



*The Nativity and below Doomsday Finale. Designer William Dudley. Lighting Laurence Clayton. Photo: Nobby Clark. (Right) Part 1 of the Nativity – The angel Gabriel summons Joseph. Photo: Brian Windsor.*



deeper portion of the void, we provided a 32 foot by 32 foot playing area 2 feet below stage level.

This kind of sunken garden, enclosed by the loose railed seating units (which in turn could be used as raised playing areas – the Mystery Cart equivalents – as required), offered a sufficient vantage over the promenading audience at the lower level.

Overhead, the two upper galleries, thronging with both seated and standing spectators, recreated the upper windows of what would originally have been surrounding buildings and balconies – sporting faces, eager to catch the festive attraction. In modern terms these are not unlike the upper floors of a shopping centre, or London's recently restored central market hall in Covent Garden, now itself a lively mix of puppet performances, spontaneous dance and street theatre, combined with the bustle of a public market place.

This first selection, entitled *THE PASSION* covered stories from the New Testament, and embodied music by the Albion Band (led by Ashley Hutchings and John Tams) with participation in the action by the musicians. Having created a playing space in the lower central pit, we needed to accommodate the band in a focal way, and

to provide an upper performance space. Bill Dudley chose to build the bottom half of a 'fourth Wall' proposed by Iain Mackintosh as part of the design study, and subsequently used in both the *Beggars' Opera* and, 'A View From The Bridge'. Iain Mackintosh had suggested this 'fourth wall' as a device for reducing the need for scenery – in a space where one target should be to experiment with the power of performance alone – when this bridge would be available to actors or spectators, and to qualify this by altering the volume of the performance space.

The bridge linked the ends of the existing galleries, and could be reached via these galleries, or by stairs from the stage below. The band was sited upstage and beneath this fourth central gallery, which provided a very strong upper focus, particularly for the Herod Scenes, and for the Crucifixion play, in which the Roman Soldiers, having nailed Christ to the full sized and very heavy cross, could just manage to haul it vertically, and fix it securely, for the twenty minutes the actor playing Christ must remain aloft. The soldiers' dialogue refers to mortice and wedges, and these were mechanically necessary in stabilizing the cross! The Theatre itself provided an exciting physical



environment for this project. Parallels were being drawn between the original fluid backdrop of the spectators, the raised levels of the carts themselves, and the focussing element of the onlookers overhead. Decoration of the space, and atmosphere through lighting were the final touches.

Having been written by the contemporary trade guilds, Bill Bryden saw the plays as a 20th Century celebration by ordinary working people of the greatest story ever told in the history of man. High above the upper gallery, Bill Dudley placed 19th Century Trade Union banners, faithful full sized reproductions, prepared in the National Theatre's workshops, with the help of John Gorman, whose definitive book, *Banner Bright*, contains many beautiful colour plates from which Bill chose appropriate banners for the Plasterers, Bakers and Nail-makers who had traditionally and appropriately written and presented the Creation play, The Last Supper, and the Crucifixion, amongst others.

A significant haze from a smoke gun running gently throughout the performance in order to replenish smoke drawn off by the air conditioning, was punctured by a firmament of twinkling orange lights, housed in early 20th century kitchen and household articles – cheesegraters, paraffin stoves, sieves, collanders and dustbins, each containing a neon candle lamp – gave the overall impression of a candle-lit barn, with a distinct feeling of a Byzantine Church.

In lighting the play in the first version in 1977, no production lighting units were used at all, with the exception of one beam light, reflected from a circular prop mirror held by the Angel Gabriel, sending a shaft of contrasting white light from above the heads of the audience down to the figure of Christ amongst the crowd.

The production of the *Passion*, which covered the New Testament from Christ's baptism by St John to the Crucifixion, remained in the repertoire initially for 63 performances. In August 1980, we added a second programme; adaptations of many of the Old Testament stories from the Creation to the Nativity, opening initially at the