

Autolycus

Have egg will travel

The British triumph in Prague is related in pictures and words on another page. Among those whose work was selected for the British Exhibit were Liz da Costa and Alison Chitty. To Alison Chitty we are additionally grateful for the pictorial record of the event she brought back: Clearly costume design is not her only talent.

Liz da Costa was delighted her work was selected to go to Prague alongside that of the longer established designers, and thinks it may have something to do with the fact that whereas other young ladies, asked what they want for Christmas, usually plump for frills, furbelows and gewgaws, she is more likely to demand a new electric-drill. This makes her very versatile, she thinks, where decor becomes structure and vice versa.

Liz has an amusing story to tell about her work for the Emma dance companies. She



Liz da Costa works for theatre and ballet. She produced the design for "Solo Ride", one of LCDT's most successful productions last year (Photo: Anthony Crickway).

was commissioned, for a piece called *The Lesson* based on Alice in Wonderland, to make a very large Hieronymus Bosch-type egg in fibre-glass. Having painstakingly hatched it in her back garden, she found it had become too large to go through her doorway. After friends got it through by brute force, it then had to be man-handled on to a car roof-rack, which must have puzzled the police. When finally they arrived at the home of EMMA in Loughborough the egg was coated in two inches of ice. "All rather hysterical", she says.

Out, out, damned spots

To start an amiable argument we talked to Toby Sedgwick, one of the moving spirits of the Moving Picture Mime Show, opening a new programme on September 10th at the Collegiate Theatre, London University's neat little stumping ground

off Gower Street. With his partners in mime (they came together at the Mime School in Paris) Paul Filipiak and David Gaines, he will be tackling, as the main work, the group's translation into mime of "The Lottery", a story by the Argentinian master of irony Luis Borges.

Their mimes, which are done in the classic "whiteface" or in intricately formalised masks, can suffer badly, Sedgwick thinks, if they get too tangled up in all the instant technology available in a modern theatre. Mime requires the ultimate in concentration and self-indentification by the audience, the minimum distraction from a flash-bang-wallop-oh-what-a-picture style of presentation. We asked him how many lights he thought appropriate. "Eleven," he said, without blinking. For how big an audience? "Four hundred," he said generously. And your worst theatrical experience, we asked. "Playing in what I think was a football stadium in Yugoslavia", he said, with a slight shudder. "But if you're at all subsidised (MPMS get a modest Arts Council Grant) you go anywhere, anytime for anybody."

Chief Technician to the Moving Picture Mime Show is Sally Muir, daughter of the ubiquitous and omniscient Frank; so we asked *her* how she squared up to the problem that seemed to be posed. "I try to get them what they want," she said loyally and in resignation.

It seems to CUE that, as in the case here, quite a few subtle pleasures are being denied to audiences on a principle of maximum utilisation of resources in production. Is there in matters of both lighting and sound a tendency to a doctrine of "if we've got it they'll get it and like it"? In film studios it is a standing joke, of course, that, as fast as the director kills lights to produce the gothik misterioso in a central image he feels he needs, his lighting/Camera man ("I'm just not getting it, Joe") just as quickly restores full illumination to all four corners of the rectangle. And there is always the case of the singer, with the delicate blue notes we admire so much on disc, who is reduced, by the volume of her backing group, to being just a frightened face at the level-crossing as a high-speed train goes by.

In mime, anyway, small is beautiful. Maybe there ought to be a lighting plot to match.

Sir John Tooley

John Tooley, the General Administrator of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, was made a Knight in the Birthday Honours List earlier this year.

He first joined the Royal Opera House in 1955 as David Webster's assistant, he was then twenty eight. Four years later he became Assistant General Administrator

and when Sir David Webster retired in 1970, John Tooley succeeded him.

It was a fortunate decision to appoint someone from inside who had by then had 15 years experience in the team which had built up a national company at the Garden.

It would be a mistake however, to imagine that since 1970 John Tooley has simply successfully presided over an established organisation, although this would have been no mean achievement in itself. Under John Tooley's leadership the Royal Opera has advanced artistically and technically to the stage where it is now recognised as an international company with a reputation second to none.

The artistic standards, the glittering casts and the seemingly inevitable successful foreign tours, are now so familiar that we take them for granted. None of these would have been possible however without the less glamorous but vital skills of sheer good organisation and business acumen. The latter must approach genius in Sir John Tooley's case when you consider the low level of support the Royal Opera House enjoys compared with any similar company abroad.

New life for old piers

Suddenly everybody who is anybody is rediscovering seaside piers. And only just in time. We are down to the last 47½ out of the 84 that once protruded their barnacled bills into the waters round our coasts. Or 48½ if you count the great, apocryphal Wigan Pier which has been a comedian's stand-by for many years, and is said to have been invented at the equally famous Wig an' Pen Club in Fleet Street.

With Dick Emery taking over from Frankie Howerd at the Wellington Pier in Great Yarmouth our own Francis Reid has been playing the Pavilion at Cromer. He writes about its happy resuscitation on another page.

Whether or not the "What the butler saw" machines have been converted for showing "Danish Dentist on the Job" seems to matter very little—piers and their shows have always been renowned for good dirty fun. One remembers with pleasure the pierrot troupe immortalised in "The Immortal Hour" ("they sing . . . and they dance . . . and they're terrible"), the lugubrious and permanently unsuccessful fishermen who remain impervious even to roller-skaters over their lines, the curious flavour that a first course of whelks gives to an ice-cream cone, the funny hats, the fortune-tellers, and the Fol de Rols. Everything promotes a willing suspension of disbelief that makes one ready to visit piers again.

Sir John Betjeman, who has (who else?) just been elected President of the august body dedicating itself to the preservation of this species of marine monster, the National Piers Society, likes them very much. He "thinks" he once mentioned the pier at Cliftonville in a poem that he has forgotten. Certainly, R. H. Barham (he of the Ingoldsby Legends) was one of the first poets to record *his* experiences on a pier (in his epic that begins "I was in Margate