

CUE

Technical Theatre Review

13 September – October 1981

The Netherlands *Theatertechnisch Congres 1981* at the RAI Congress Centre in Amsterdam included a demonstration of scenic painting techniques held on the main stage of the RAI. As a contrast to the contemporary work in progress on the floor, several beautiful historic cloths were on display in the flies. The 19th century backcloth in our cover picture is by Bartholomeus van Hove for C. L. A. Vogel's opera *Le Siège de Leyde*.

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Conferring at Trade Fairs

The ABTT Trade Fair is unique. It is not associated with a Conference. Why? Is it because the ABTT does not enjoy conferring? Or because it does not consider that there are any technical theatre topics worth conferring about?

Elsewhere in the world, Trade Fairs and Conferences are regarded as inseparable. Usually for economic reasons. Conferences need funding and manufacturers' stand rentals are a useful source. To justify these rents and the time of their expensive salesmen, manufacturers need a large, broadly based and preferably international, audience.

A conference helps to stimulate just such an attendance. Not only because it makes the journey seem a little bit more necessary, but because, in the eyes of the dispensers of travel grants, a conference scores a few points above a trade fair on the scale of educational justification.

That there are entertainment technical topics worth conferring about was amply demonstrated at Showlight '81. There were very few theatre people present and many of these were only able to attend because their journalistic connections enabled them to bypass the rather expensive turnstiles. But most emerged claiming to be mentally refreshed by being stimulated to think in wider terms than their normal round of daily survival.

The ABTT launched itself in 1961 with its first and last international conference. The opening of the National Theatre was recognised as an opportunity for a major international technical jamboree, but the uncertainty surrounding the opening date, coupled with the financial gloom then prevailing, combined effectively to prevent lift-off.

From the viewpoint of a recession, that financial gloom looks particularly rosy – which only goes to reinforce yet again that everything in life or in theatre, particularly poverty, is relative. But whatever ails our general national condition, one thing is sure. Our theatre – its art, its craft, and its technology – are riding high. Can we not find a way to host an event that would stimulate higher and yet higher standards at home and across the world?

The ABTT is the ideal body – indeed probably the only body – to lead the way. Let it be a gorgeous rag bag. A conference full of parallel sessions for the various specialisations as well as integrated sessions on general problems. Let there be design exhibits and hands-on workshops. Backstage tours and informal encounters. All generating, and supported by, a Trade Fair of such importance that not even the smallest manufacturer of pins for pin hinges can afford not to take space.

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