

The houselights bracketed to the fascias and to the pillars are properly positioned and proportioned, offering a reasonable compromise between visibility and ambience.

The relationship between the 402 seats and the stage is intimate. The space taken by the orchestra pit does not impose a barrier. Contact is something more complex than mere distance and an orchestra has a bridging role. The pit extends well under the stage to hold 80 players for the big stuff but

provides enough space in front of the stage to seat a Mozart orchestra where they should be. This part of the pit is on a hydraulic scissors elevator — not for the usual playhouse function of offering a possible apron stage but to position orchestras at alternative depths and bring the piano near the surface for rehearsals.

The stage is a usefully sized and proportioned space. The wings are adequate rather than generous, encouraging designers to use their imagination rather than

massive trucks. Perhaps the presence of a paint frame on the back wall will catalyse some rediscovery of paint. Flying height is restricted, inexplicably, by the amount of space left between the grid and the roof of the fly tower. It is nice to be able to walk tall when maintaining pulley blocks, but why leave enough height to swing a cat?

The lighting positions should serve well. There is a bridge in the advance bar position and the possibility of rigging within the auditorium ceiling space. A bar on the circle front allows effects and front cloth washes from a properly full frontal angle. There are good side foh positions in the gallery and, since the theatre is small, the major lighting difficulties of this style of auditorium — absence of side wall booms — should not be a problem. The onstage lighting possibilities include pros booms and ladders running in tracks under the fly floor. There are 120 dimmers and the Duet 2 has been transferred from the college's old theatre to a central lighting box positioned exactly where you would expect to find it in a well designed theatre.

Reviewing in *Tabs* the 1973 Royal Northern College of Music Opera Theatre (all blank walls and pure sightline), I wrote "The building sets out to avoid intimacy: this could be disaster in a playhouse but is appropriate for opera". I was obviously thinking just how cruelly an intimate theatre can expose a raw acting performance, especially of a heroic deity. But on reflection I really wonder if that is really such a bad thing in a school theatre. RCM students in the Britten Opera House will certainly have an incentive to act with conviction and truth — and that can be no bad thing for the future of opera.

But what is even more important is that they sing in a supportive acoustic, free from strain and able to hear themselves, their fellow singers and their orchestra. Here all is well: Derek Sugden was in charge and can add this theatre to his honours gained in such acoustic delights as Snape, Glasgow and Buxton. I hope the Royal College will reward him with a jolly good evening of his beloved Haydn.

Architects: Casson Condor Partnership
(Job Architect: David Ramsay)

Acoustic Consultant: Derek Sugden

Lighting Consultant: Neville Currier

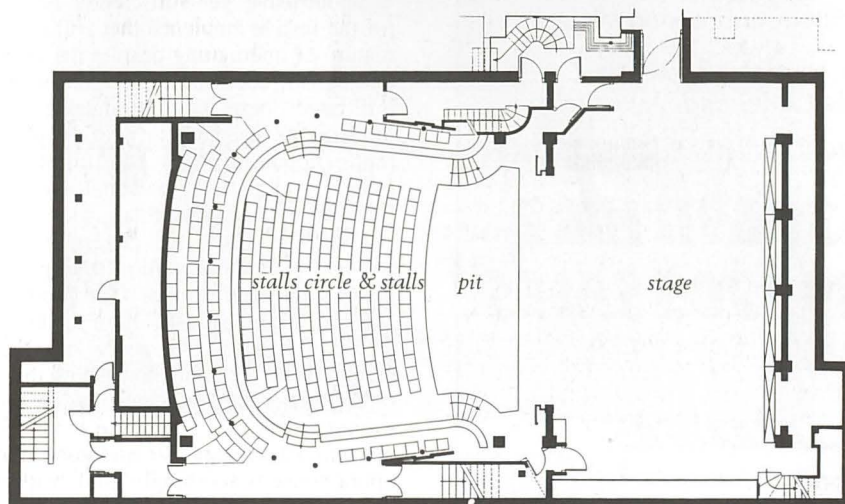
Sound Consultant: Bruce Elliot

Main Contractors: John Laing

Stage Engineering: Telestage Associates

Lighting Equipment: Strand Lighting

Electrical Installation: Showstrand



DIMENSIONS

Pros Arch Width9.06m (29'8½")
Pros Arch Height5.18m (17')
Stage width between walls15.66m (51'4½")
Rear of stage to pros	..8.39m (27'6½")
Rear of stage to pit9.82m (32'3")
Max flying height12.37m (40'7")
Length of bars12m (39')
No of lines	...35 including house tabs.