

# REIDing Shelf

From Australia comes **BASIC STAGE LIGHTING**, a concise hundred-page introduction to the aims, means and methods of lighting design. With straightforward clarity, Mark Carpenter describes the hardware and the procedures to make that hardware serve the play. He writes with the confidence of one who is familiar with his subject from exposure to the stage action, although he does seem to be a braver fellow than me ("Safety chains are used in some theatres" he says, without further comment). Its all the usual familiar basic stuff well explained — and universal, apart from that marvellous Australian device the piggyback plug whose delights we British lightpersons have been denied by some of the occasional pedantry which peppers our otherwise sensible safety regulations.

Many of Pirandello's plays are about theatre, exploring the meaning of theatre and examining the interacting roles of the participants whether playwright, director, actor, technician, critic or audience. But while still being valid at this surface level, theatre is also used as a metaphor for the function of art in life, and ultimately of life itself. Many of the plays have had surprisingly little exposure in the English-speaking theatre: perhaps Susan Bassnett-McGuire's concise **LUIGI PIRANDELLO** in the Macmillan Modern Dramatists series will encourage a re-examination and revival of works which are responsive to a wide range of approaches, both mainstream and alternative.

In the same series, Denis Calandra discusses the work of seven **NEW GERMAN DRAMATISTS** whose work is principally in that vein favoured by the more experimental German-speaking drama theatres — non-naturalistic treatments of the political and social issues of the day. Plays where people tend to be symbols rather than recognisable individuals. Plays in which I, for one, keep wondering if I am really understanding the hidden depths; plays where my self-questioning is on the lines of "is this play really as simple/complicated as it seems". But Calandra convinces me that we should see more of these playwrights translated beyond their German-speaking homelands.

Although **BACKSTAGE AT THE OPERA** is a picture book about the San Francisco Opera, it has an international flavour because virtually all the featured singers are the itinerant superstars who fly the circuit of big league houses. Even the productions will be familiar to international opera buffs since the directors (or producers as they still remain in most of the opera world) are also on the circuit, often taking along their designs — or at least their ground plans.

Ira Nowinski's photographs include all the expected glimpses behind the scenes that are the stock stuff of programme books. However, the publishers have done this photographer proud with quality printing on quality paper — such a relief at a time when muddy printing on cheap paper is reducing so much of one's reading pleasure.

Joan Chatfield-Taylor's text is cheerfully purple: probably just what a marketing survey would prescribe for the average subscriber to the San Francisco Opera Season. I am sure its slightly breathless air of wonder is just right for a backstage peep. It is a reasonably accurate account of operatic life — although, just occasionally, areas of not-quite-fully-received knowledge break through. For example, "Computers register the location, focus, intensity, and color of every light in the house." Now if I were to believe that, I (and a few others of my acquaintance) would catch the next flight to San Francisco. But it's still a book that any opera-lover will enjoy.

**BASIC STAGE LIGHTING.** Mark Carpenter. New South Wales University Press.

**LUIGI PIRANDELLO.** Susan Bassnett-McGuire.

**NEW GERMAN DRAMATISTS.** *A study of Peter Handke, Franz Xaver Kroetz, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, Heiner Muller, Thomas Brasch, Thomas Bernhard & Botho Strauss.* Denis Calandra.

Both in **MACMILLAN MODERN DRAMATISTS** £12.00. £4.95 (paperback) (UK).

**BACKSTAGE AT THE OPERA.** Text by Joan Chatfield-Taylor. Photographs by Ira Nowinski. Secker & Warburg. £7.95 (UK) (Paperback)

This lavishly printed booklet produced to coincide with the Theatre Design Exhibition presents a wide selection and a permanent record of British designers' work over the past four years. It contains more than 100 art reproductions of models of set designs, photographs of sets in performance and costumes, several in full colour.

A limited number of copies are still available at £4 including postage and packing from CUE, Kitemore House, Faringdon, Oxon. SN7 8HR.

# Letters to the Editor

From Mr. Frederick Bentham

Dear Editor,

I was honoured to find myself featured in Walter Plinge's column in the last issue and intrigued by his conjectures on my estimation of the relative rating in importance of the Patt. 23 and the Light Console in the development of stage lighting. My answer has to be that the Patt. 23 is the more important.

That spotlight lies in the mainstream of world stage lighting development, whereas the light Console represents a diversion only. Of course the Light Console remains nearest to my heart. It was a work of art intended to further an art which was *not* stage lighting. An art of moving light which was not to be shackled for ever to the accompaniment of — the illumination of — actor, singer and dancer.

As it turned out, it was fortunate for Strand Electric that we had the Light Console when in the early 1950s the promise of our first real advance in control for stage lighting, the Electronic-Preset, evaporated. In a matter of weeks only, we were able to create the Systems C and CD which scored such a success in television and theatre. Nevertheless the electro-mechanical techniques we used were the equivalent to the days of steam and have little relevance to mainstream development of all-electric lighting control — no moving parts. The story of that electro-mechanical by-way I have told, in some detail, in the Spring issue of the ABTT's *Sightline* and will conclude it in the Autumn one.

Back to the Patt. 23. After a false start as Patt. 74 in my brand new Strand Electric catalogue of 1936 due to the lack of suitable lamps, it got going in 1953. At which time it was the first stage spotlight designed and tooled for mass production in the world. The leap was from batches of fifty or one hundred or so to five thousand. The sad thing is that nobody knows, or is prepared to estimate, how many were produced in the thirty years that the design was in production.

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