

Between Cues

The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

Bottled Tabs

Walter Plinge was once a Tabman and so he is much pleased by his new paperweight inscribed *Fragment of House Curtains, Royal Opera House, Covent Garden*. Acquisition of this encapsulated fragment of plush,* calculated to have risen over 70,000 times in performance, is Tabman Plinge's token contribution to the relief of backstage squalor at ROH. Do I detect the start of a new appeal activity based on bottled theatrical ephemera? Fragments of a Diaghilev costume to aid the Theatre Museum? Or a square inch of the Arts Council's letter to the Old Vic? And is it true that the off-cuts from Peter Hall's office carpet are securely deposited in a bank vault?

Bees in a Hobby Horse's Bonnet

There are a number of resident bees in the plingular bonnet and their buzz is a familiar feature of this page. They swarmed when I perched in the higher regions of the vast Theatre des Champs Elysees. *Shallow Circles* (rather than deep overhangs) and *Theatres Usually Make Concert Halls* (whereas concert halls do not often make theatres). The band were thrust forward on the raised pit lift. Visually they were a long way away, but aurally they were close and clear. Their music had presence. And this was not the big stuff: it was an all-Mozart evening. While the architectural bees buzzed, there was activity in another familiar plingular part: the memory playback. Soaring over the Mozart glided the voice of Jacques Brel as the idealist Man of la Mancha. Twelve years on and the Grand Master Bordoni has been overtaken. The foh are new but the optics remain simple pc focus. However the problems in Mancha were – and would remain – finding the right position rather than having available the right instrument. Which is the familiar buzz of another plingular bee!

Any Light for Denis?

While my lighting philosophy remains basically *It ain't what you put, it's the where that you put it*, I am not averse to improvements in the tools of my trade. On certain throws I am not choosy between Silos and Teapots: indeed a cosy old 264 will do just as well if it has a halogen lamp. However I am much indebted to the Silhouette for allowing me to use profiled wide angles and still get a useful quantity of light. And



Rosco Directional Diffusers (about which I enthused in Cue 1) surely continue to be increasingly indispensable tools for practitioners in the art of light squeezing and squirting. The Ironing Lady apparently endorses my view: I understand that both the Silhouette 40 and Rosco 104 are considered essential in Whitehall.

Chamber Rock

At a time when so much Music Theatre is suffering from a masochistic excess of percussion, guitar and decibel, it is a pleasure to find the *Sadista Sisters* exploring the subtler textures of violin, cello and piano in their latest look at society through feminist eyes. This ladies trio owes nothing to the palm court traditions of their chosen instrumental combination. It includes the rhythmic pulse of today's rock and the sparse atonality of today's chamber opera. It embraces the acidity that recalls the music of the political theatre of 50 years ago. It is that rare thing in today's Music Theatre: a score based on sincerity rather than parody. (But includes one devastating musical lampoon which lays bare the full horrors of the country & western idiom). Microphones are used but only because the vocal style requires an electronic quality. Climaxes are not dependent on blasting: we are allowed to enjoy vocal and instrumental textures. Alas, the words do not rise to the music. Heightened realism is all very well up to a point, but must the characters be so closely based on the stock simplifications that have become the Fringe's equivalent of Victorian

melodramatics? Are not the audience at feminist theatre now sufficiently sophisticated and sympathetic to be offered a play about people more detailed than these stereotypes?

Sorry I Was Right

It must be seen in London, but only if it can be given the 'overlooked' style of staging that it gets on the traverse stage at the Circle in the Square. (Remember how The Club fell apart when it transferred from that theatre to a 'played-out-front' production style in London). Having said that in Cue 7 about 'I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking it on the Road', I hastened along to the Apollo hoping to eat my words. Alas, a cool casual brittle piece of music theatre had been hyped into a mini imitation of a showbiz blockbuster. Souffle into suet pudding. In New York I felt feminist: London nearly converted me to chauvinism.

Plinge at Number Ten

On July 12th at 10 pm I walked the ultimate corridor of power: the one that stretches in simple perspective from *the* photogenic front door. The Right Honourable Lady who (with her husband) had 'requested the honour' of my company explained that the length of the corridor resulted from her residence being constructed by Walpole from a pair of back-to-back houses. Upstairs, floating though the eighteenth century elegance of the drawing rooms, I sipped champagne and relished the historic ambience of this superb *theatre of the body politic*.

Sitting Literally

A lovely John Christie quote from Kenneth Ireland allows me to return to the matter of *Audience Assistance* noted in last CUE, and to reassure any curious readers that Britten and Pears were assisting the performance by sitting *in* (rather than *on*) a box! Apparently Christie recommended that Pitlochry Theatre be built *On top of a mountain, with no roads leading to it. Surround it with barbed wire, make everyone wear full evening dress, charge the earth – and you'll be full.* I am sure that the great marketing man was being serious, not cynical.

Cork Critique

The Cork correspondent of STAGE shall have the last word upon which any plingular comment would be superfluous. *A special word of praise is due to the technical team, whose precision work with scene-changing occasionally gets ahead of the lighting box, and even further ahead of the actors.*