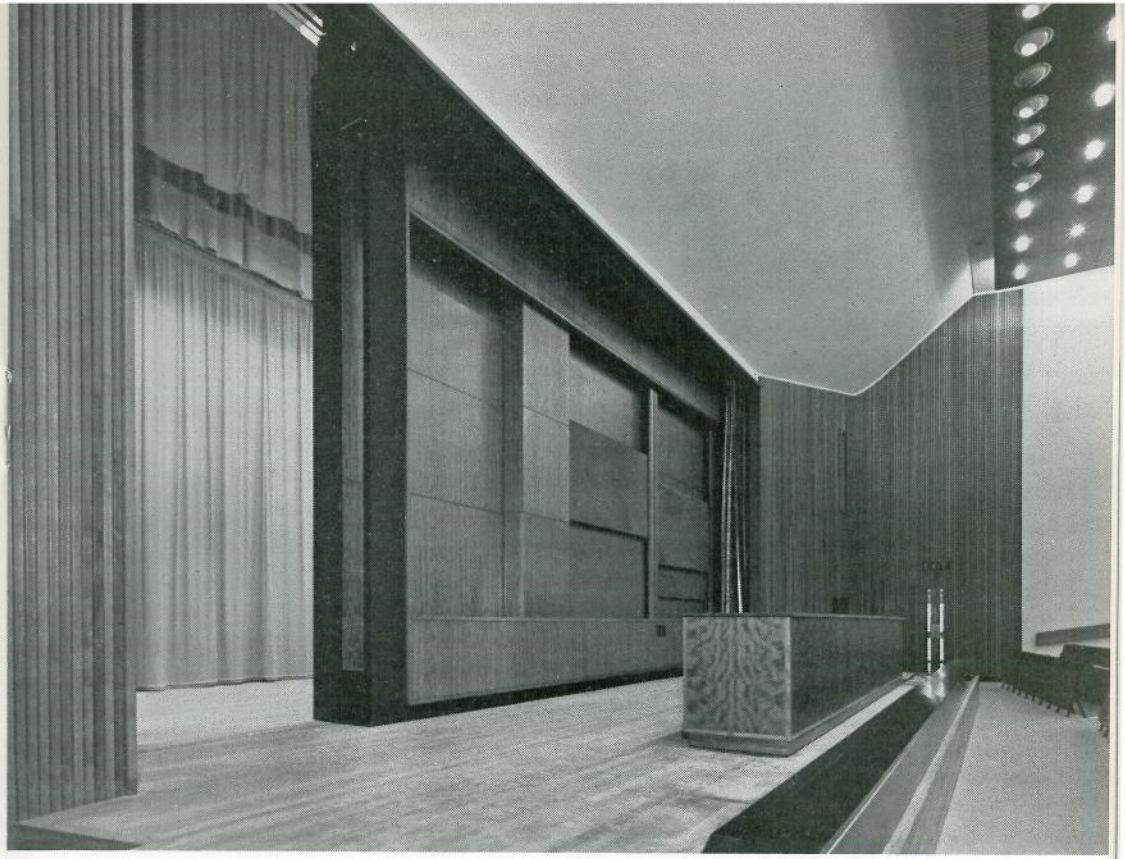
Obverse of the ticket for an exhibition in the State Museum, Cologne, with an exhortation that "one should go to the theatre."

Around this concrete tree for the benefit of the visiting technicians were displayed the kind of wares that appeal to technicians. There were stands with lighting controls—memory or plain—lots of luminaires, Scheinwerfers or lanterns to taste, giant cheeses (which turned out to be nylon rollers for stages) and even an excruciating display of—wait for it—Colour Music on the high intensity "Lazer Projektion Apparat". Thank God it was the Germans themselves that were murdering Johann Sebastian Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D Minor* in this manner.

All the famous firms, including the one I willingly represent, were there. Seated upon a giant's foot made in some polyconcrete and gazing at the sunlight in the lovely gardens outside the theatre (yes they even had summer sunlight!) well could one join in the chorus "Das Ist Alles Möglich!" adding once again the silent prayer—"In England we would not have the money".

†*Theatre Design & Technology* No. 7

Düsseldorf Schauspielhaus: Underneath the spreading concrete tree.



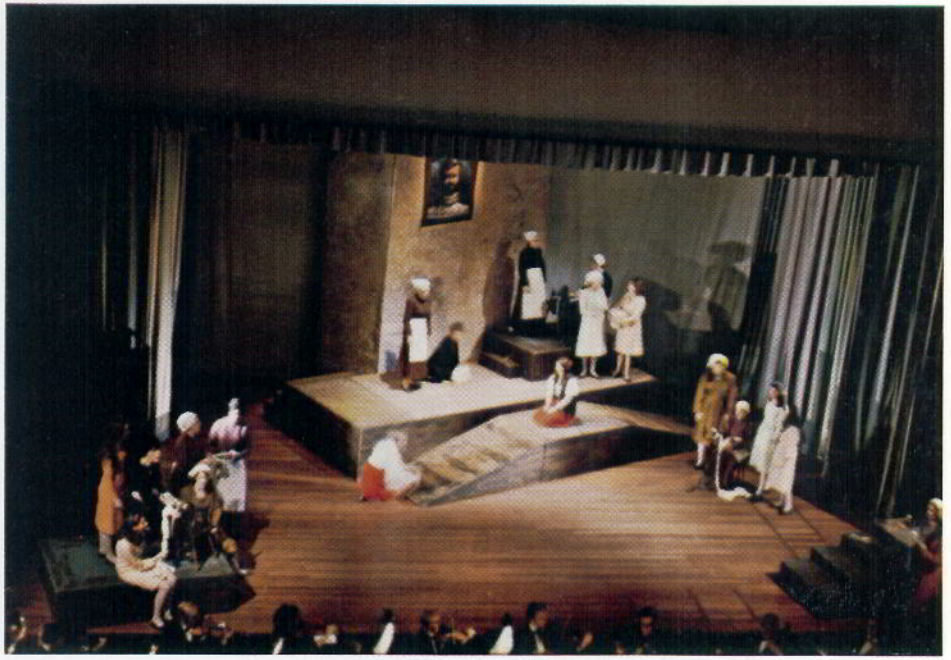
Renold Lecture Theatre, Manchester, with teaching wall on the way out.

A Non-Flying Dutchman

Percy Corry

The Renold theatre was originally planned and equipped as a lecture theatre for the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology (UMIST for short). As a lecture theatre it is excellent, having steeply tiered seating for 490 with perfect sight lines to a 10 ft. deep lecture platform, backed by an impressively solid structure embodying chalk boards and screens which slide away to reveal a stage of 20 ft. depth, with a proscenium 36 ft. wide and 17 ft. high: the height above stage to ceiling beams is 21 ft. It was originally expected that the stage would be used only for very occasional shows for which, however, it was inadequately equipped. There were no FOH spots: a number of lamps with internal reflectors provided light for the lecture platform but these were of little use for stage performances. A roller type safety curtain was installed and this, together with the house tabs and the chalk boards, forced the No.1 lighting bar about 6 ft. up stage; lighting of the acting area became rather farcical.

