

thinkable actor for Garrick, and Timothy West once again made us wonder how we could ever contemplate any performance of anything without his contribution. In fact we have survived many theatrical evenings without Timothy West – indeed, enjoyed many productions which were certainly not the poorer for his absence. But there are actors who are so *right* in everything they do that they carry the conviction of indispensability throughout the magic hour of their strutting and fretting. Such an actor is Mr. West and his contribution thus catalysed Mr. Richardson's characterisation of the leading role. I certainly hope to look upon their like again.

Stage scores a century

Stage newspaper is one hundred and I have read every issue for over a quarter of that century. I have no intention of missing a single future issue until my final curtain. I like *Stage* and I congratulate her on a splendid long run. I hope that she will always remember that she is a local newspaper and will contain even more trivia and even more names. Hers is a world where the Cast List is infinitely more important than the Review.

B's Memorial

Although not an ABTT founder – I was in rehearsal when the promulgating ad hoc cell met in that King Street cellar – I did join in time to speak from the floor at the ABTT's 1961 Conference: their first and only, but certainly successful attempt at international

hosting. After a decade of active committee work, I now offer only moral support from the back benches. And so I did not join the band of enthusiastic members who did-it-themselves to transform a bleak slice of fringe Soho into office, committee, and assembly rooms. Instead I waited until the official opening when the plonk flowed liberally (by courtesy of Theatre Projects). After all the volunteer effort and donations in kind, it would be churlish to suggest that the assembly room looks as if it had been devised by a local authority acting on the advice from equipment manufacturers without seeking an opinion from the ABTT's architectural and planning committee. So I will only think it, not say aloud. No, I will just commend T.P. for putting their finger on the real pulse of the ABTT – informal communication – and supplying the necessary lubrication. This essential purpose of the ABTT was recognised by the late B. Bear and I can well remember the moment when he rose to his feet in the King Street basement to bring a wandering policy discussion to its senses by proposing a wine and cheese epilogue to the monthly technical meetings. The bar in the new premises is most properly dedicated to B's memory and he would have wished no finer memorial. But, glass in hand, he might well have used the occasion to warn that acquisition of grand premises can often be the first sign of an institution on the slide.

Lyric devalued

On entering the new Lyric at Hammersmith I expected to be overcome by a great wave

of *déjà vu*. I had, after all, seen many great performances from the old Lyric's gods and had bridged a two month unemployment gap in the late fifties by acting as the Lyric's chief electrician. So I stepped out of the ghastly foyer (style: developer's bland) into the comic auditorium (style: disneyland Matcham) anticipating a great wave of damp-eyed nostalgia. But I collapsed in a wave of nervous giggles arising from a state of disbelief which resolutely defied all attempts at suspension. The auditorium had been re-scaled to a minor but disastrous extent; but even if the new Lyric had been an exact copy of the old, this is no way to go about building a theatre. It stands as a monument to the stupidity of our planning regulations and possibly even to our whole attitude to the performing arts. Frank Matcham would surely regard us as a right load of loonies.

New decade's resolution

As a regular breaker of New Year resolutions I now propose to attempt a New Decade resolution. *Hear Ye, Hear Ye!* The only things that I really care passionately about (well, things of the soul, that is) are Handel and old-shallow-tiered-horseshoe theatres.

So Walter Plinge hereby resolves that he will make no more mention of either in this column throughout the Eighties. (It is not that your Walter is a Puritan, he just does not want to be a bore.) So no mention. Well, not unless he succeeds in getting a Handel Opera performed in some old-shallow-tiered-horseshoe of which he happens to be, for the time being, custodian.

Caring is the little things

DOROTHY TENHAM

Only American Actors Equity would dare to attempt to define the duties of a Stage Manager on paper. The idea of actually setting down on paper the duties of any particular member of a stage management team is something that has always defeated me totally. I was brought up to believe that anything that was required for the comfort of the rest of the company and for the requirements of the production was my job to provide.

As DSM on the book of any fairly conventional production, it became a habit to think of myself as hostess to all the people who turned up in the rehearsal room each day. That seemed (very simply and without too many fussy complications) to take care of the 'comfort of the company' part of the deal. However, the quality of the host varies from time to time and varies considerably from generation to generation. The common-sense courtesies tend to slip

away first. Let them not be forgotten in the stampede to computerise the provision of production requirements. They are the things that make actors and directors comfortable in the rehearsal room and, therefore, able to produce better and more relaxed work more quickly.

For good box office, the essential conclusion to all the preparation work must be good performances from the actors – no matter how efficient theatres become technically. A company needs relaxed and safe rehearsals to enable it to go all out for the best results and yet still feel secure.

Actors are a walking paradox. They can remember 2½ hours of script and still forget to come to their rehearsals with a pencil. As a good host, you should be prepared to provide a pencil (preferably one with a rubber on the end) and something with which to sharpen it when required. A spare note pad or two should always be at

hand for use by actors and directors – also forgetful folk! As hosts of the rehearsal room, DSM's should be the first to arrive and the last to leave. They should know the most convenient route to the rehearsal room, where the loo is, where to eat, where to drink, where to make the company's tea and coffee, where the nearest pay phone is and how to get from the rehearsal room to costumiers and wig makers.

These may seem unnecessary or obvious duties for a DSM. If they become so unnecessary that nobody performs these duties anymore, then I believe that the standard of stage management will go quickly downhill and take some potentially exciting performances with it. If you find it all too obvious, I once more apologise for boring all you good DSM's.

It is my firm conviction that unless these 'little niceties' become so obvious to DSM's that they are automatic actions, schools who teach stage management are wasting their time teaching students to understand the workings of more technical aspects of the craft.

As I said to start with – 'caring is the little things'.