

variously known as the Brighton Empire, Brighton Coliseum, Court, Paris and finally Dolphin has not survived. I well remember crawling all over its fibrous plaster delights with joy and tears at the prior-to-demolition auction in 1963. If it had survived but another decade or so, changing attitudes might well have produced a preservation order that would have encouraged combination with the Theatre Royal to form an elegant arts centre befitting the Prince Regent's chosen seaside spa.

This sort of history book is vital. Every theatre should be the subject of such literary recognition.

Teach yourself is the traditional way of learning about theatre. Even in these days of concern about formal stage training, with committees beavering away at the structure and accreditation of the courses, learning the job is likely to remain largely a matter of do-it-yourself. At best, formal courses may develop awareness of possibilities and provide a framework into which later self-discovery can be slotted. At worst, they may instill a minimum awareness of safety requirements and a knowledge of traditional techniques that can be usefully reacted against to take the art and craft of theatre forward. Reading seems to play a surprisingly small part in formal stage education but it is the stuff that self-teaching is made of.

Everyone in theatre starts, or should surely start, as an amateur (and anyone with any sense probably stays with their amateur status!) Jennifer Curry's *Amateur Theatre* in the *Teach Yourself Books* series is a 225 page introduction to every, yes I think every, aspect of the craft. Each chapter covers one aspect of theatre (Playscripts, Acting, Directing, Stage Management, Lighting, Scenery, Costume, Make-up, Sound, Publicity and Management). These chapters are each prefaced by wise words from an appropriate expert — and these experts are straight out of the top-most drawer: people like Patrick Garland, Keith Mitchell and Richard Pilbrow.

There is a surprising amount of information in the book and the author is obviously not only well experienced but well read: she appears to have absorbed the essence of the standard texts that her book recommends for further reading. For the energetic, each chapter includes one or more exercises. This paperback is the cheapest way I know of finding out what goes into making a production happen.

Playbill. A History of the theatre in the West Country. Harvey Crane. Published by Macdonald and Evans. £7.95

The Theatre Royal Brighton. Antony Dale. Published by Oriol Press (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.). £8.75.

Amateur Theatre. Jennifer Curry. Published by Teach Yourself Books (Hodder and Stoughton). £1.95.

The Computer Fixes Bubbles' Waggon

SIMON KELLY

He who laughs last laughs longest was never more true than in the case of Leonard Stencil, the Senior Impedimenta Officer (Roman and Greek) at the National Theatre. He was a short man with a serious disposition and a scraggy Hitler moustache. He was balding, but not in the usual way, it took the form of a small thick thatch right on top of his head, the rest having fallen out some years ago. This effect, coupled with his steel-rimmed glasses, gave him the appearance of a startled carrot. He also had a slight limp, not that there was anything physically wrong, it dated back to when his mother told him to stop sliding on the ice in the back yard. 'Don't you come running to me when you break your leg,' she told him. Later that day she herself slipped on the slide little Len had made and was laid up for months.

Mr. Stencil, as he thought of himself, and his assistant Barry (an out-of-work actor who had mistakenly thought to sneak himself into the company via the back door so to speak, and had got himself stuck with Greek and Roman dept on a five year contract. He still paid his Equity sub every half year in the forlorn hope, and could often be seen posturing in the corridor near Lord Hall's office. He was once rewarded with a 'Good Morning') inhabited a small but modern office in the sub-basement below the main auditorium. It was tastefully furnished in Civil-Servant Filing Cabinet Green, slightly foxed, a desk, a couch upon which Barry was wont to fling himself negligently but elegantly, and a Computer terminal. This last was nothing unusual at the National at that time. Everyone, even the doormen at the stage door had one. The system had been the gift of an eccentric wealthy Cybernetic manufacturer who had had his life changed by a definitive production of 'Cuckoo in the Nest' and had donated one of his experimental models in an excess of generosity, and then shrewdly charged against his tax. Mr. Stencil sent himself on a course. He knew how to interrogate the machine on the current Spear and Breastplate situation, and how to update the Toga stocks when a new consignment had been delivered. Although he was quite in the dark as to the workings of this wondrous machine (so was the manufacturer, it was *very* experimental) he had a certain knack, a certain je ne sais quoi, a *rapport* if he wanted to be French about it which Mr. Stencil most certainly did not. Barry would have been French about this or any other thing had he been allowed, but Mr. Stencil no longer permitted unauthorised use of the terminal since a disastrous episode when Barry (who definitely did not have the touch) attempted to program a simulated Lunar Module Landing into it, thereby causing a Ken Campbell production to overrun by 10

hours and to crash into the moon at a speed of 3000km/hr. As luck would have it none noticed any difference.

St. John McGovern Jones-Letherby, known to his intimates, of whom he had few, as Bubbles, had only lately signed with the company to play medium-sized parts at quite a good salary. This made his agent very pleased prestige-wise even though he wasn't going to get as much as when he was in the world's longest and dreariest surgical soap opera 'Maternity Ward 10'. As Dr. Killdead he had made his face a household object, but lately his fan mail had become a little predictable, and his act, as it were, needed a little class. Hence the National. He was a chronic complainer, given to moaning about anything and everything as a matter of principle. Barry hated him, but then he hated anyone who was working when he wasn't. He could often be seen standing in the wings during performances sneering out at some of the finest actors in the world, until chased away by irate stage managers.

Bubbles had lately been kitted out by the Wardrobe as a Centurion of the IXVIIIth Legion (the ones that tied their Greaves in half-hitch knots for quick-release) and was dissatisfied with his helmet plumes. He had gone up to the Wardrobe to complain, but he found it full of pre-pubescent girls being fitted for yet another revival of 'The Devils at Loudon'. They all screamed when he went in, but they needn't have bothered. The only person he was interested in was himself, a lifetime's love affair, with never a moment's disappointment. He moodily went down to see Mr. Stencil as the next best thing. As he rudely walked into his office, Barry was reclining at his ease on the couch reading an old copy of *Plays & Players*, while Mr. Stencil was conscientiously entering the day's returns of Grecian Urns into the computer.

'Now look here,' was the not very promising opening gambit, 'look at these feathers.'

Mr. Stencil and Barry looked.

'It's a bloody disgrace!' said Bubbles indignantly. 'Not even the B.B.C. would have given me *this* to wear. And they've tried to fob me off with a few old bits of tat in their time, I can tell you. Surely you can do better than *them*? How can I be expected to get into character when I'm given this rubbish?' He waved a perfectly good and highly expensive bronze hand made authentic in every detail ostrich-feathered roman helmet disdainfully in the air.

'Have you tried the Wardrobe?' asked Mr. Stencil politely. 'It's not our province now it's been issued to them, you know.'

'Yes, dear boy,' said Barry in tones of languid fellowship, 'Such a ghastly crew. No time for the Artists, you'd think that the prod acted itself.'