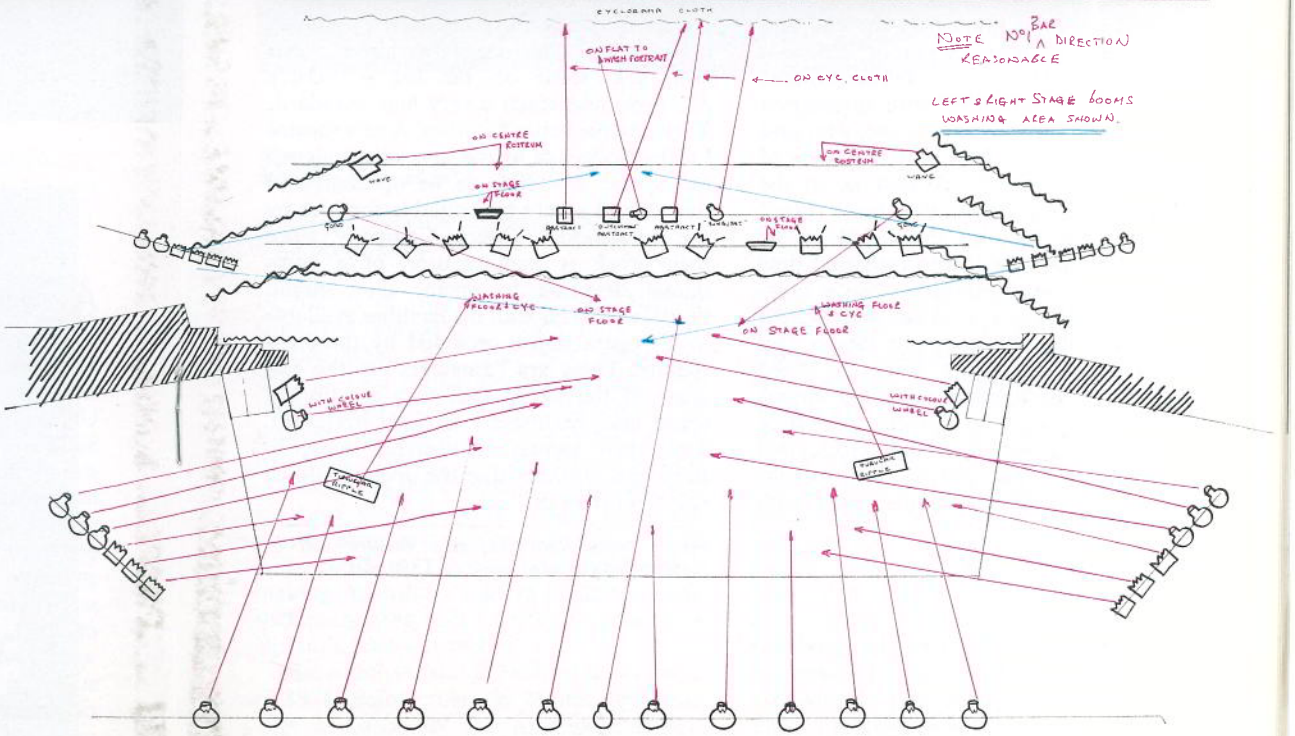
Because Manchester is deplorably short of suitable alternative accommodation, the Renold theatre was soon in greater demand for stage shows than had been expected. As FOH spots were essential, they were hired



Manchester Renold Theatre—Flying Dutchman.
Act I (above). Opposite, Act II and the lighting layout.

and rather perilously installed in ceiling apertures created by removing lay-lights. It was recognised that this accident hazard had to be eliminated and there are now twelve spots permanently installed in the ceiling, supplemented by two side booms, each with six spots, to light the apron.

The lighting equipment over the acting area is still too restricted for any ambitious production and it is tribute to the indomitable spirit of the theatre's amateurs that any grand opera and, in particular, *The Flying Dutchman*, should be presented. Such reckless courage is, however, characteristic of the Manchester Opera Company, whose members are fee-paying students in a class of the North Hulme Further Education Centre, and whose tutor, Keith Hoskinson, employed by the local authority, becomes musical director of the opera performances. Formed in 1964, they have an impressive record, including productions of *Boris Godunov*, *Il Trovatore*, *Faust*, *L'Elisir d'Amore*, *Don Carlos*, *Ballo in Maschera*, to name but the best known operas in their ambitious programmes. They import extra soloists and an orchestra from other amateur organisations in the Manchester area. All the people involved are unpaid for their services. Cliff Walker, the amateur producer (using "producer" in its older theatrical sense) is a professional design artist and, not surprisingly therefore, he designs his own settings. For *The Flying Dutchman* he used a minimum of scenery, relying mainly on a flexible use of colourful abstract designs projected on the background. He needed a rigid cyclorama and



leg curtains of black to achieve maximum effect but had to make do with a simple sky cloth lacking in tautness, and grey legs. A few rostrums which remained static throughout, with a couple of flats added when the interior set had to be suggested, assisted the lighting in producing a perfectly credible environment for all scenes. How wise to accept the existing limitations and to avoid that all too common mistake of trying to design the kind of "realistic" sets that can only be really effective if there is a fly-tower. Even had there been a fly-tower there would have been justification for the imaginative treatment that was adopted.

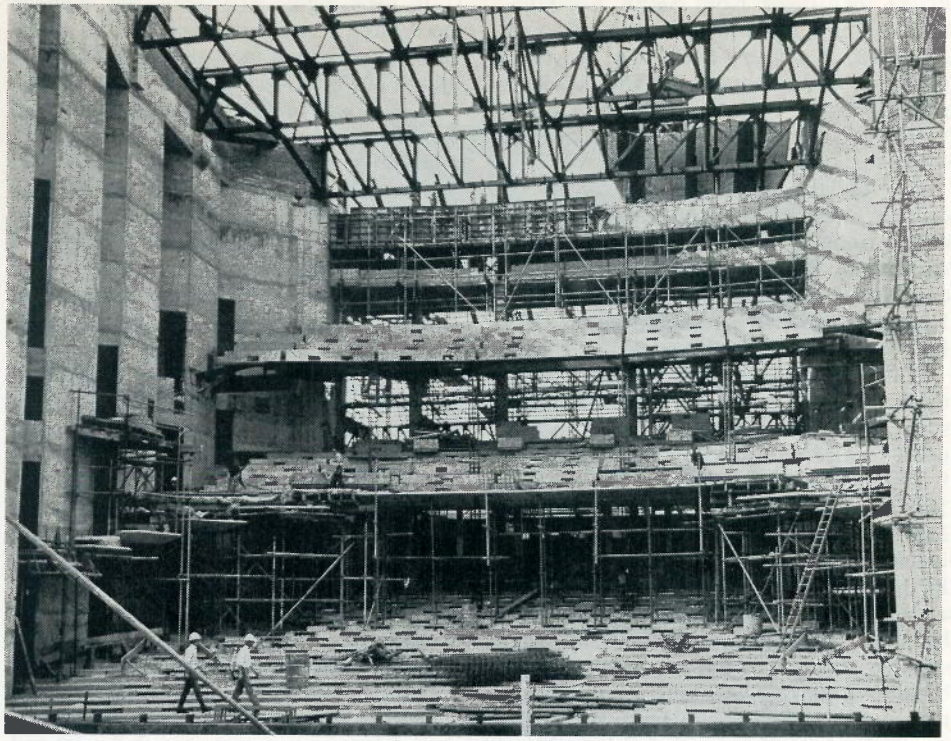
Unfortunately, the absence of a pit caused the orchestra of sixty, occupying the space normally required for the first two rows of seats, to be insistently visible throughout; the light from the music stands was not at all helpful. In spite of handicaps, however, the production succeeded amazingly, both visually and aurally. A packed house on the first night gave a well-deserved standing ovation at the end and there could hardly be more eloquent approval than that. It was Bernard Shaw, not Corno di Bassetto, both committed Wagnerians if ever there was one, who said "Wagner stands or falls by the success of his appeal to 'the folks'—that is, to the unsophisticatedly receptive natural man."

Preparation for the show had to be compressed into the all too restricted time allowed, the usual problem when a company has to play in a hired hall with limited staff whose limited hours of labour can curtail activities. Apart from the fixed FOH spots the lighting depended almost exclusively on hired equipment, consisting of three Linnebach-type projectors, two Patt. 252 with sea effects, two tubular ripples, two on-stage booms, each with six spots, two apron booms each with two spots, a No. 1 bar of twelve Patt. 223 Fresnels, two lightning effects, a couple of gobos for projecting patterns of light on the stage floor, and sundry oddments. The permanent 48-way dimmer control in a perch position on stage right was supplemented by two ten/twenty units, all operated to cues given by microphone from the projection room at the rear of the auditorium.

Only those who have had similar experience can have any idea of the amount of preparatory work involved in rigging such a temporary installation with its necessary reorganisation of control circuits. Fortunately, the producer had the co-operation of a former Strand Electric man, Douglas Sharman, now able to enjoy his stage lighting as an amateur.

