

# Between Cues

The thoughts of Walter Plinge

## Collectives

Sheep flock and cows herd. You can have a swarm of bees, a school of porpoises or a pack of wolves. But what about scenographers? Well, Alan Ayckbourn is thought to be the first person to refer to a *gobo of lighting designers*.

## Keep down the good work

And now for a word in support of Channel 4. I am delighted by its undoubted success – a success well demonstrated by its low audience ratings. At last we have a proper minority service doing what I always thought that BBC 2 had been set up to do.



## Figaro extracted

The 1982 Walter Plinge Award for Imaginative Arts Sponsorship went to *Liebig*, sometime distinguished purveyors of meat extract. I may be late in recognising their contribution, but then they, in common with all other arts financing bodies, were more than rather late in recognising Mozart. Still, when Liebig did honour Mozart, they did it with élan, distributing scenes from *Figaro* with their product. I do not know when they were issued or whether they represent an existing production – but whoever painted these scenes knew the opera, its characters and the precise scenography implied in the libretto and music. These six 4" by 3" cards are sufficiently detailed to provide a precise production format. Is there a contemporary meat extractor who would sponsor a new production based on these cards?

## Architect

To criticise a fellow artist needs delicacy. Singers have a tactful way of separating the voice from the person ('a lovely lady, quite super . . . but the voice!') I predict an interesting future for the young architect who referred to a senior partner's building as a *splendid concept, but should never have been left out in the rain*.

If any of its programmes do, by mistake, achieve high ratings, then they must surely be transferred 'upstairs' to make more room for programmes that very small numbers of people want to see. Yet Channel 4's viewer count has aroused newspaper screams in tones that vary from simple delight to witch hunting hysteria! Minorities are relative: a miniscule percentage of the viewing millions, but a percentage that would fill any theatre for a very long time indeed. Certainly Channel 4 gave me by far my finest television experience of the christmas holidays: Antonio Soller's baroque dramatic cantatas. Finely sung, staged and filmed. Well over an hour of pure delight. And a wonderful accompaniment to my pre-lunch carafe of sloe gin. Well done Channel 4 – keep up your good work by keeping your ratings down.

## A marquee for today

It is, I think, reasonable to assume that if the architect's original elevations for the National Theatre had shown a newscasting sign on the facade – particularly that facing the river – there would have been some . . . well, shall we just say that there would have been some discussion. Both around the building-board's committee table and among that extensive external

critical body of wishers, well and ill. But an electronic sign has now appeared at a point of command whose precise siting yields nothing to compromise. Its luminous messages roll and wipe to unfold the purpose of a building whose function might otherwise only be immediately apparent to those who know a fly tower when they see one. I have not yet driven southwards over Waterloo Bridge in daylight, but after dark I find a dramatic gain in the NT's architectural impact. Lights generally, and moving lights particularly, need isolation to register. The size, shape, and flow of this sign combine to make it rather poetic. The messages are inevitably prosaic (definitely a case of style rather than content) but there is a positive projection of *Come In*. This light writing device is as appropriate to today's design for a riverside National Theatre as the Marquee was for yesterday's pavement fronting Theatre Royal.

## Backpage personalities

Have you seen the back page of the current TABS? Really! What *is* our technical press coming to? Is not that picture of Reid just too too much!! My goodness me, for the cost of that enormous colour block they could have made a positive contribution to theatre technology. Like satisfying Reid's lust. And for what does he lust? We understand that he craves nothing more than a new cinemoid colour which would be the equivalent of double fifty. But the market mammons have set a trend and so it is up to CUE to demonstrate that we too are in the very first Rank. And so, demonstrating our customary discretion in the use of colour and space, we offer you a picture of Walter Plinge, albeit in his rather more salad days.



## Bad language

New ugly words often entertain my ear on first hearing. But on their first hearing only. There is one word whose current growth rather depresses me and so I would welcome all possible help in my efforts to suppress PRIORITISATION.

## Creative pressure

. . . and on the seventh day I have my seminar on resting.