

There was a tremendous feeling of isolation, 6000 miles from home, living and working in one foreign country – Greece – and stepping ashore in another – Brazil, Argentina or Uruguay – every couple of days. We had to be totally self reliant. One is forced to say that the organisation of the ship was not exactly 100%. Any problems we had were only exacerbated by involving anyone from the crew. The Chief Electrician was known to us as Mr Charisma, as he oozed charm with his dashing smile, curly grey hair and engagingly broken English. Although he could always be relied upon to provide us with an awesome rendition of 'I'm getting married in the morning', accompanying himself on the guitar, at all or any social gathering, neither he nor his staff were able to bring the lift 'Temporarily out of service' when we started the season, or the Tannoy which disintegrated after about two months, into working order before we arrived home – or probably to this day.

Obtaining supplies or spares in South America was very difficult. Even getting hold of good quality batteries for the radio mike was sometimes a problem. In Brazil there is a ban on imports of practically everything, in order to support their home industries. Unfortunately there is no indigenous product of professional quality in the audio or electronics field. This has resulted in a flourishing black market in imported goods. When I tried to find a mike for the ship to buy I was offered an AKG like our own for \$600 – three times the price at home. In Argentina imported goods are readily available in the bigger cities, but with an inflation rate of 210% per year, prices are as astronomical as the Brazilian black market.

Even Harrods in Buenos Aires could not supply a spare part when our musician broke the chanter on his bagpipes. I had hoped to persuade British Caledonian to fly one from Edinburgh to Rio for free, but to no avail. We were forced to wait until a new magician flew in to join us. He arrived like Father Christmas, with all the bits and pieces that were unobtainable locally. Apparently a full scale battle had taken place when he changed planes in Lisbon. Spare tapes had been wrenched from his hands and X-rayed – fortunately causing no damage. Furthermore they flatly refused to take off while he had a radio mike in his possession, even though it was in pieces in its case, for fear of the plane's radar being affected. Eventually they gave way. Difficulty in communication across 6000 miles was apparent when the black gaffa tape I had asked for – we already had plenty of grey – turned up with a note saying 'Our black gaffa is grey'.

Looking back I can truthfully say that it was unlike anything else I have ever done. Where else would you cancel a performance because the stage was moving up and down so much? Nor did I know quite what I was letting myself in for. I never expected to be playing Neptune in the Crossing The Line Ceremony, and throwing the Commodore into his own swimming pool! Summing up, the motto seems to be: go prepared for every conceivable eventuality – and you'll still be outsmarted.

Here today and there tomorrow?

FREDERICK BENTHAM

The Publications committee of OISTT has recently been meeting in London and speaking for myself I became aware, once again, of the difficulties in exchange of information about the technical side of theatre within one language, let alone with the confusion of tongues as an additional hazard. It is not just a question of the differing interpretations carried by words: that one may have to go into the 'orchestra' in the States to do precisely the same thing as we would do over here in the 'stalls'.

Before we get too deeply into that, it is necessary to explain what OISTT is and stands for. It is the International Organisation of Scenographers and Theatre Technicians. Two clues proclaim its origin across

technical vocabulary. The technician wants to know about something in order to do something with it (if only to say it is not for him) whereas the academic wishes to ponder and reflect upon it. Immediacy has only a little part in the latter's brief; he deals in archive and it is not of great importance whether the 'happening' was last week, month, year or century. To satisfy him *our* publications must arrive, preferably indexed, for preservation in filing cabinets or upon library shelves: or interred on micro-something-or-other ready for instant digital exhumation.

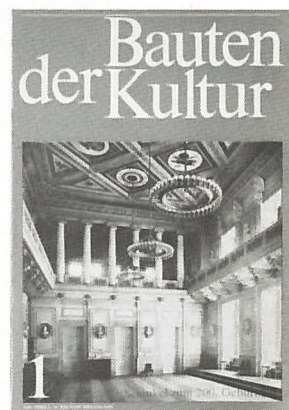
That is enough provocation in that area, let us turn to the man* who is actively engaged working in, or for, theatre. What does he want? Years ago I used to think that if he were a pro he didn't want to read anything technical; whereas if he were an amateur he wanted to read everything, within reach or out of reach. It doesn't really matter to the latter whether the equipment is in scale with his field of operation or not. Technology exercises its own allure – all the greater, perhaps, if one doesn't have to use the stuff.

And, why not! If readers can enjoy an historic past impossible for them to experience why not an equally impossible present. Is this what the journals of the twenty-six member countries of OISTT



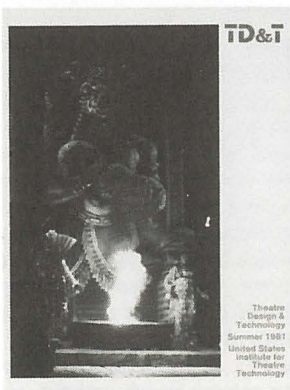
the channel; the O before the I in OISTT and the word 'Scenographer'. It is inconceivable that we theatre people over here would dream up a word like that to describe any of our activities. To me it evokes not John Bury or Pat Robertson – both of whom are, I assure you, scenographers – but a professor with rimless glasses and not so much as a twinkle in his eye. And twinkling eyes, both active and passive is what theatre is about.

Thus it is that, leaving aside political philosophies, different approaches to the funding of theatres and the like, we have to face the fact that the practitioners and the academics don't even talk the same language within the same language and



exist for – to be all things to all men? Surely not: though such a wide range of readership certainly comes within the province of CUE.

The best example of an OISTT journal is *Bühnentechnische Rundschau*: in itself hardly a catch-phrase for the bookstall. Founded in 1907 – long, long before there was an OISTT – it must surely be the oldest regular technical theatre journal in the World. It is the organ of the German Society of Theatre Technicians. The present editor is Helmut Grosser and he is probably



* Just in case: 'man' = human being, distinguished from other animals by superior mental development, articulate speech, and upright posture.