Manchester badly needs a well designed and well equipped Community Theatre which could be available to such adventurous amateurs. The Manchester Opera Company is one of the very few amateur groups in this country regularly producing grand opera. They stage two productions each year (next on the list is Verdi's *Macbeth*) and reach a very high standard. They deserve better facilities. A new theatre for the College of Music, specially designed for opera, is shortly to be opened* and this should surely be available for hire by the Manchester Opera Company since their work is manifestation of a communal devotion to opera: they should be allowed to have all the facilities available in an opera house provided by the community. These are "amateurs" in the real sense of the word: that they are unpaid spare time performers is quite irrelevant. That their annual membership subscriptions partially subsidise the opera could be just a bit relevant.

**It is hoped that this new theatre will be reviewed in the next issue of* TABS. *Ed.*



Adelaide—New Festival Theatre.

Bigger and Better?

Iain Mackintosh

Notes on Adelaide, Sydney and California 1972

In March of this year Prospect Theatre Company played Adelaide's only major theatre (the 1,150 seat Her Majesty's, built in 1962 behind an old frontage) and made a major drama contribution to the seventh Adelaide Festival of Arts. I made two trips to Australia, and on the second occasion left the company in Sydney and returned via California. These notes are mostly about the two large theatres which will open in 1973: Adelaide and Sydney, making Australia's tally in building major theatres seating over 1,450 two higher than Britain's post-war record.

The eighth Adelaide Festival takes place in 1974. Before then, in March next year there will have opened the Festival Theatre' a 2,000 seat Opera House lacking only production facilities (the Ballet is based on Melbourne, the Opera Company on Sydney, so there is therefore no need for production facilities in Adelaide) and built in just over two years. A year or so later a 700 seat playhouse plus experimental space and drama workshops will open alongside. The total cost? About one tenth of the £50 *million* Sydney Opera House complex. The date? Well, some twenty-four Festivals earlier than the long awaited Edinburgh Opera House which might well be opened at the 32nd Festival in 1978.

Obviously they move fast in Adelaide. This is strange even to Australians who,

unless they come from South Australia, tend to think of Adelaide, capital of South Australia, as a sleepy backwater, the sleep probably being induced by the excellent wine from the Barossa Valley and other "wineries", wine that is first rate by any standards.

But Adelaide is flying into the twentieth century, and because it started late, may avoid ruining its city in the way that Australian developers are ruining Sydney and Melbourne no less effectively than their European counterparts. Adelaide, like Edinburgh or Dublin, has *style*.

All of which is not merely to show that I drank deep of Australian culture, but to suggest why Adelaide is building such a good theatre so quickly, and so cheaply. It is a fair sized city (800,000) but is some 500 miles from the next. The Premier, Don Dunstan, leads a Labour Party which is self assured to the extent of dropping the Birthday Honours system—unthinkable in a country which is more British than Britain in its respect for decorations—and sensible enough to support with capital building grants as well as current subsidy the major International Festival of the Southern Hemisphere with full knowledge that finance is more likely to come to a cosmopolitan city than a country town. (Next on this list—an Australian Film Industry.)

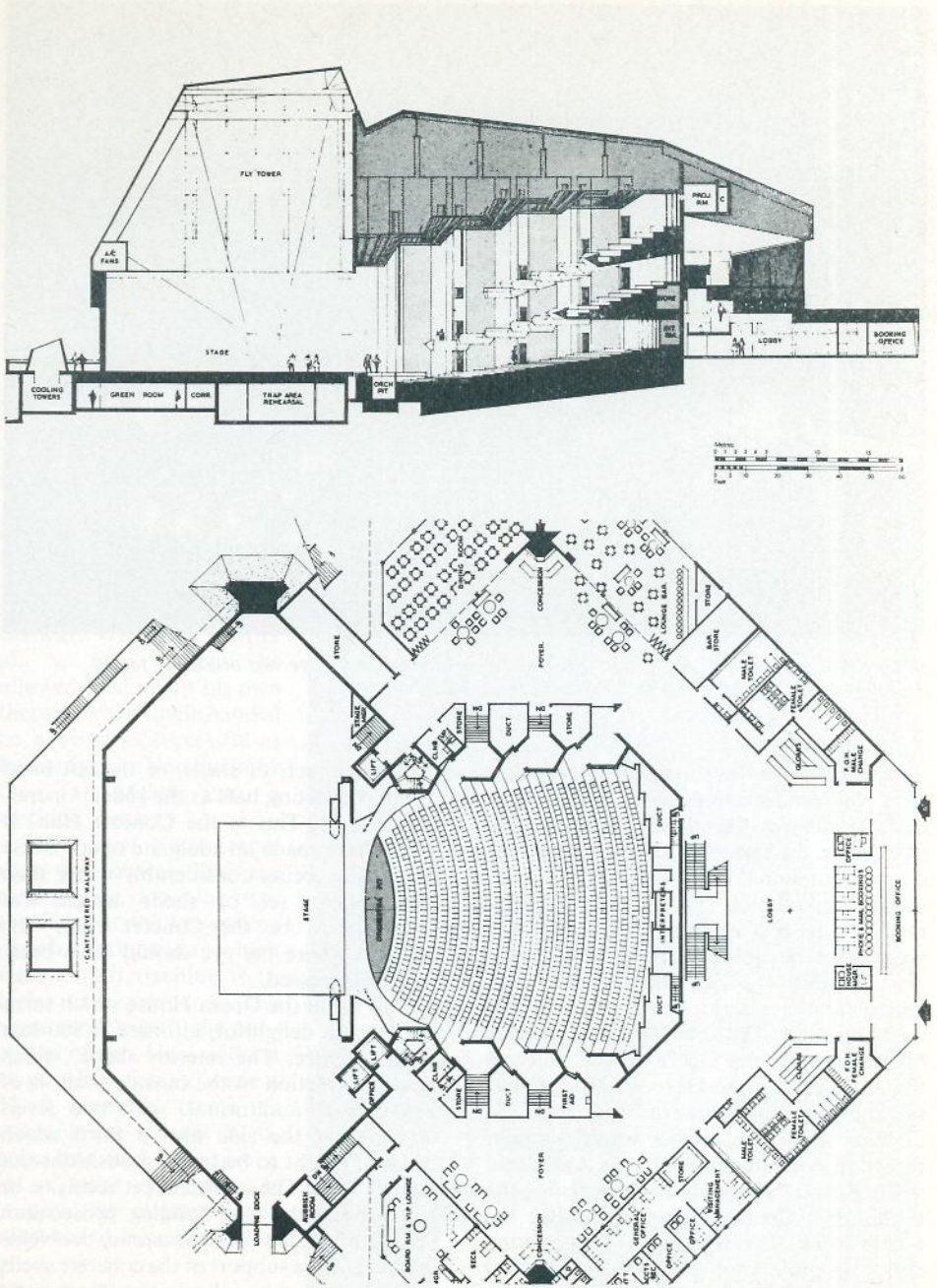
The theatre was designed by Colin Hassell, theatre consultant Tom Brown (ex Old Vic School ex Guthrie Stratford Ontario team) and seems first and foremost practical. Why the heavy armadillo-like thick concrete roof—flight path problems and heat. Where is the safety curtain? —seemed to the design team to be a bit old fashioned in the days when all fires happen in the auditorium, so they rang up the Premier and nipped a new Act through Parliament abolishing the requirement of a steel curtain *and* ensured excellent exit arrangements from the auditorium. Why no trucks, revolves, etc. ?—well, a study not only of Sydney but opera houses the world over suggested that what a Stage Manager really wants is a large flat area, no tricks, no bumps, no pillars or corners, just acres of room for repertoire working.

It feels right, and with the planned decoration, smokey grey-brown Australian timber with a facet profile, it will look right. The walls are papered with people, and one only regrets the absence of a last box at the sides. The rubric of perfect sight lines and the splayed surround to the proscenium commanded by the acoustician (did not meet him, does anybody ever, other than other acousticians?) may have been the cause.

