

# The Collegiate Theatre will serve them well

JOHN LEONARD

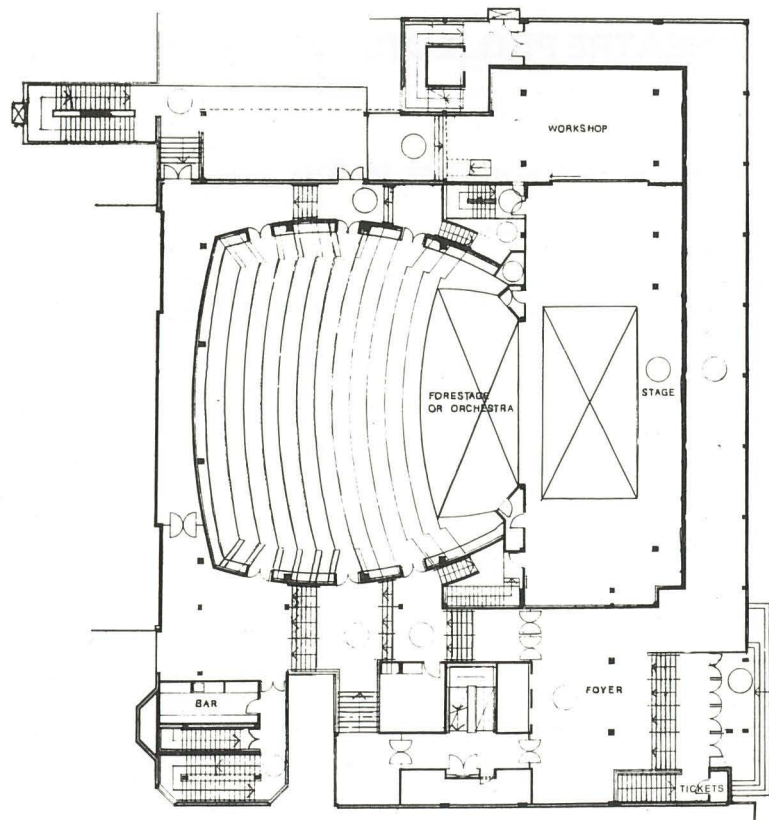
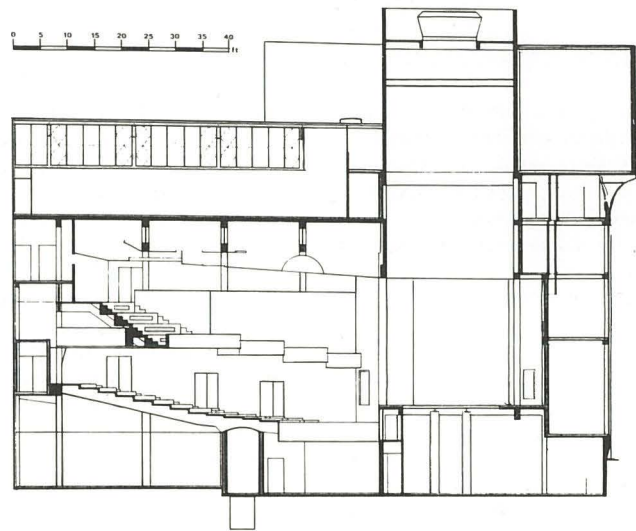
I should say at the outset, that I am not a great fan of university theatres. Not, I hasten to add, the theatres built for Drama Departments, but the multi-purpose affairs so often provided for student union buildings. My experiences in the past have left me with the distinct impression that such theatres are designed to please the largest number of people, and succeed in being next to useless to everybody. Such delights as polished hardwood floors (you want to hammer *nails* into our floor?), total lack of wing space and flying space, and the ever present cinema screen, make the theatre technician's job even more difficult than it already is. It was therefore with a slight sense of foreboding that I agreed to visit University College's Collegiate Theatre to see what sort of problems would be facing the entrants to the London Student Drama Festival. The University College's Student's Union and Collegiate Administration have agreed to loan the Theatre to the Festival, thus saving them some £3,000. A commendable gesture indeed.

First impressions of the theatre are not good. The Long Coffee Bar that runs down one side of the theatre, is scruffy and cramped, with cigarette burns on almost all pieces of furniture. The coffee and the jam doughnut that made up my breakfast were, however, excellent! A talk with the Administrator, Ann Ceri Llewellyn, revealed that the theatre is almost always fully booked, either with student functions, or with outside hires to amateur companies or the major London companies, both as a performing and as a rehearsal venue. The Theatre also boasts one of the few paint frames available for hire in central London. Harassed production managers take note. My guide around the theatre was Jeremy Anderson of the Stage Committee, a student body that supervises the technical side of the theatre running. He was far sighted enough to realise that supervising the ingress of 11 companies in as many days was not going to be an easy task, and together with the Chief Electrician – George Owczarski – and the Master Carpenter – Peter Wood – he has arranged a question and answer session, so that incoming groups can be made fully aware of what they are going to be up against. Judging by my subsequent tour, one thing they are not going to be up against is the total lack of interest and help that can so often mar festivals of this sort. The theatre, despite the unpromising exterior, is a testament to the perseverance and pro-

fessionalism of the people who run it.

At first sight, the stage seems very small in relation to the auditorium, particularly when one stands on stage and looks out into the horseshoe shaped house. This impression is altered when the viewing position is

reversed, and from the auditorium, the stage looks much larger. This is largely due to the use of a forestage extension, which projects some 6m out from the pros. Given the fact that the distance from the back wall to the pros is only 9m, it is hardly surprising



Architects: James Cubitt and Partners (Fello Atkinson ARIBA)