

# Between Cues

The thoughts of  
Walter Plinge

## National Reading Lights

The *Performing Arts Book Fair* at the National Theatre provided the lovely afternoon of my expectations. Having received a bank statement that very morning, I was able to resist most of the goodies. Well, until I sighted some posters of my own yesterday's hits (and flops). Immediately I was waving a cheque book with all the narcissistic fervour of my profession. National faces began to redden as dusk fell. The Fair was on a slow fade to blackout. Someone somewhere is presumably reading or writing a memo to the effect that Book Fairs were not in the original building brief for the NT's foyers. It is unbelievable but I believe it. However a forest of anglepoises and lesser reading lamps, fed from a spaghetti of stage leads, quickly sprouted to save the day. I hope that there were enough grelcos left for the evening's performances.

## One Mo' High

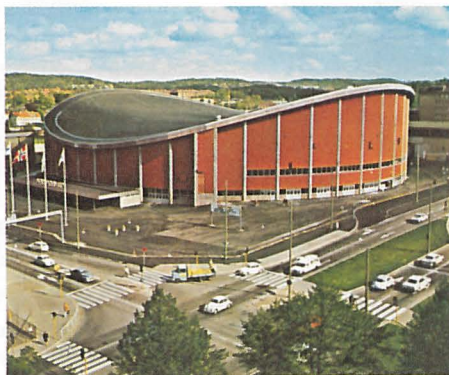
The alchemy of a performance is, thankfully, beyond analysis. I am sure that the singers and musicians in *One Mo' Time* never ever give anything less than total power. But I caught a Monday night when they seemed to be responding to some sort of compulsive overdrive. Was it the presence in the audience of their New Orleans friends, the *Preservation Hall Jazz Band* – on the only rest night of the British tour by those great veterans? I can only say that hearing both Preservation Hall and *One Mo' Time* within a couple of days gave me a rather high *high!*



## Park Theatre

To Francis Reid's enthusiasm for the pleasures of Tivoli, Walter Plinge would like to add a word of praise of *Liseberg*. Gothenberg's version of a summer entertainment park is perhaps just a little bit more contrived, perhaps just a little bit less

relaxed. But there is enough light-hearted filigree in the architecture to bring considerable pleasure to a Sunday stroll and an *al fresco* lunch. The performance stages include a theatre sitting amidst its botanic landscape with such confident dignity that its orange dome seems the only possible permissible structural form.



## ... and Car Park Theatre

Gothenburg's *Scandinavium* also has a distinctive shape and again the architecture befits the environment: road junctions and car parking. Billed as Scandinavia's largest indoor arena, it houses ice hockey, show jumping, and all those other athletic pursuits which are somewhat alien to the plingual physique. This Walter prefers spectator sports like *Aida* and, if the trumpets are sufficiently *ad lib*, his imagination will see him through the splendours of a triumph scene with the slaves in tuxedos. Especially when Nicolai Gedda lets rip. The sound was generally jolly good – and that is high plingular praise for opera with microphones. As a concert it was more than OK: staged in the middle of this vast arena, it would have been more than fantabulous.

## IDM Recalled

Of course Gothenburg has its more conventional theatres. The central broad avenue sweeps up to an open square across which Konserthuset and Stadsteatern face each other, flanking the art gallery. The Stadsteatern is the city playhouse. Music Theatre has a home in the charming old *Stora Teatern* where I once had a rather special experience – or at least an experience that was rather special for 1969. The board was an IDM and it worked impeccably. Quite impeccably. At morning plotting, at afternoon rehearsal, and at



evening performance. That night I drank to the new technology at a British Consulate reception. The next morning I sent a congratulatory postcard to 29 King Street, Covent Garden, London WC2. That was to be my one and only production experience of IDM. I was one of the lucky ones.

## An Operatic Polemic

It is not unusual for an opera house to crave the indulgence of its audience on behalf of singers who agree to appear despite some degree of malfunction of their vocal apparatus. It is, however, rather unusual for advance attention to be drawn to any visual shortcomings. Today's stage has lost the capacity to surprise or shock. We enter an opera house in the secure knowledge that upon the stage anything and everything is possible. We certainly retain the option of closing our eyes, although curiosity always gets the better of my eyelids. The rationalists have acquired control of the opera – that irrational art! The revolution started with a little sensible infiltration from the playhouse by sensitive directors who did a bit of visual tightening up and gave some assistance with role interpretation and the dramatic interplay of ensemble. Fine. But then came invasion by interpretative teams with an imagination stimulated by an attitude to music that can be labelled as disregard or dislike according to charitable taste. So when a Hamburg Staatsoper programme prayed for the understandings of the publikum for alterations in the stage pictures at today's performance, I was not unduly dismayed. (If I translated accurately – and the restricted range of the omnibus words included in my pocket dictionary does necessitate a creative approach to the task – the scenic restrictions were the consequence of a serious stage accident last year. But whether this affected the original rehearsal schedule, or its aftermath was restricting current operations, I am unsure). What I *am* sure is that *Così fan Tutte* works in a simple environment of frocks and furniture. But its cynicism has the delicacy of a wine wager rather than the witlessness of Götz Friedrich's bordello bet. If he had ears, he would know that this opera is about caring men and Guardian women. Mozart's sincerity invests even the most ephemeral expression of love with blinding truth. Anne Howells and the Band were magic.