There is no full grid over the forestage in a theatre which will be used for Drama a great deal, but then perhaps the new—in English speaking terms—device for a full grid over the forestage and for the proscenium arch tracking forward for drama had not really gained momentum by 1969 when the plans were drawn (Newsflash: possibly two Opera/Drama theatres at present planned for Scotland may adopt this principle). The opening is wide—52 ft. maximum—against 38 ft. at Sydney and the 42 ft. 6 in. being mooted for Edinburgh, although the way of closing it in, which involves baffles as well as transverse sliding towers, looks good. The orchestra pit, which of course goes under the stage as well, becomes two more rows of seats and the re-entrant curve, which usually throws the stage back, will not do so here because of the width of the opening. There are 2,000 people within 100 ft. and it would appear, from the thought that has gone into the ceiling, both false and actual, that the building will behave well as a concert hall when the acoustic shell is put up on stage. And oh yes (though architects may be incredulous) they chose to have three seat widths in the continental seating stalls and worked out the mix of width by feeding the whole sight line problem through a computer deciding, presumably, what parts of the stage area are most likely to be peopled with watchable performers.

The Drama theatre next door is at present being planned to have a 100 ft. wide, four gangway, single fan facing a 40 ft. opening. Judgement must be deferred until the plans are finalised.

Sydney: yes, everything you have heard about it is true. Mention the word Opera House and your new Australian friend



Adelaide New Festival Theatre section and plan. Architects: Hassell, McConnell and Partners.

Sydney Opera House: Concert Hall showing organ where opera stage was originally to be. Architects: Joel Utzon, completed by Hall, Todd & Littlemore.

looks hastily over his shoulder, beckons and then commences either to denigrate Utzon or else stoutly to defend him. Question only is whether the inside will look like a first class international hotel or a second class international hotel, say the Utzon opponents to the new team of architects. "Do you realise he left *no* working drawings?" say the critics. The stranger can only marvel at the exterior—and pick his jaw up having actually seen the arrangement of the stage of the Opera House. Such is the scale of Sydney Harbour Bridge that the site was much more difficult than the obvious scenic advantages would suggest, rather like designing St. Paul's Cathedral in the Grand Canyon, or even designing the Edinburgh Opera House opposite the Castle Rock. The solution is breathtaking and it is quite simply the most beautiful modern building I have ever seen.

Allowing time to park the car (there is no car park) and time to traverse a quarter of a mile of foyer, one arrives at the larger of the twin sets of shells, or the left hand of the copulating bats as the ruder Australians call it. This is the Concert Hall. It would have made an adequate opera house technically, being considerably wider than the smaller set of shells which was originally to be the Concert Hall. The organ is where the cyc should have been. One is impressed.

Now on to the Opera House which turns out to be a delightful, intimate, 1,500 seat *drama* theatre. The interior shape, which bears no relation to the outside shell, is of a two level auditorium, with two levels of boxes at the side plus a third which certainly ought to be lighting positions but may be slips. The orchestra pit seems to be half outside the true building proscenium line, half inside due to some problems inherent in the support of the concrete shells which could not be solved when this concert hall became a theatre.

For the rest let the dimensions speak—taken from conversation rather than plan:

Scenic opening: 38 ft. wide by 24 ft. high.

Grid height: 53 ft.

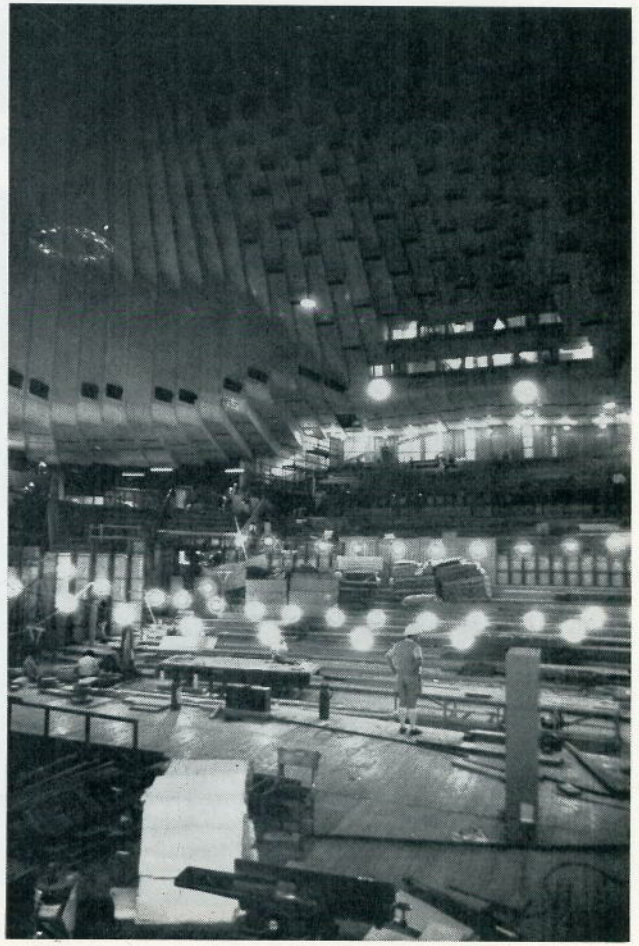
Width between fly galleries: 58 ft.

Depth of stage: pause, well, this is limited by the shells and indeed the only place where these wonderful shapes are apparent inside the building is where the grid and side galleries *taper* upstage. . . .

Into this pint pot, which is joined by upstage lift to cavernous undercrofts where you could store all the repertoire of the Australian Opera Company, Willi Ulmer (Technical Director) has squeezed two quarts of impressive German equipment. Those who regret that the front-of-house lighting positions are worked from the fewer large wattage lantern continental system rather than the multiple position British lower wattage system should not castigate Willi Ulmer. After all, a man should be allowed to develop his own theories when single handed he is being as successful as humanly possible at turning the Taj Mahal into a working theatre.

There is of course more than one theatre. Drawing a very long, low veil over the 500 seat shallow-ceiling drama auditorium which faces a 48 ft. opening 16 ft. high, one moves to the space underneath the concert platform. Here under a stage which was to have a 52 ft. opening (same as Adelaide) is a large 50 ft. cube that was to house a lot of stage machinery. It is now an elegant space surrounded by galleries on three levels. At last an exciting original performing space? No, a recording studio which is not to be used for performances at all . . .

And so we bid farewell to Sydney as the evening rays of the sun make the Opera House more beautiful than any picture postcard can ever plausibly portray, with wonder in our hearts—wonder at how the Australian Ballet and Australian Opera, each peopled with first class artists and served by highly competent technicians, can work repertoire between two houses one of which demands 60 ft. cloths for a 52 ft. opening, and the other of which has a stage rather smaller than the Nottingham



Sydney Opera House—Concert Hall from platform end.

Playhouse, and fly galleries 58 ft. apart. Ah well, there is Melbourne to come, where three or four auditoria are to be built underground and there might be a good chance of learning the lessons of Sydney and Adelaide.

As a postscript to Australia a sad picture: Sydneysiders "celebrating" the last night of Sydney's last Nineteenth Century theatre in the centre of town. It is Saturday, 29th April, 1972, the Prospect Theatre Company taking the calls for *Love's Labour's Lost* in the Theatre Royal Sydney which was opened in 1875. A 1,250 seat auditorium facing a 30 ft. opening, it is typical of a large number of ravished Australian theatres. Ray of hope: three weeks of frantic lobbying and public meetings which started with Toby Robertson (Director of Prospect) suggesting the day he arrived from London that the profession should protest and which ended in John Tasker's Preservation Committee getting the bulldozer workers to "black" the demolition, resulted in a real, legally enforceable, commitment on the developer to build a new properly planned 1,000 seat theatre on the Theatre Royal site where none was planned to exist before.

For an extra £28 one can travel from Sydney to London the "other" way. This was an opportunity to accept a long standing invitation from the University of California to view their campus theatres with the intention of planning a tour.

There are nine campuses, and since many have more than one theatre there are a great number of theatres. They are all different, which makes difficulties in

Last night at the Theatre Royal, Sydney. Photo: Australian Consolidated Press.

