

## Abstracts from the Congress

The RAI stage was given over to a working display of scenic painting techniques (on floor, of course,—not frame). And there were some gorgeous old cloths hanging.

It was difficult to obtain a total impression of the proposed new Amsterdam MUZIEKTHEATER from the many plans on show. There was the obligatory model of landscaped exterior and a confused model of the proscenium zone. But, alas, *no isometric*.

Dutch theatre technicians are awarded a silver pin after 25 years service. But it is that most useful of all pins, the one that everyone of us from time to time needs urgently—the pin that goes in a pin hinge.

The Stadsschouwburg building in the Leidsplein has gained an *International Theatre Bookshop* (on the opposite corner to the *Cisca ticket shop*).

Judging from their exhibition stand, they have a very wide stock including many hard-to-get and out-of-print technical theatre books.

A student design exhibition indicated a promising level of competence—which is the most that one can expect from work undertaken as an exercise rather than stimulated by an actual production. Never were so many costumes so fresh, so clean, so laundered and so untextured. Bring on the aerosols!

*Theaters en Concertzalen in Nederland* is an ambitious publishing project covering over 100 Dutch theaters and halls in four volumes. For each theatre there will be a groundplan of stage and auditorium with a transparent two-colour overlay giving the lighting layout in CIE symbols with wattage and channel number within the symbol. There will also be a cross-section plus general and technical information such as exact measurements of stage, platform, auditorium, numbers of seats, dressing rooms, light and sound installations, etc. All plans have the uniform scale of 1:100. Volume 1 is imminent and volumes 2, 3 and 4 are scheduled for 1982. The subsidised price is Dfl 600 but subscribe now and get it for Dfl 520, which is a bit more than £100.

# The White Heat of Revolution

DORIAN KELLY

On the 5th of October, 1881, there was very little happening to attract the attention of the London theatregoer. Covent Garden, Sadlers Wells and the Lyceum were occupied with Grand Opera, most of the Drama Houses seemed to be doing revivals, and both St. James's and the Haymarket were closed for renovation. Wilson Barrett was scoring a personal success at the Princess's in the 'Lights O' London', and in Dublin, Henry Irving was electrifying the Irish with the Lyceum classical repertoire. Down by Victoria Embankment, however, plans were afoot to electrify the theatre scene in a very different way.

For Richard D'Oyly Carte, it was the culmination of a dream. Here was a man whose wit, sagacity, gentleness, irrepressible good humour, keen insights and self-deprecating manner caused most people to detest him immeasurably and respect him immensely. He was widely experienced in the ways of the world, and a more than shrewd businessman. In his capacity of Managing Director to the Comedy Opera Company he had contrived somehow to hold the company together for nearly five years, and make money at the same time, in spite of boardroom dissension leading to the formation of rival companies, fist fights on stage over disputed ownership of scenery, and pirated versions of his productions being presented simultaneously next door at the Olympic.

### A cut throat business

Putting on a production in those days was a cut-throat business. Theatre leases were brought and sold, but merit and art had very little to do with it. Only one factor mattered to the owners of a theatre, and that was the financial reward. When the lease of the Opera Comique was nearing its end, Carte decided that enough was enough, and that rather than seek renewal, rather even than try to find another venue and therefore be beholden to the vagaries and corruptibility of the owners of the bricks and mortar, he would seek total independence. The result took only a matter of months to rise from a piece of wasteground by the riverside. It was the Savoy Theatre.

This was to be in every respect the best theatre that he could make it. Never again, he vowed, would he attempt to cram 'twenty love-sick maidens' onto a stage ideally suited to ten. The orchestra pit was to be large enough for the extra musicians for which Sullivan was always agitating, and, spurred by Gilbert, who had very firm ideas on production standards, coupled with a healthy contempt for the commonplace, he intended to make the technical facilities second to none. It was to have the best of taste in decoration, the

finest of ventilation systems, and it was to be the first theatre in the world to be lighted throughout with the incandescent filament lamp.

The phenomenon of light produced by electricity had been known since about 1800, when Sir Humphrey Davey, (he of safety lamp fame), discovered that his latest toy, a voltaic battery of great power, could be used to heat strips of platinum to incandescence. He also showed that a brilliantly blinding light could be produced between the tips of two carbon rods if they were briefly touched together, and that this light could be maintained for as long as they, and the power lasted.

This led to the development of a great many devices for floodlighting and public streetlighting, but it was not until forty-five years later that we first hear of its use in a theatrical setting. At the Princess's, Charles Kean, (no sluggard, he, at trying anything new) used it in an otherwise unremarkable pantomime entitled 'Harlequin and the Enchanted Arrow' as a wide angle floodlight. It was adjudged less than successful, according to the critic of the Times, who dismissed it as 'sickly' and accused it of 'producing giant shadows'. Later, in Paris, M. Dubosque invented the first of what turned out to be a whole circus of special effects, including sunrises, stars, rainbows, lightning flashes and most important of all, an arc, with a reflector, in a housing with a lens and some shutters (fig 1) which could be used as a follow spot. In London, Kean used it, or one copied from it, to great effect, for many years.

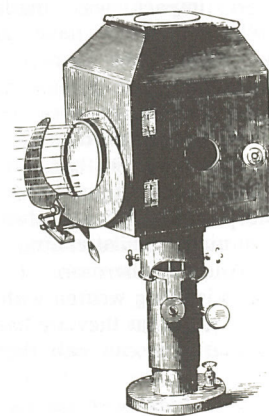


Fig. 1 Dubosque's Follow Spot

In 1879 a new theatre had opened in Lyons, which had taken the novel step of lighting its auditorium by means of electricity. This did not employ filament bulbs, but used a system of arclight known as the Jablochhoff Candle. These consisted of pairs of carbon rods separated by a quarter of an inch or so by a strip of meltable ceramic insulating material. (fig 2). The rods were connected at the top by a very fine strip of carbon, sufficient to strike