

Newman and set up a company called *Subscribe Now (U.K.) Ltd.*, which is offering its expertise at a fee of around £4,000 a year, including a year's after sale service. The firm's complete package, including slick promotional material and the cost of printing and postage runs to around £20,000. The business is run from a top floor office in Covent Garden's Floral Street within singing distance of the Royal Opera House. And the men behind the enterprise are Hugh Barton and Keith Diggle, both well-known in the arts marketing world, and accountant Tony Gamble.

Hugh Barton pointed to the phenomenal success of the Newman philosophy in both the States and in Scotland as evidence of what the English subsidised theatre was missing. When Newman started, there were just six theatre companies in America using subscription ticket sales. Now there are some 200. The Brooklyn Academy of Music increased its subscriptions from 2000 to 20,000; the Seattle Repertory Theatre from none to 24,000 and the New York City Opera from none to 35,000.

Closer to home is the success story of the Scottish National Orchestra which signed Newman up four years ago. Of the 11,000 tickets sold for the SNO's 1978/79 Winter Season in Aberdeen, more than 7000 were bought by subscribers.

Like Newman, Barton is critical of the many theatres who fail to get names — 'they are your gold' — of the present single ticket buyers in order to follow up their attendance with a mailing shot.

The SNO's literature woos the potential subscriber with subtle flattery —

'Become part of the audience that visiting artists love for its warmth and discrimination.'

Employs the old trick of making virtue out of scarcity —

'Make sure of your own regular seat for our bound-to-be-sold-out concerts by taking a subscription with the right to re-book next year . . . and the next . . . and the next.'

And encourages elitism —

'Meet your friends at the SNO's Music Hall concerts.'

But what matter, so long as the seats are filled. The SNO offered the subscriber a choice of buying tickets for a series of eight concerts at 19 per cent discount and costing, depending on position, no more than £28 or of buying tickets for four concerts at a 12 per cent discount costing around £8.60. As an added inducement, payment can be made by banker's order over six months.

Hugh Barton believes that music lovers in particular are ideal subscribers because of the degree of choice which the average triple bill provides. Most people will enjoy Beethoven even if they are not enthusiastic about Rachmaninov on the same bill. But he was quick to deny any suggestion of artistic interference by his firm in the choice of production. 'I know it worries people,' he said. 'But the subscription system actually increases the freedom of the artistic director, not the reverse.' The director could afford to be more daring in his

choice, in the certain knowledge that subscribers would attend come what may.

Under Newman's guiding hand the Scottish Opera too has attracted over 6000 regular customers who occupy 70 per cent of all the seats available. In two years the Birmingham Rep has attracted almost as many.

The beauty of the system, says Barton, is that its so easy for the consumer because he only has to go through the booking process once in a season. And with so much more money 'up front' it is also easier for the management to invest in future productions and perhaps more adventurous ones.

Subscription promotion was 'not a horribly crude approach' he said. There was the art of the product and the art of 'selling' the product and the sooner people running theatres with empty seats woke up to that fact the better.

This seems a fair enough analysis and as the Newman approach to the selling side appears to have worked in America it may well be something worth looking at in Britain.

Within a budding grove . . .

For reasons which no-one seems able adequately to explain, the London borough of Hammersmith is spawning theatres at an impressive rate. It seems like only last week since the Riverside Studios opened its doors for the first time and only yesterday that the Lyric raised the curtain on its inaugural production of 'You Never Can Tell'. Even the nearby Bush Theatre, while not an infant, could at least be regarded as a juvenile.

selection of plaintive Irish ballads and jolly jigs while ye jar, bears testament to the green and misty origins of most of the regular patrons. The rapt attention on their faces as a variety of youthful and strangely exotic first nighters tramped into the saloon for their statutory pre-performance gin and tonics was something to behold. Though quite what they made of this sudden wild invasion wasn't clear.

The theatre seats just 70 people on numbing wooden chairs designed for those without pelvic bones. But aside from this slight discomfort the design and construction of the room is masterful. Rik Carmichael, seconded from the Bush Pub Theatre, has created a stage, a dressing room, a lighting box, lighting gantry and raked audience area in what, even by fringe standards, is a tiny space in which to perform a play. By painting the walls, windows and ceiling in black he has managed to create a sense of infinity which helps to enlarge the room to good effect.

The Grove theatre was started on a shoestring £1000 by two young entrepreneurs; Paul Caister, 24, an ex-Bristol Old Vic student and John Spearman, 27, an old Etonian and one-time gossip writer for the London Evening Standard. Spearman admits to a certain recklessness in throwing up a promising career in Fleet Street, but says that the magnetic pull of the theatre was too strong to withstand.

It is too early to make predictions about the success of the duo, who have blended audacity with courageousness in setting up an entirely self-supporting theatre in an area which already has two heavily subsidised theatres vying for our attention. But the fact that critics from the national press, who are not known for zealously reviewing fringe productions, bothered to turn up at



Between acts at the Grove.

The latest in mother Hammersmith's growing theatrical family was born on February 4 at the Grove Tavern. Known as the Grove Theatre it occupies an upstairs room in the pub, which in former days of grandeur was used for banquets. For many a year long since, this particular tavern has been a plain and simple ale-house where those who earn their living by the sweat of their brow come to wash the dust from their throats with, as often as not, a gallon or so of Guinness. The juke box, with its liberal

all is an indication of the professional approach of Caister and Spearman.

Their first production, 'True Facts', a new play by American Bill Elverman and directed by Caister, received mixed notices as they say. The Grove is hoping to gather momentum on March 20 with its own shortened version of *Romeo and Juliet*, which, because of the smallness of the stage, has been pared down to eight characters.

Hmmm . . . interesting.