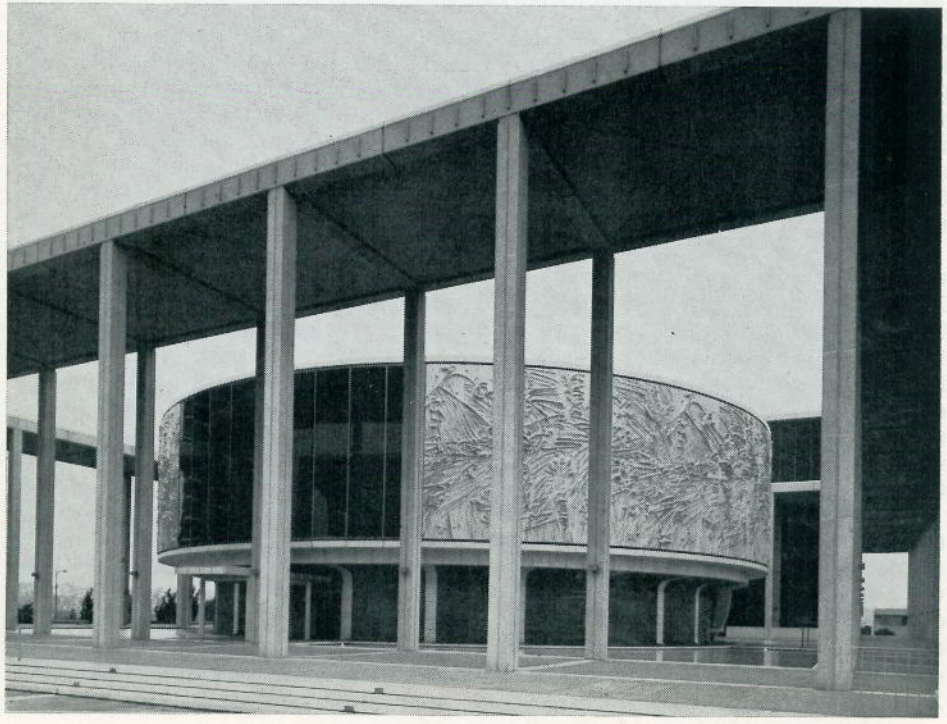
Zellerbach Auditorium at Berkeley Campus, University of California.

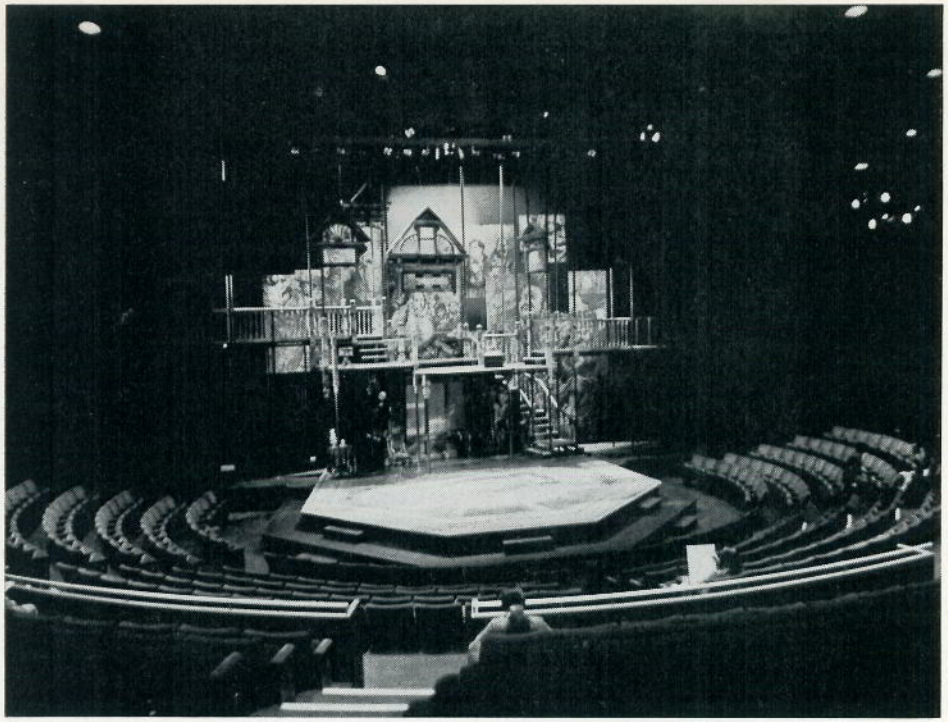
planning a drama tour. A large number seem to consist of a very few, very long rows in a shallow-rake single-level auditorium facing enormous flat scenic stages (500 people in twelve rows facing a 58 ft. wide stage at Los Angeles seems to be redolent of 'thirties Germanic space stages and as for continental seating—well, an 80 ft. wide row makes for a long journey in the interval).

But there is some arresting new architecture. Take the Zellerbach auditorium, at Berkeley Campus, seating 2,009 and built a few years ago, under the guidance of Professor Travis Bogard (also responsible for the most sensible teaching theatre I saw close by). All right, the opening is 63 ft. wide, but the treatment of the side walls makes for more intimacy than might be thought possible in such an auditorium.

Outside the university circuit there is in Los Angeles a three theatre complex of distinction: the Music Center. There is a vast theatre/concert hall—The Dorothy Chandler—second a 2,100 seat theatre—the Ahmanson (where the National Theatre of Great Britain played *The Beaux' Stratagem*) which somehow seems much bigger than the Zellerbach—and, third in size, the Mark Taper Forum (all on top of a 2,000-car car park). This has received little attention in the British technical press and is in many ways a surprise. It was built primarily as a recital hall. It is in a sculptured drum set in a pool surrounded by a lofty colonnade. Inside this supremely unfunctional looking building is a practical theatre. There is little wing space; there are only 750 seats. "By the book" it ought not to work, the rake being too shallow and there being, horror upon horror, a cross gangway right the way round the auditorium. There are no vomitoria—those football stadium entrances that seem to limit the number of people in the front row so drastically. The audience, and actors, enter on the cross gangway behind the fifth row and then feed downwards on three gangways or upwards on five gangways. It all worked in performance (the set on the stage being for *Volpone 1872*, Ben Jonson translated to the frontier/railroad-king days of San Francisco, 1872). It is possible that it is the scale that makes it work, something midway between Sheffield and the Young Vic.

Los Angeles Music Center—Mark Taper Forum.





Los Angeles Music Center—Mark Taper Forum auditorium with thrust stage.

TABS will no doubt run features on both Australian theatres when they open and will tell of marvels wrought by the DDM switchboard at Adelaide and possibly ever so delicately find an Australian operator to tell of its advantages and disadvantages *vis-a-vis* its Germanic competitor in Sydney. Better still, some architects and technicians will make the trip to Australia to see how they build bigger and, in some interesting ways, better theatres than we do in England—Scotland's Edinburgh Opera House being the only British one to rival these in seating capacity. And if so they may visit California and test the theory that a suitable slogan for Californian Campus theatre architecture of the 'fifties and 'sixties might be "Max Reinhardt Lives!".

Describing his own Grand Theatre de Quebec* Victor Prus advocates wide auditoria without a serious effort to integrate spectators and performers—straight rows producing the illusion of being close to the stage through the eye being unable to see the extremities of the rows. After seeing those wide Californian theatres one wants to ask some questions: what if you are sitting at the end of a row 53 seats long? What do you put on an "independent linear forestage" 100 ft. wide and 28 ft. deep? *The Ring? The Rockettes?* Expressionist drama on a big budget? It is all a very different world from the English Playhouse or even the Baroque Opera House.

Design a new theatre for whatever purpose seating over 1,400 with modern sight lines and you come slap up against a more subtle problem than acoustics for speech. It is how to retain the *human scale* necessary for all but the most formal type of presentation. The Edinburgh Opera House design team have to solve this, and there may be other new large British theatres. The Australian experiences in auditorium design might be very useful.

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Peter Cheeseman talks a-round theatre*

What I thought we might do as a beginning, Peter, is to ask you just a little bit about your theatre—particularly to get some idea of its general lay-out and find out how content you are with it or not and then get down more specifically to lighting. In most theatres-in-the-round I have seen, it usually seems that the stage tends to be too large, now how do you find your stage size here?

It seems about right. I think I've said it in the past and I don't feel any different after ten years of very variegated productions, though of course always with fairly small companies. This is the key factor; the maximum number of people we've had in a cast has been for some Shakespeares—round about eighteen. I've generally found the stage quite large enough—I've sometimes found it a little too big. There have been occasions when we've tried to reduce it by one device or another but I've never found it too small.

