

S.M

Rothwell's one-man-show, *Eau for a Muse*, subtitled *An Entertainment based on Water*. Unlike some drama critics who were observed to prefer the management's interval hospitality room, I (conscious, as always, of my reporting responsibility to my CUE readers) entered into the spirit of the evening by graciously consuming the proffered bottle of up-market water from the sponsors of the performance—*Perrier*. An enjoyable anthological evening, but I think that on the whole I would prefer to ignore the advice of G. K. Chesterton

If an angel out of heaven
Brings you other things to drink
Thank him for his kind attentions,
Go and pour them down the sink.

Underground Light Music

I nearly did not visit Mallorca's *Caves of Drach*: the exotic colours of the picture postcards suggested that the stalactites and stalagmites were subjected to lighting with fruity filters. But the lighting turned out to be impeccably designed—and unfiltered so that the rock formations could make their own delicately tinted statements. The largest cave is a theatre, its stage a lake facing raked bench seating for an audience of a thousand. The houselights fade, there is a



moment of total black—such a blackout as I have long desired but never achieved—and then a barely perceptible glow appears from the depths of the cavern's lake and swells as three rowing boats glide across the still waters. The boat's gunwales are lined with white light bulbs which cast light on to rock and water but ensure that the oarsmen are invisible. In one boat a trio of violin, cello and organ (live musicians, no gramophone nonsense) play Greig and yes, the Tales of Hoffmann Barcarolle. The interplay of sound and light is pure theatrical magic. But let the official guide book make its own charming comment . . . *like a theatre stage where the birth of day must be put over to the audience, slowly and politely. This set of lights is now completely automatic. Before, some rheostat worked by hand provided these effects; but sometimes the day rose slowly and sometimes it rose later, depending on the mood and time of the one in charge of working the lights. Today, everything is perfect as corresponds with the natural jewel we have in front of us.*

Softly Spreading

As my years roll by I become increasingly uninterested in lighting equipment. After all, Lighting Design is mostly about where you put the lights and what you point them at—rather than which (or whose) lights that you use. Certainly the new memory controls have made life much easier once the putting and pointing is over. But these controls have now achieved detergent status: most of them will do the job equally well. The lights themselves just chug along from year to year with the occasional tentative gesture in the shape of a bit of cosmetic tarting-up. Certainly the arrival of the variable-beam-angle profile has been useful and the PAR 64 has added an exciting new texture of light to the palette (at least in the 120 volt version, not the grotty 240 volt spin-off). But by and large there is absolutely no reason to discard anything bought at any time within the last twenty years or so. However Rosco have now come up with the nearest approach in many years to a genuine U.S.P. (For those unversed in marketing jargon, these initials stand for *Unique Sales Proposition*.) Rosco's U.S.P. is a series of directional diffusers. Now directional glass frost is not new: It is a common device in theatres which follow the Central European tradition of focus spots with simple P.C. lenses. But the new stuff is a normal plastic filter which can be cut to give a directional spread in the desired plane with varying degrees of diffusion. The crews on recent Walter Plinge shows have become accustomed to experiments with off-cuts from his diffusion test kit and bits have ended up in all sorts of profile spots, particularly at the bottom of booms—and in the pair of 774s that some goon sold into an unsuspecting civic mini-theatre. So let's raise a cheer for a really new useful tool for the Lighting Designer.

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Efficient Loudspeakers were in Attendance

With considerable typographical emphasis, an old Bury St Edmund's playbill in the gallery of the Theatre Royal announces that *An Efficient Band will be in Attendance*. The Actor's Company, for Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, substituted two efficient loudspeakers and placed them before the proscenium doors in recognition of the command offered by these forestage entrances within the intimacy of a regency county playhouse. That the music to be thus loudspoken should be by Mr. Handel was entirely appropriate, but that it should be in the sumptuous arrangements of Sir Thomas Beecham perhaps bordered a little on an alienation effect in such a house. We live, after all, amidst a growing awareness of the sensuous pleasure of pre-romantic sound—the authenticity of gut strings, natural brass and keyless wood which might surely seem appropriate for a Restoration play, adapted by a Georgian actor and performed in a Regency playhouse. But with houselights out and tabs away to reveal an attractive and practical set whose stylised timbers owed nothing to the painter's art, there was an indication that this production was to be no attempt at historical reconstruction of either Wycherley, Garrick or Bury St Edmunds. (Throughout, the proscenium doors remained dedicated to the gramophone rather than the actor.) However, in the search for acting style, this splendid production had developed just the right degree of robust heightened naturalism from a base of period formalities. And for this the Handel-Beecham was a precise musical mirror.

(*An aside*—the asides, particularly when delivered by Leonard Maguire, demonstrated just how much the Georgians in general and William Wilkins in particular knew about the art of theatre architecture.)

The Wycherley play, in Garrick's re-working was being performed in celebration of that most illustrious actor's bicentenary: that it should be accompanied by Handel in a Beecham re-working was entirely appropriate since this is also the year of the centenary of that most illustrious theatrical theatre musician. That the bicentenary was of a death and the centenary was of a birth mattereth not: long may the theatre continue to find motivation in its anniversaries. This is the silver jubilee of this Walter Plinge's stage baptism . . . and he needs, nor makes, no further excuse for turning columnist.

St. Edmundsbury Postscript

During the Wycherley performance, resolved to become more closely associated with this most magical of perfect playhouses. *And so it shall be.*