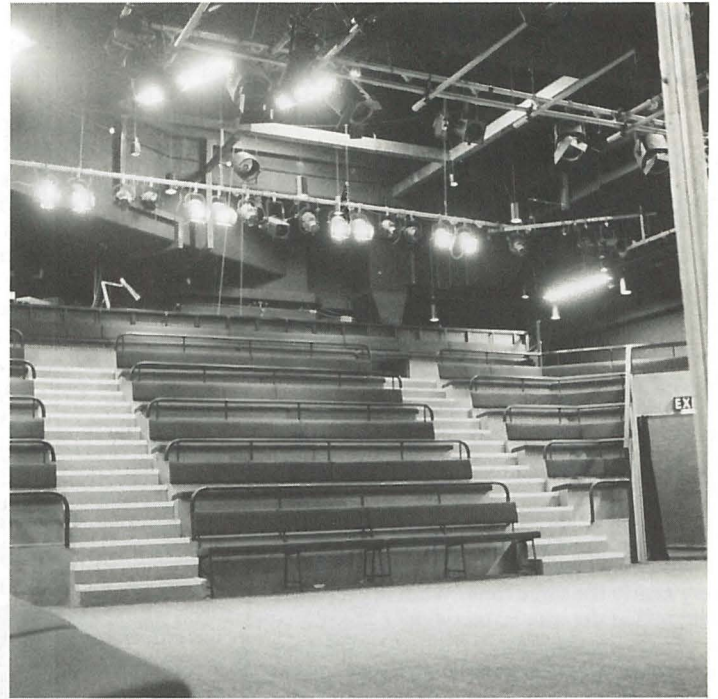


*The permanent elements of the Pit seating under construction. The acting area relates exactly to the Other Place in Stratford, but the seating is tiered on three sides, as opposed to being on two levels as at Stratford. (Photographs John Leonard)*



*The completed auditorium and stage area, as set for the opening production, *OUR FRIENDS IN THE NORTH*. The audience capacity for this production was 200. The capacity has dropped to 155 for one production, but can reach up to 240 for productions incorporating a fourth side of seating.*

both concept and size, the swop over of the two control areas was achieved, giving lighting and sound the sort of space they now require.

With the addition of the Pit and various changes in the RSC administration during the long time from completed plans to completed buildings meant that many spaces were going to be used in different ways to what was originally intended. The need for the Corporation to put a stop at the earliest possible moment to any variation orders that could have accommodated these changes was understood. The priority had to be to get the main contract completed, the building handed over with no further excuses for delay or increased cost that could be attributed to this type of variation. Then the changes could be undertaken. As progress to the final handover slowed up, as seems inevitable in the later stages of many such contracts, the time for the RSC to do these works at their own expense was fast disappearing and therefore becoming ever more expensive to achieve. It was depressing to have to watch the fixing of fitted furniture according to the original bill, which would have to be removed or restyled directly after the handover. The rehearsal room, due to become the Pit had to be completed to a high standard of paintwork, floor finish, balanced ventilation and so on. A January handover soon became February by the time the Corporation and architects had snagged the area to their satisfaction. During all this period it was a matter of trying to wait patiently, knowing that so much of this work was going to be ripped out or altered in order to achieve the Pit

and there were now only three months left to the first performance in which to achieve the work. Some of this frustration also of course passed on to the contractors, who watched dismayed as other contractors immediately attacked their so recently finished work.

Much has already been written about the power flying system, sound and electrics rig both by the user and consultants. Suffice to say that into the second season one is becoming ever more conscious as to just how much of the electronics of the flying control desk is all but obsolete, some components required for spares are getting difficult and expensive to obtain or have been replaced by less-satisfactory components within the terms of the design of the desk, and heat within the desk may be the cause of some unreliable performance. This latter point will be tackled, but the obsolete nature of the control desk due to the great electronic advances of the last few years does not bode too well for the future. This again stresses the often-aired opinion that this type of item should be left out of the main contract on a theatre development or refurbishment if at all possible. To do so can also considerably reduce the cost.

It was never really possible that money available for sound and communications would cover the required installation, due to the developments in this area and the requirements now being made by composers and directors. From the start facilities were short and it is here that RSC money has had to be spent and equipment from the Aldwych installation put into the front line. Again some facilities and equipment were outdated

from the outset and have never been properly incorporated into the operation. Alternative and additional systems are already in use.

In year two the lighting rig has also developed substantially in the wake of last year's experience. Good positions have been further expanded and accesses to many lamps to speed repertoire change overs have been enhanced and provided from scratch, including the introduction of two further on-stage bridges, much reducing the reliance on the original access cradles, which were rigged to the flying bars for each changeover.

These are just some impressions. Each department within the Theatre would surely add to the suggested improvements and criticisms and be wise after the event. The wonder is that, with such a restricted site, with so much of the development needing to be up and down and plans that, for the RSC at least, were all but put to bed in 1968, such a successful theatre has emerged. There is no doubt that we complicated our own lives greatly by the addition of the Pit, but the work is vital to the Company and adds immensely to the spectrum of activities within the Centre available on any one day, which remains one of the best qualities of the Centre. To retain all these has been a battle over the years of the development, but with the perseverance of Henry Wrong and Richard York, the Centre's Administrator and Deputy Administrator and the City Committee responsible for the content, it has been achieved and we are grateful.

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