Having got the stage right, what about the seats. How many does it seat?

Well until a year ago we had 347 but we have just built platforms over the three entrances bringing the total up to 393, simply because of the demand.

The impression one gets from the auditorium is that the stage is almost equally confronted in all directions but presumably there are more rows at each end.

In fact, until we put the new seats in there were five rows for the two opposing long sides (because the acting area is 26 ft. long but 22 ft. wide) and there were six rows on the short sides. The new seats have made this slightly more irregular so that at one end we have added two more rows, but this is balanced at the other end by two nooks which go about as far back as the two rows. I think it's important that it should be roughly weighted equally on each side—though I agree with Peter Brook that it is a good idea to avoid symmetry, you know in his "deadlines" concept. I think that symmetry can be a deadly quality in a theatre, it's important to have an asymmetrical arrangement. It ought to be balanced.

From that, would it be correct then to say also that you wouldn't like an exact square for a stage or a circular stage?

Well I think that Stephen Joseph would always have felt that a theatre should be curved and, had we been able to choose, it would have been curved, circular or elliptical. When we planned the new theatre he became very interested in the super ellipse, which is a shape formula devised by Piet Hein (I believe that the Central Square in Stockholm is a super ellipse) and Stephen worked on the assumption that any new theatre we built would use this form. It helps the sight lines in a theatre-in-the-round. If the seating is rectangular and the acting area is rectangular, then towards the ends of the rows in the corner of the auditorium you are sitting too much sideways—you are looking a little too much to your left or right—so that the curve is necessary to adjust this. Also a curve is a less specific shape.

Any particular points about audience entrances and actors' entrances?

Well there are three actors' entrances (kind of vomitories) two in corners and the other in the centre of the opposite side.

And in your super ellipse stage, how many entrances would you have there?

I think we'd have three. A super ellipse has one axis slightly longer than another so that there is a degree of rectangularity in it.

So that sorts it out in plan. In section two things come up, first the seating sight lines. Do you find you hit it off right here with the angle of the seats?

I think so. The treads are 3 ft., the riser are 15 in. and Stephen evolved this out of our touring arrangement where the treads were 3 ft. and the risers 12 in. That was more convenient to tour but he felt it should be increased and it gives a greater sense of occasion, in a curious way, the slighter steeper rake. I think it's excellent. I would want it to be round about that, having worked with both.

How long in fact have you been at Stoke?

Well, we opened on October 9th, 1962 so we're just coming up to our tenth birthday.

Very appropriate that TABS *should do the interview; what is it—a scoop?*

Yes, and of course obviously the thing that is central in our thoughts is how much more can we develop in the existing building technically, how much capital ought we to pour into that, and how much should we save for our new theatre but I should add that I'm very anxious that the new theatre should be as *cheap* as possible. What I certainly don't intend to do—to the dismay of Rank Strand Electric—is to buy a lot of new equipment specially to put into it! I think we'll do what we did before when we opened here; we simply put our *touring* equipment down in one place and waited till we could afford to improve.

This of course reminds one that the existing theatre really came out of the Stephen Joseph touring affair. How many years did that function?

Well, it was started in 1955 at the Mahatma Gandhi Hall in Fitzroy Square and then toured all round the country to theatreless towns. This was one of the theatreless towns, as it were. There was Newcastle [-under-Lyme] which is part of the North Staffordshire conurbation that we came to and this is where we settled and I joined the company in order to help Stephen Joseph set up a permanent base at a time when we were going to build a brand new theatre.* The new theatre scheme fell through and I was instrumental in persuading Stephen to settle for the present conversion of an old cinema. Later Stephen was appointed lecturer in drama at Manchester University and left me to run the theatre. So this company has only really been run by two men, Stephen first of all and then myself, and I would say that now one of my principal responsibilities really is doing justice to what Stephen would have wanted, had he lived.

I suppose the most that's known about our relationship is that years later we had a spectacular quarrel, but like many spectacular quarrels it was about a number of superficial things. Basically what we are doing here (more than basically—in almost every way) is an absolutely logical follow through of Stephen's work. We've added one thing to it—being settled in one place. We're using theatre-in-the-round and new plays, which were Stephen's two great basic policy principles but in a particular community.

Really and truly this seems to me to be the Stephen Joseph memorial theatre working here and now—not the scheme which one hears they are going to do one day in Scarborough. It is the continuity that is so important. "We never closed", so to speak.

Well without stealing their thunder, I certainly feel, as far as my responsibilities are concerned, that it is. Whether or not it's called that is neither here nor there, though I certainly feel that the new building should explicitly commemorate him in some clear way.

And of course I do remember when the ABTT was founded that Stephen's scheme for a new theatre was in fact one of the projects presented. Mentioning the ABTT his death was not only a great loss to theatre in general but to the ABTT in particular. His particular angle on theatre is something we've not been able to replace.

I like to think we embody as much of it as is possible without him. I would say it is a very rare day for me when I'm not drawing on something of Stephen's and I mean that very sincerely; it is extraordinary how constantly one comes

*This article is a transcript of an interview with the Director of the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, recorded there by the Editor.

*See Adaptable Theatres. *Proceedings of conference held in London. Published 1962 by ABTT, 9 Fitzroy Square, W1.*

back to Stephen's principles. I would say that I mention him almost every day.

Of course after all he was trained as a scene designer—which used to come to people as a shock since he was known as "theatre-in-the-round"—which of course raises this whole question of whether and how far scenery is used in the round. You have corresponded

". . . *a question of how high you can build up scenery in the centre.*" Eh? *Livings.*

with TABS *before on this and I'm supposed to have blasphemed.**

Stephen was the first person I met who really could see through all the humbug that people talked about theatre and had an extraordinary capacity to see all its components and essentially what theatre was. He had an amazing gift of being able to visualise things spatially. It comes down to the actor I suppose in the end. Theatre-in-the-round can be *completely* successful and in every show the most important and forceful thing is the actor in front of the audience—always.

So that if you start off from that, there are occasions when you can add to that situation to help him. For instance if we do one of these multi-episode plays like *Anna of the Five Towns* or *Tess of the d'Urbervilles*, it's useful for the audience's imagination to be stimulated a little more every now and again by the addition of something—or you may need a permanent set. For instance it's quite common for us—as I said with *Anna*—to want the acting area to suggest an enormous number of places and it's useful therefore to add things that will help without making the set at any one time one particular place. In other words it's exactly the same situation as the permanent set for *King Lear* let's say. We want the shape and structure of the thing to give places for the actors to sit down sometimes, for a start.

For instance in *Anna of the Five Towns* one of the problems was (without changing the set because we wanted to keep the thing moving fast) to have a lot of scenes—in a kitchen where people had to sit down and have meals, in a factory, a chapel, a park and also there were scenes in the Isle of Man on the beach where they were clambering about the rocks. Now you can do that with a completely bare stage except that somebody's got to bring on a table and chairs or take them off again or you could use things like the Shakespearean permanent setting. Sometimes we decide we'll do it with hardly anything. For instance, we'll do something like *Whitby Lifeboat Disaster* and make twenty different scenes out of the same collection of fish boxes. This gives you both a basic vocabulary and fluidity. Or we'll use a composite set in exactly the same way as the Shakespearean designers have done for the last fifty years. I often think with theatre-in-the-round that it is of itself a tremendously flexible form, because with nothing it can represent everything; yet if you introduce one object onto the stage that object (because you are close to it and because the audience surround it—because it's almost as if it were in your embrace) that object, or even a ray of light, has got immense impact—a much greater impact than if you're looking at it, as it were, flat-on two dimensionally. So you sometimes think of the immensely stimulating power of very very simple things like a rope dangling—or as in *Moby Dick* we're going to have several, you know, clusters of rope like shrouds. But you only need a few and a bulwark and a few crates because the physical presence of anything in-the-round is prodigious. This means that when you do something like Ibsen, say, or *The Caretaker* (and we've done a fair amount of Pinter and a fair amount of Ibsen) the here and nowness of the set that never alters is so potent; you are so close and its presence is so potent. Not only at the one extreme is theatre-in-the-round very flexible (you can move from A to B fast) at the other extreme you have the kind of here-and-now quality because the objects are so present. I mean you can use smell in theatre-in-the-round to a much greater extent that you can in other forms, you know! There have been two occasions when we have used locomotive lamps in the theatre: one in *The Knotty* (our local railway)* and the other in *The Old Wives' Tale*, a Bennett adaptation in which there is an ascent in a balloon from the Gare du Nord during the siege of Paris. We showed this scene and it was lit by locomotive lanterns. The smell of paraffin added extraordinarily to the whole thing. I am working something out for *Moby Dick*, but I am assured by A. L. Lloyd† that the smell of a whale is such an appalling assault on the senses that it can leave you without a sense of smell for six months, so I am using a different tack!

