

Between Cues

The thoughts of Walter Plinge

Dressing the boxes

The house was nearly full but it seemed rather empty. Why? Because no one was sitting in the stage boxes. Why? Because they were too expensive. Surely filled boxes are so important to the "dressing" of the house that their price should be reduced, even to virtual zero, until they sell. Are courses in arts administration paying sufficient attention to a study of the paintings of Sickert?



Recalling the Piper

If there be any theatre archaeologist who is anxious to know what became of John Piper's statues for the premiere of *The Rape of Lucretia*, I bring news. I have just remembered what I did with them. I could not bear to throw them on the dump at the Aldeburgh Brickworks in 1957 (or was it 1958), so I planted them on a suitable ridge

overlooking the River Alde. There were no subsequent reports of mariners lulled to a classic fate, so I assume that the rotting gauze-encased plaster was soon absorbed into the landscape. The timber spines may still be there because the set was built at Glyndebourne where Jock Gough, like all the old master carpenters, preferred his timber to be properly seasoned by service in several previous productions. And I have seen him lovingly straighten historic operatic nails. Such memories do not clarify in the cluttered confines of the plingular mind unless its sensors are exposed to some appropriate external stimuli. In this case a small Piper exhibition in Aldeburgh, comprising items from the Britten-Pears personal collection. Including the original designs for *Albert Herring*: a production which was performed for nearly a decade before I assumed guardianship for the final performances — and then officiated at the laying to rest in the aforementioned Aldeburgh Brickworks. I knew the set intimately, but had never met the designs. Likewise the original *Turn of the Screw* represented by a preliminary sketch which captures the totality of the final design. If any theatre historian has read this far, I would welcome any news of the whereabouts of Piper's gauze design for *Il Ballo dell'Ingrate* which as far as I know only had two (Cranko-directed) performances in the Jubilee Hall in 1958. The rest of the set was rostrumage covered in random-rucked black corduroy: a technique I have subsequently advocated freely, but without takers. All this is really rather rambling, but I felt a need to write something about Piper — and his visual language so transcends mere words that I cannot begin to explain why I think he is one of the great stage artists of our century.

The Old Pic

Ed Mirvish, saviour of that maternal home of our national drama, dance and opera companies—**The Old Vic**—included a chronology of the distinguished theatre in the press information pack announcing his reopening season when "only by subscribing will theatregoers get price reductions, but what's more it will be the only way of guaranteeing seats for a spectacular season in this spectacularly restored theatre". The forty-six dated events chronicle the Vic's significant ups and downs. The details of the ups are familiar but there is one of the downs, or rather potential downs, that just might have changed the course of our theatrical history. In 1847, Pickford's made an unsuccessful bid for the Vic as a parcel's office. I hope that Honest Ed will invite the Chairman of Pickford's to his opening night.



Ms in the Moon

I am a bit of a moony. I have no choice: no lightperson with a leaning towards real music (the stuff not dependent upon the more metronomic aspects of instruments of the percussive and plucking kind) can hope, or wish, to avoid the moon — that great cinemoid 61 factory in the sky. Or whatever your favourite moon cool is: even open white for those caught up in such dramaturgical cults as literalism or puritanism. (There is not much open white at the Berliner Ensemble because Brecht understood washing powder marketing rather better than many of his British disciples.) Now, astronauts notwithstanding, I know, I just know that there is a man in the moon. The evidence? Well, there is the 1518 Rosenkranzmedallion in Nürnberg's St Lorenz, or the 1870 mechanical toy in Munich's Puppentheatermuseum. And then there is my intuition. Which enables me to assure an equality-conscious world that there is now a Ms in the Moon. In June.



Love among the consultants

Now there goes a man who hates the theatre. What a pity — it hurts his work. As an eminent American designer once remarked to an eminent American professor about an eminent American theatre consultant. (Source: the eminent American professor speaking during an architectural debate at NoTT 83. Names were named but I shall respect the confidentiality of the conference room, even when in open session.)