

Between Cues

The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

A Plinge Rejected

I am suffering from acute rejection symptoms. A leading journal of architecture commissioned my opinion of a new theatre and rejected the resultant pearls of wisdom. Straightforward rejection I can take on the chin (that's how I've survived a quarter-century in the theatre) but to have my polished prose referred to as 'your initial draft' is enough to make any Plinge throw in the pencil. Where did I go wrong? Were my infinitives too inexpertly split? Or my commas too inelegantly scattered? Surely it could not be because I had committed the unspeakable critical sin of *enthusiasm*? Confident that Somewhere there is Someone who will not reject – nay, might even welcome – a Plinge opinion on the *Ipswich Wolsey* let it be recorded that *I like it*. (O.K., so the lighting angles don't acknowledge the importance of an actor's eyes and teeth, but that can be solved by the traditional technique of planting extra lamps on the walls.) Internally the *Wolsey* is a bright, cheerful welcome playroom. Externally, an oasis of stylish domestic architecture in the midst of a particularly hideous example of civic centre barbarism. A dramatic assertion that there is no correlation between cheapness and nastiness.

Celebrating Stage

Still on the theme of rejection, a sentence disappeared from my little appearance in Centenary STAGE. As I had labelled the missing sentence as 'an aside', the sub-editor may well have thought that it was intended only for his private eye. Or he may have thought that I was trying to insert a free advert. The rejected aside – *I'll be damned if I'll stick with British Theatre throughout the battering that has been officially prescribed for it in the eighties. I am open to offers from any country that actually wants a theatre enough to be prepared to pay for it.* STAGE was absolutely right to cut this: it is not the stuff that centenary celebrations are made of. This was a time to rejoice in the glorious achievements of the British stage rather than contemplate the official attitude to the performing arts... an attitude which traditionally oscillates between tolerance and indifference but is currently locked into positive contempt. The Minister for the Arts appeared at the STAGE's *Savoy Lunch* to toast *The Profession*. His smooth quips were greeted politely but the air was heavy with some two thousand pros silently projecting a variety of emotions from despair to disgust. But it was but a passing moment on a joyful day – greater love hath no other profession for its newspaper. Thank you, STAGE, for celebrating your

first centenary with such theatrical flair. Even though it must have cost your last 100 years savings or your next 100 years mortgage – or both.



Costume design by
Osbert Lancaster
for *Tiresias*

Osbert Recalled

I missed the Osbert Lancaster Retrospective – my fault entirely: I was undergoing a tiny touch of the leap-year confusions. Sadly, because some of the exhibited items would surely have triggered off the kind of rosy memories that tend to overtake Waltraute and I as we sip our twilight cocoa. Like . . .

REMEMBERING the designs arriving: one flat, or border, or cloth per day. In London, by taxi from the Daily Express. In Wexford by the Irish Mail. After the last design came the Designer, just in time to offer sympathetic help to a young Plinge struggling to coax a reluctant prop *Thieving Magpie* into a not very virtuoso display of thieving and flying . . .

cloth. This was for Poulenc's *Tiresias* – possibly my own favourite Osbert design. Seen for only two performances in this Aldeburgh production with elegant role reversals by Peter Pears (in style defining wig) and Jennifer Vyvyan (with liberating levitating bosom balloons) and John Cranko choreographing Osbert's magnificent goosehead umbrella with, if memory serves, Trevor Anthony doing the obvious with it to Hervey Alan. All this incidentally in the Mk1 Jubilee Hall (when it was still a genuine village hall) as part of a double bill with a John Piper Monteverdi mounted by a six-person stage management/technical crew who were coping simultaneously with the world premiere of 'Noyes Fludde' some miles down the road. . . .



Osbert Lancaster
design for
Thieving Magpie,
Wexford Festival,
1959