Have you done a documentary about the canals? If not, you certainly should.

Well it's Brindley's Centenary this year and we're cogitating on it, as we've done one on the Railways as an institution, and we are really looking for some kind of reason—some kind of peg to hang it on.

I think you ought to do this canal because of the connection with Brindley—and with Wedgwood who was the man behind the Trent and Mersey. Actually this was the very

". . . *very useful to park the artist right at the edge of the stage in front of an exit.*" Henry IV Part 1.

The Staffordshire knot, for readers overseas, is the County symbol, and the name is affectionately given to the old North Staffordshire Railway.

†*A. L. Lloyd has previously advised the theatre on folk songs and working songs and has now been called upon in his capacity as an ex-whaling man.*

*TABS; Vol. 29, No. 1.

canal we came on in my own cruiser the Peter Sam *and interview you. If you want any sound effects there's a splendid BBC record with all the old canal voices and also some of the recordings of the old type of Bolinger diesels used on the narrow boats.*

Peter Terson who has been associated with us for many years has lived on the canal for the last two years and has become an enthusiast, so it's likely that it will happen!

If so I shall come up and see it—though whether by canal, which took a week, all depends! Continuing on scenery raises a question of how high you can build up scenery in the centre. You sent me a photograph with the letter to which I referred earlier, in which you've got quite a high structure up the middle. What did you do about masking problems in that sort of production?

To generalise we keep to around about 3 ft. or 3 ft. 6 in.—even 4 ft.—but usually not more than 3 ft. from the floor of the stage upwards. If it's, say, single objects like sideboards or pianos or constructions of one sort or another, then theirs tends to be the maximum height because from one aspect the audience might be trying to see an actor past them. If this is a gradual build up or a build up of the stage into levels I think this rule applies though the nearer the edge you get . . . It's the actor on the other side that's the worry, so that if you put the very high object right up to the audience, they can see over the top as far as their eye height if you see what I mean, except that they don't want this great object in the—what I keep on calling the subliminal area—at the bottom of the eye, but for instance in *Anna of the Five Towns* we needed one very high level for a pulpit and I think we made that 3 ft. but put it right up against the audience.

There are also a number of positions in the auditorium where there isn't a member of the audience sitting, in other words the gangways, and I often refer to these in rehearsals as the non-masking positions. If for instance where, as you have in the storm scene in *King Lear*, one of the daughters (either Regan or Goneril) has to stand for a prodigious time without actually saying a word, she's still very important in the action and under those circumstances it's very useful to park the artist right at the edge of the stage in front of an exit so that they don't get in anyone's way. Or if we've got the

". . . *a good standing up and raving at or suicide height.*" Anna of the Five Towns.

odd spear carrier we'll sometimes do that to him and the same with a high object of scenery.

Yes, that sounds a very good reason for not having the exits standing exactly four-square. That is, all entrances in the four corners of the stage.

Yes, any gangway or place like that is useful. Under normal circumstances if we are building levels we're working basically with our stage rostra on a 9 in. module (this is for permanent sets) because 9 in. is a possible step, 18 in. is a seat. In theatre-in-the-round 2 ft. 3 in. is a marvellous table height—slightly lower than a normal table, but if you get somebody sitting at a 2 ft. 3 in. table, looked at from the other side they don't seem to be swamped by it. So that's a table height and going up in 9's, then 36 in. is a good standing up and raving at or suicide height if you like, so you can make a composite set on those modules. This is what we did for *Anna of the Five Towns* for instance, or if we are doing Greek Tragedy we sometimes build up with a series of platforms. For the normal sort of large areas of the stage we won't have much higher than 18 in. or 27 in. and then of course we drop scenery in. We have hanging, suspended objects—lamps, rope, cloths, flags, all kinds of things.

All the time you've been here have you ever dropped the strict in-the-round form and so to speak borrowed one end of the seating area for nefarious purposes other than audience?

No! I mean, why should we?

That's just what I wanted you to say!

There wouldn't be any point.

In other words it's never used as a thrust stage, it's always used as in-the-round?

You can only ask that question if you actually had doubts that there was any validity in any form of theatre. One comes back to the whole point about a form of theatre. As Stephen would say, theatre is just actors and audience and it's totally valid in whatever situation you can get people being able to see and hear the actors. That's theatre and I hope we've got beyond the situation where we imagine that the magic of theatre can only take place under one arrangement of those two groups of people. The fact is that the differences between different forms of theatre are like the differences between painting and sculpture or let us say—perhaps the analogy is a better one—between epic poetry, the sonnet and the novel. You don't say what are the disadvantages of the novel or what is the disadvantage of representing the Madonna in painting or in bas-relief or sculpture. You don't talk about sculpture and painting in those terms, they're different media and you don't talk in terms of advantages and disadvantages.

This is true. I must confess, for me I think the validity of theatre-in-the-round on the one hand and of proscenium theatre on the other is beyond question, but I think there's some very dubious half-ways in between and especially when they're adaptable.

Tell you another thing, Fred, one attribute of lighting in-the-round is that lighting seems to define the space in which the actor works much more emphatically than lighting in another form. The impact of an actor's gesture or the space where he seems to be depends on the lighting considerably.

You see, in the proscenium theatre for instance the boldest feature in the front of the audiences is the architecture of the room and the arch, so that all the time this kind of subliminal thing is going on underneath everything they see. The weight of a confrontation or of a gesture is determined by the scale of the height

". . . *we have hanging, suspended objects—lamps, rope, cloths, flags, all kinds of things.*' Drums in the Night, Brecht.

and width of a proscenium—and nowadays to a certain extent also by the lighting, but in theatre-in-the-round it is totally determined by the amount of area you give him—by the amount of area you define—because in a way you do shut out everything else much more. You are so much closer to him and I think lighting becomes much more important for that reason. Lighting can close down the area or open out the area to make it seem as if he's in a field.

In *The 1861 Whitby Lifeboat Disaster*,

for instance, we had a scene in which the minister, who is trying to find out the cause of the disaster fifty years before, went to interview the old harbour master and met him on the moors by Goathland, so one wanted to use the size of the stage, the empty stage as a vast open space and you *can* do this; then the theatre is excitingly big. We emptied all the fish boxes off the stage gradually so we could use the open lighting; I mean an almost flat lighting, two figures and a curlew. The combination of simple lighting and sound we find is one of extraordinary potency and I think this fact is one of the things that's made it possible for us to keep going because it's much cheaper than scenery!

I remember that when Stephen Joseph wrote that little booklet for us, Planning for New Forms of Theatre, *he listed equipment at the back and spent more money on the sound equipment than on the lighting which made me rather sad, but this emphasised the importance of sound. How do you find it works out in your case?*

We use a great deal of sound. We do a lot of music and songs and need a lot of rehearsal tapes. We use a prodigious amount of tape also for research when we do our documentaries, so this means that the actual total amount of sound equipment required compared with the total lighting equipment is considerable —unit by unit I mean. It costs over £100 to get a decent tape machine, whereas we can buy a new lantern for under £20.

We'd better not say that too loudly!

I suppose we've tended to concentrate on a fairly simple switchboard and in fact we are still using the twelve lanterns that we had when we were on tour and we've gradually added to them; they're getting a bit battered now but lighting equipment is much less subject to deterioration and decay. We're on our fourth set of tape machines; we're still using our original Strand Patt. 23s and Patt. 123s.

The only real perishables in lighting equipment are the lamps inside which we don't make, but luckily do sell!

