

Most of the Group productions were directed by Rupert Doone who remains, to me, something of an unresolved shadow despite Robert Medley's recent memoir in *Drawn from Life* (see Cue 27) and Michael J. Sidnell's new history of the Group **DANCES OF DEATH**. Doone, a dancer, was billed as 'producer' in the then, directorial, sense of the word. The missing person in the Group Theatre seems to have been the right someone to carry out the 'enabling' catalysis that is now understood to be the role of a producer. A group with talents so strong and personal needs the dynamic chairing of a Peter Hall or Joan Littlewood.

In 1934 Brecht offered the Group Theatre a play. Like so many of their plans and aspirations, his association with them did not materialise. But (remembering 1934 as the year when Ebert and Busch came to reform our operatic stage) it is a rewarding fantasy to speculate upon the course of British drama if Brecht had spent his exile in London.

During the life of the Group Theatre I aged from one to eight: I knew the years but not their theatre. In my teens I found the scripts of Auden and Isherwood's 'The Dog Beneath the Skin' and 'The Ascent of F.6'. The latter with music by Britten. Fleshing the words out with sight of a few production photographs, I welcomed evidence of an alternative to the drama of the weekly box set.

I therefore pounced on Sidnell's book in the hope that he would recreate something of the actuality of the Group Theatre. I was not disappointed. His narrative is founded on research whose air of thorough credibility adds authority to his analysis. Appendices identify sources and offer areas for further research. There is a complete listing of cast and production credits for all the Group's performances. The shortness of the bibliography demonstrates the need for this book which allows another piece of the jigsaw of theatre history to drop into place. Welcome!

Analysing star quality is one of the more fascinating pursuits of theatre thinkers – whether observing today's stars or researching yesterday's. There are those who abhor the whole idea of stardom and seek only perfection of ensemble. But whether the star is an individual or a group, there is something extraordinary and indefinable in the special relationship established between certain performers and their audience. Belief that star quality defies analysis only encourages the search for a definition.

After reading **THE GREAT LITTLE TILLEY** I am no nearer to fully understanding the undeniable magic of Vesta Tilley. But I do get hints of it from Gwynedd Sudworth's new biography and I feel quite a familiarity with the person and her performance. The strength of this book is the way that it sets its subject within the social context of her theatre and weaves in the anecdotes in a way which breaks up the potential heaviness arising from the

inevitable "and then" aspects of chronology which seem to afflict so many theatrical biographies.

When I found myself with a theatre to administer, I bought a copy of the first edition of Leslie E. Cotterell's **PERFORMANCE** which sets out as (and I quote) a study of organisation, business and law of entertainment and the performing arts to provide practical guidance on issues which matter to managements, producers, performers and all who write or compose or are otherwise concerned with entertainment. I found the book very interesting as an overview but, because of the width of its approach, inevitably too unspecific to be of much help in coping with the nitty gritty of the daily managerial grind.

However the new edition has upped its pages from 370 to 600. (Nearly twice the pages for less than three times the price is pretty good value for seven inflationary years – well below the rate of advance in theatre seats and contracts over the same period!). The extra pages allow more detail and this has increased the book's value as a source of directions to be pursued to find the appropriate small print for a specific situation. This is particularly noticeable in the new edition's approach to Equity contracts although, with updating to 31st July 1984, one might have expected some mention of Equity Designer's Agreements. Also, I would not care to set about organising a performance without some knowledge of the existence of NATTKE.

Nevertheless this book remains the standard British introduction to the contractual obstacle race that lies between an idea and its performance in all media.

A BRIGHTER SUNSHINE. A Hundred Years of the Edinburgh Royal Lyceum Theatre. Donald Campbell. Polygon Books. £8.75 (UK).

THEATRE ROYAL. 100 Years of Stratford East. Michael Coren. Quartet Books £12.95 (UK).

UPPER CIRCLE. A Theatrical Chronicle. Kitty Black. Methuen. £10.95 (UK).

DANCES OF DEATH. The Group Theatre of London in the Thirties. Michael J. Sidnell. Faber and Faber. £18.50 (UK).

THE GREAT LITTLE TILLEY. Vesta Tilley and Her Times. A biography by Gwynedd Sudworth. Cortney Publications. £3.95 (Paperback) (UK).

PERFORMANCE. Second Edition. Leslie E. Cotterell. John Offord Publications. £18.95 (UK). £14.95 (Paperback) (UK).

PRODUCT NEWS

A Brave leap into the Light

In just two decades lighting control development has been nothing short of revolutionary. Indeed for variety and choice of control we must be close to saturation point. The sad truth however is that this spectacular progress in control design has not been matched by any corresponding advance where the luminaires are concerned. Now, however, Tim Burnham, himself a lighting designer, has taken a hard look at the available hardware and decided that low voltage is the key to a serious breakthrough in luminaire design. With the result that his company, TBA Technology, has launched a new generation of luminaires.



TBA Technology F/65
650 watt Fresnel

These luminaires, branded MAGIC LANTERN, combine highly efficient optical systems with advanced electronics, enabling the 400 watt 36 volt lamps to compete on equal terms with currently available 1000 watt fixtures.

The manufacturers claim running costs 60% down against conventional units, and lamp replacement costs are less than half those for conventional 1000 watt lamps.

Even more exciting is Magic Lantern's networking capability: the integral electronics housed in each instrument permit direct connection to a 240 volt power supply, with a serial control signal looped from lantern to lantern. The Magic Lanterns will drive directly from the serial output of any of TBA Technology's or Colortran's recent memory control systems, and a low-cost encoder is available to interface to any standard analogue control system, memory