A 1961 DIARY

Twenty five years ago, on the First of November, FRANCIS REID embarked on a three week mission to find a new 'board' for Glyndebourne. He kept a diary.

HAMBURG TOSCA
Auditorium architecture a good solution to sight lines while preserving intimacy, but doubts about decorative treatment—especially houselights. Wonderful depth from gauzes in Act I. Excellent dapple. Act 2 crude with rather nasty omni-directional yellow candle-light. Low ceiling and the false pros dropped low to frame the stage down to intimate room size—a very good example of the use of a typical German adjustable false proscenium. Act 3 had a black cloth cyc (with ridiculously bright stars) but it is difficult to get a good dawn on a black cyc.

HAMBURG STAATSOPER BACKSTAGE
AEG 240-way thyratron board installed in 1956. Control desk in cabin off the OP lighting tower. Two presets which can be quickly reset via each lever's 4 adjustable levels memorised mechanically on adjustable cams. Master desk here and also duplicated in lighting box at the rear of the auditorium. Row Masters corresponding to the rows of circuits on the preset desks, plus fixed group masters for various stage and foh groupings. Circuits can also be grouped into a further three groups by means of illuminated push-buttons under each preset lever. For two of these groups there are cross-faders and it is by this means that most big cues are carried out. The control room also has a patch panel to allow transfer of batten circuits. Floats can be raised or lowered by remote buttons from this room. No I Bridge in two levels: large lamps on top level and low-voltage (used a great deal for follow) on lower level. These low voltage have a small potentiometer fitted to rear of each lamp for fading by operator. Towers have soft-edge spots next to stage and 500w ellipsoidals offstage. Side galleries in abundance. There are 5 foh bridges in the auditorium ceiling and a side slot each side of the pit, running full height. 80 foh are mixed 5k and 2k. All stage mechanics are hydraulic including a main lift in sections, sliding rear and side stages, and flying bars.

HAMBURG FIGARO
Watched Acts 1, 2, & 3 from the lighting cabin and adjoining tower. Act I inside lift so that in first change it dropped below bringing Act 2 into position on top. Act 3 rolled down on rear stage and Act 4 came in two sections from the sliding side stages. Saw last act from foh lighting box. Master desk not used but cues given from here by microphone count-down to the other (hidden) master desk! Acts 1-3 in open white, Act 4 with lots and lots (? too much) blue dapple. Follow spots move discreetly but too bright and too flat.

HAMBURG BALLETABEND
Watched Romeo and Juliet from backstage. Again the cues operated from the backstage lighting cabin, talked down by the Beleuchtungsinspektor from the foh box: he did not use his own masters and this seemed a pity as some of the fading seemed visually rough to me, although operated strictly to time. Huge nasty gold set. Strange blobs of pink and yellow in otherwise open white full-up. Lifts used a lot for making levels. Transistor walkie-talkies for re-setting in changes. Primitive portable upstage lighting towers—wooden wheeled rostra with stands screwed down.

HAMBURG THALIA THEATER
Refurbished 1960. A Schauspielhaus playing drama repertoire. Not a city or state theatre but privately owned with partial subsidy. The board is the standard Siemens Magnetic Amplifiers operated through a motorised desk as installed in many theatres including Berlin, Mannheim, Salzburg, Nurnberg etc and will be fitted on all stages of the new Sydney Opera House. This example is 120-way with 4 presets setting the motorised levers of the main desk via clutches and polarised relays. Control desk situated at the back of the circle in room next to sound control room. Main desk has one dimmer lever per circuit and can be moved through a clutch and motor drive to a limit provided either by (a) a physical stop on the control scale or (b) a polarised relay controlled limit which is servo-operated from the preset desk. This presetting desk has 4 small preset levers per circuit. As these levers are close together and very small, they are made to rise in a gate by means of a master wheel, one preset at a time. Above the window there is a switch panel allowing any circuit to be grouped to one of three masters. Master controls (motor 'go' and 'speed', and group masters) are placed together on the master desk which has telephone and microphone communications to the lighting crew. The sound control cabin is equipped on a scale completely undreamed of in any British theatre. Microphone and loud-speaker patching facilities. Mixers, faders and studio-quality tapedecks. Stage has normal bridges and towers. Many pneumatic-electric colour changing mechanisms from Reiche and Vogel. Stage has no large side/rear sliding stage system but a large electric revolve with built-in lifts which rotate with the revolve.

BERLIN
Seat in the stalls. I like the grey and yellow auditorium although the houselights are horrid. I like the open plan foyers and the pebble wall. I seem to be the only person in Berlin who does. Three-tiered baroque balconies built over both sides of the orchestra for the second chorus who comment during scene changes. Lots of lovely sepia. Singing fair but no conception of Handelian style in acting, singing or orchestra. But Handel will never be recognised as one of the operatic greats until Glyndebourne takes him in hand. The lights and stage management don't seem to tie up very well.

THEATRE DES WESTENS: MY FAIR LADY
Stood at the back of first circle for act one. Sets, after Beaton, on revolve. Lighting pretty ghastly. Foh positions poor, wonder how they managed when the opera were here. Orchestra good musicians but style incredibly square for this music. Coordination between SM & lights very bad. Eliza and Doolittle fair, rest not for me. But audience wildly enthusiastic. Auditorium very poor design for its period: rather nasty in a Moss Empire sort of way.

DEUTSCHE OPER: COSI FAN TUTTE
For me, Cosi is the Ebert Cosi and this was a good one (more the Cosi I remember from the Edinburgh Festivals of the late 1940s than our 1959 Glyndebourne production). Lighting good and recognisably Ebert . . . I mean this in the best sense. One cannot always apply logic to Ebert lighting but when it works it is excellent. Production very familiar and as Glyndebourne ground plan. Glyndebourne can teach the Deutsche Oper (1) ensemble singing and (2) wig dressing.

REICHE UND VOGEL
Shown around factory and showroom by Herr Heinrrich whom I met at the ABTT Conference in London last summer. Very impressed by 500w ellipsoidals—manipulation of iris, shutters, focus much easier than in pattern 23. Can rotate the shuttered mask-shape through 360 degrees. Low-voltage spots good, near parallel beam, very high intensity for the wattage (transformer built-in). These are the lanterns that Lila de Nobili and Zeffirelli enthuse about. I think Glyndebourne ought to try them on the booms (foh & stage). Good 2kW effects projector (flames don't go in a circle). Looked at all kinds of spots up to 5kW. Germans are swopping their horizon floods for fluorescent tubes, especially the blues, but I am not satisfied that the colour quality is good or the control flicker-free. Fortunately Glyndebourne cyc is so far away from the acting area that we do not have the normal intensity problems. Factory is very much a matter of individual craftsmen rather than mass production.

DEUTSCHE OPER BACKSTAGE
Tour with Technical Director Birr. Standard cruciform layout of four stages: main, left, right and rear (including revolve). Rear and side sliding stages cut-off by iron curtains when not actually moving. Main stage sectioned in lifts. Usual adjustable proscenium carrying twin-level bridge and side lighting towers. Approx 90 counterweight lines, alternately hand and electrically operated. The lighting control desk is in a cabin on the OP perch, far too small and so the desks have been built vertically rather than horizontally which seems to make operation more difficult. Takes a lot of men to work and they seem to get in each others way. A small master desk faces the