And our other two old switchboards are still in use, one in Manchester University Drama Department and the other we have on permanent loan to a Sixth Form College. They're still going strong, and our third switchboard is in use, but our other tape recorders are clapped out and lying on shelves waiting to be dismembered.

That's the way of some things electronic I fear.

Yes, I think in practical terms that would be my answer, Fred. I don't know what the total is but I would reckon we've spent more on sound over the years—about twice as much as we have on lighting.

Just think of that! But to go on, you have made asides to your new theatre, how is it getting on?

I am about to draw up a detailed brief for our architect although the architect has not been officially nominated yet and there are no designs. We're at the beginning of a long process of drawing up a very, very detailed brief but we *have* made official application to the City of Stoke-on-Trent, for a site and we're on the brink of being given it, though we've no finances settled as yet.

Unlike most architects your architect will be very lucky because he will have a client who knows what he wants.

Well I like to think he'll think he's lucky; I think he *will* think that he's lucky!

Well he should, whether he thinks so or not! I'm sure that while in the case of some of the theatres we see built it's the architect's fault, in many other cases I'm certain he really wasn't given a proper brief.

Well I did hear the other day—and this would be a nice story to end this part on—a friend of mine who is now a judge came to see me (we were at University together). We were discussing the new theatre and he said, "I hope your architect is going to talk to you," and I assured him that he was. He said, "You know that we recently had a court room built in my town and the architect built for the jury, in permanent form, a jury box with ten seats in it!"

[This interview with Peter Cheeseman will be concluded in our next issue when he will concentrate on the lighting of his theatre-in-the-round.]

Synopses

Over the Styx

Qui considère-t-on en premier lors de la préparation d'un plan: celui qui va vite ou celui qui va lentement?
Se tenant sur un pont du 14e siècle, l'Editeur voit le châtelain sur son cheval obliger le paysan à pied à s'effacer et se demande si le même fait ne se reproduit pas dans les projets d'aujourd'hui.

Wen beachtet man zuerst wenn man Pläne entwirft, die Geschwinden oder die Langsamen? Der Redakteur steht auf einer 600 jahre alten Brücke und sieht im Geiste den Lord zu Pferde, der den Untertan, der gehen muss, zum Ausweichen zwingt. Er fragt sich, ob dasselbe Prinzip auch heute noch zutrifft.

Exodus

Les bureaux administratifs de la Rank Strand Electric vont s'installer à Brentford et l'Editeur leur souhaite "bon voyage". Ils ne cadrent pas avec Covent Garden, le quartier du théâtre. Ce qui en fait partie restera sur place, c'est-à-dire salles d'exposition et théâtre de démonstration, spectacles et instruction—et bien sûr TABS.

Die Verwaltungsbüreaus von Rank Strand Electric ziehen um, von Covent Garden nach Brentford und der Redakteur nimmt fröhlich von ihnen Abschied. Sie gehören nicht in das Theaterviertel, was dorthin gehört, wird naturlich bleiben. Showrooms, Demonstrationstheater, Unterhaltung und Instruktion—und natürlich Tabs.

Elizabeth of Stratford

Nécrologie d'Elizabeth Scott, l'architecte du Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon.

Nachruf an Elizabeth Scott, Architektin unseres Shakespeare Memorial Theatre in Stratford-upon-Avon.

Adaptibility in Essex

Le nouveau Mercury Theatre à Colchester contient 409 places dans l'avant-scène et 505 en théâtre ouvert. Francis Reid le compare au théâtre de Harlow, aussi situé en Essex, où la faculté d'adaptation entre l'avant-scène (436) et la scène en éperon (424) est moins heureuse, mais où le programme orienté vers la musique est davantage à son goût.

Das neue Mercury Theatre zu Colchester in Essex hat bei Prosceniumbühne 409, bei offener Bühne 505 Plätze. Francis Reid vergleicht es mit dem Theater in Harlow, auch in Essex, wo die Umwandlungsmöglichkeit von Prosceniumbühne (436 Plätze) in spornförmige Bühne (424 Plätze) weniger harmonisch ist, aber wo ihm das auf Musik eingestellte Programm besser gefällt.

Das ist Alles Möglich!

Frederick Bentham revient de la Journée Scènique à Düsseldorf, émerveillé par les planchers de scène qui montent, descendent, basculent et tournoient, les salles qui se partagent en 2–5 parties et un rideau de fer adaptable aux différents niveaux. Il se console avec la pensée qu'en Angleterre les fonds font défaut.

Frederick Bentham berichtet über die Bühnentechnische Tagung in Düsseldorf. Er ist erstaunt über die vollmechanische Bühne deren Fussboden hinauf, hinunter, schräg und ringsherum gesteuert werden kann, Auditorien, die man in 2 bis 5 Teile zerlegen kann und einen Feuervorhang, der sich den verschiedenen Lagen anpasst. Er tröstet sich mit dem Gedanken, dass wir in England kein Geld dafür haben würden.

The Non-Flying Dutchman

Percy Corry découvre comment la Compagnie de l'Opéra de Manchester monta "Le Vaisseau Fantôme" dans un amphithéâtre de 490 places, sans propre gril pour les décors, mais avec un orchestre de 60 membres et une excellente critique.

Percy Corry sieht, wie die Operntruppe in Manchester es fertiggebracht hat, den Fliegenden Holländer in einem Vorlesungstheater mit nur 490 Plätzen aufzuführen, das nicht genügend Höhe zum Hinaufziehen (auf englisch "Fliegen") der Kulissen hat, aber ein Orchester mit 60 Mitgliedern hat und das ausgezeichnete Kritiken hervorruft.

Bigger & Better?

Iain Mackintosh et sa compagnie, Prospect Productions, viennent de participer à l'Adelaide Festival of the Arts. Il relate ses impressions sur le théâtre aux antipodes, et entre autres, sur le nouveau Festival Theatre à Adelaide (2000 places) et l'Opéra à Sydney. Il s'envole ensuite vers la Californie pour visiter le Zellerbach Auditorium à Berkeley (2009) et les trois théâtres du Music Centre de Los Angeles: deux ont plus de 2000 places, le troisième le Mark Taper Forum 750 seulement, mais sa construction et position sont peu communes.

Iain Mackintosh, dessen Truppe, "Prospect Productions" jüngst aus Adelaide vom Festival der Künste zurückgekehrt ist, erzählt von Neuigkeiten und Meinungen in Australien u.a. von dem neuen Festivaltheater (2000 Plätze) und dem Opernhaus Sydney. Dann fliegt er nach Kalifornien, wo er das Zellerback Auditorium in Berkeley besichtigt (2009 Plätze), ausserdem drei Theater des Music Center in Los Angeles, zwei mit über 2000 Plätzen und das dritte, das Mark Taper Forum mit 750 Plätzen, ein Gebäude mit originellem Bauplan und interessanten Milieu.

Peter Cheeseman talks a-round theatre

Peter Cheeseman au cours d'une interview avec l'Editeur raconte ses aventures avec le théâtre en rond au cours des dix dernières années à Stoke-on-Trent. Dans ce premier article, il décrit quelques-unes des techniques scèniques employées et expose ses plans pour un théâtre entièrement nouveau.

Peter Cheeseman spricht in einem Interwiew mit dem **Redakteur über** seine Aberteuer mit Zentralbühnen-**theater in Stoke**-on-Trent in Staffordshire in den ver-**gangenen 10 Jahren**. Dieser Artikel, ein zweiter folgt in der **nächsten Nummer, erklärt** Methoden, die er, beim **Inscenieren anwendet und** beschreibt seine Pläne für ein ganz neues Theater.

Wax lights and Memories

Deux brochures viennent de paraître. L'une contient des renseignements détaillés sur les Memory Systems de Rank Strand, y compris des installations particulières; l'autre concerne le nouveau choix de Minispots actuellement en usage à la galerie des figures de cire de Mme Tussaud (voir couverture).

Zwei neue Hefte werden angekündigt, das eine erklärt die Speichersysteme von Rank Strand und auch bestimmte Installationen, das andere mit Information über die neue Auswahl von Minispots, die jetzt in Mme Tussaud's Wachsfigurenausstellung angewendet werden, siehe Titelblatt.

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