

of mica stuck together and hand painted. A process in which the fingers played a large part. Much early Eddie work will be readily identifiable by the archaeologist one day, in consequence. The mica discs persisted until after the Hitler war. I recall that on the first night of *Rainbow Square* in 1951; during the storm scene something like a sheet off a bed went rushing by overhead. One of the micas had become unstuck and was showing white. I sat in the stalls of the old Stoll Kingsway petrified. But it did not reappear: it had been spotted by the Light Console operator and that effects projector faded out before the repeat came round. It was nicely done.

When at last it became possible to think of using discs of heat-resisting glass and photographic reproduction it was natural to consider pointing a camera at bits of the sky and making a master montage. This was quite hopeless. To collect enough cloud pictures which could be pieced together to make a story, so to speak, and arrive at a point of repeat was a task for a computer or Eddie Biddle. Since we did not have computers in those days the 'photographic' clouds are from Eddie artwork made in King Street.

In a changing world the craft of optical effects—like the toilet roll—is something which defies fundamental change. Nevertheless, the reader must not be left with an image of a man doing the same old things, however craftworthy, year in and year out for over fifty years. The truth is, thanks to his skill as an artist and his native ingenuity, there must have been few special optical effects demands from a director or his lighting man which he, after a little thought, has not been able to satisfy. You put a bit of this with that, draw or paint something, add a breaking-up glass or two, suggest the right lens and degree of focus and there it is—the desired effect. And much better, and certainly much less expensive, than some extravaganza employing film or lasers. Above all it will be right for the stage because it is a 'live' piece of apparatus conceived and made by a man to be part of a live show.

CUE readers will like to know that Eddie Biddle who figures so largely in the article above, became the ABTT's Technician of the Year. The coveted trophy (a chromium plated G clamp on a suitably inscribed base) was presented at the Round House Trade Show by Antony Easterbrook chairman of the ABTT who said that Eddie had practiced for 51 years what surely must have been the rarest of theatre crafts. In acknowledging the honour Eddie replied that for twenty years he was known as that "Effects chap" for the next twenty as "The effects expert" but when, ten years ago he became, like Joe Davis or Fred Bentham, just "Eddie Biddle" he knew he had arrived!

(Editor)

Between Cues

The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

Ensemble Defined

Ensemble is perhaps an ideal more appealing to the committed minority playgoer than to the majority audience who, on the evidence of the box-office, seem to prefer stars. Music, on the whole, is dependent on ensemble. Drama, on the other hand, can exist without it and the word has developed something of an image (often based on experience) of acting that is closely integrated but uniformly bad. However, ensemble as a total integration of uniformly excellent acting has been freshly defined by the RSC in *Nicholas Nickleby*. It was difficult to get in, but during the last weeks of the final revival my patience was rewarded with a "return" in the back row of the pit. It was part 2 and I felt like an interloper. The four hours that the audience had spent together during the afternoon's part 1 had bound them into an ensemble: not only with each other but with the cast. And when the actors came wandering and chatting around the auditorium before the start, I buried myself in my programme even more than I usually do during such moments. Despite having previously clambered all over the set at an ABTT meeting, I was a complete outsider. But not for long: within five minutes or five cues, whichever the shorter, I was part of the family. Has there ever been a production so uniformly well received? If there was a bad notice I never saw it, and if there was a single bad word I never heard it.

Salad Night Stands

One Night Stand failed to provide the same nostalgia trip for the mums and dads who danced the 1962 Twist as *Grease* did for anyone who could recall life in an American high school under the Elvis regime. A gentle evening of cosy predictability, clearly derived from *Salad Days*. For a fresh brew I look to various corners of the fringe—particularly the feminist corners—where sooner or later the trends will surely coalesce to advance the development of small scale music theatre.

Church Concerts

A recent evening of orchestral Haydn and Mozart in a little Georgian theatre down the road from Chez Plinge reinforced yet again my oft stated belief in theatres as concert halls. But what about churches? Well, up the road there is a minor perpendicular cathedral where another summer's evening found me rejoicing in the sonority of Beethoven's horns but requiring a score to hear the strands of his pastoral symphony. From time to time it is certainly right and proper to stand in awe of Gothic Grandeurs and some music takes on a new, sometimes even interesting dimension when the acoustic stresses the overall shape at

the expense of the inner texture. However on the whole my ears and sensors are more receptive to the Georgian churches with their domestic scale and elegant restraint. St. George's Hanover Square was built in Handel's parish during his lifetime. Like the theatre of that time, it is built in courtyard form with people hanging on the walls to increase that intimacy and sense of corporate identity which is fundamental to the concept of both theatre and church. With the baroque timbers of original instruments, including such stylistic felicities as oboes doubling recorders, Handel's "The Triumph of Time and Truth" was a total marriage of music and architecture. It is one of those pieces that jogs along pleasantly but from time to time suddenly overwhelms the senses with unbelievably exquisite sounds. A perfect evening with every ambient detail just right—including tolling the bell to recall interval drinkers from the Mason's Arms.

Repetition Parisien

I have never shared the widely held view that worthy theatre can only germinate in an atmosphere of tension and exhaustion. Regular sleep and relaxed meals have always seemed to me to be an essential part of the creative process. Perhaps that is why some of my more pleasant rehearsal memories are Parisian. Even (or especially) the Man of la Mancha rehearsals which were scheduled to last from 2 a.m. until late breakfast so that they might integrate with day rehearsals for evening concerts. Days in bed, evenings in Paris and nights in rehearsals passed a week in pleasant routine. Preparations for the French flop of Sleuth were enlivened by an oblique back wall requiring the set to be an exact left for right mirror image of the original design. This turned out to be rather more unnerving than anyone had predicted, but the focussing schedule fortunately allowed for frequent refreshment breaks to reverse the lighting designer's visual perception. Bubbling Brown Sugar was rigidly scheduled as 8-12, 2-6, 8-12, (with an additional 30 minute intermission in each call) to allow a proper creative contribution to be made by the cuisine of the cafe next door. A carefully regulated creative environment where the only intrusion from the outside world was a message relayed from the box office in the form of a scrap of paper bearing a London telephone number and an elegantly pencilled *Monsieur ?? (au fait avec lumiere)*.

Phrasing for Profit

Was it Dick Condon (it must have been Dick Condon) who shook his head over the notice in a theatre bar *No Hot Meals Served after 7 p.m.* "Now surely everyone knows"