
REIDing SHELF

Michael Forsyth's **AUDITORIA** is a survey of the various architectural styles with which the recent decade has met the challenge of housing the performing arts. Theatre and Concert Hall Architecture is a subject noted for arousing passions and polemics. Consequently, progress has been via a sequence of rather extreme reactions. It is very useful, therefore, to have this objective overview based on a sequence of case studies. It offers information rather than opinion: although Michael Forsyth draws attention to the options and comments on the pluses, minuses and interactions, he does not reveal his own preferences.

I personally welcome the book particularly for the acoustic base of so much of its argument. This is an area in which I do not think I stand alone in my confusion, and so I found myself immensely helped by Michael Forsyth's clarification of recent acoustic discoveries and their implementation in specific cases.

Auditoria is a valuable addition to the bibliography of theatres and concert halls. Its A4 pages allow an abundance of illustration by plan and photograph, accompanied by the basic dimensions and creative team credits of each case study listed in a standard format. A pity however that the paper has a slight tendency to allow print to bleed. But that is a very minor quibble about a book which is an indispensable reference for anyone who specifies, builds or just uses theatres or concert halls.

Kenneth Tynan is a key figure in the post-war flowering of British theatre. As a critic he recorded the great burst of new drama, and then as literary manager was a leading member of Olivier's creative team who founded the National Theatre. He desired, rather deeply, an involvement more actively close to the central mechanism of a play's performance, preferably as director. But that, while perhaps satisfying him, would have been a waste for us. Directors we had in plenty. Our need was Tynan the amateur who beavered away in so many directions, usually simultaneously, to stimulate a forward progression of our theatre and its relation to society. We had the necessary serious visionaries and the enablers who could guide them through the establishment games of bureaucratic snakes and funding ladders. What we needed was a flamboyant articulate spokesman. Unafraid to enthuse or to scourge. No less serious in intent but entertaining in its pursuit. Ken Tynan was an artist and therefore aware of the limitations of a purely logical approach.

In **THE LIFE OF KENNETH TYNAN**, Kathleen Tynan offers us not just a detailed, well researched biographical record but an

analysis of both the public and private persona of her husband. Although a wife, his second, she is able to adopt a surprisingly objective viewpoint. Surprising and indeed courageous because life with Ken Tynan was a complex and volatile affair. He was as eager to probe the nuances of his own attitudes, desires, ambitions and responses as he was to analyse a play and its performance. In his post-NT years his physical decline was apparently matched by a dissatisfaction for what he considered to be a failure to find a more creative role. An inevitable question (and I cannot detect an answer in the book) must be why he never wrote a play.

At the memorial service, Tom Stoppard suggested that Tynan was the product of our time but our time was of his making. There is a kernel of truth here that survives the immediate generosity of a funeral tribute. Tynan's pen was prolific: there is a vast heritage of fact and comment about how our theatre was and how it related to the civilian life of its time. His work is currently in that out-of-print, rarely-read and little-regarded limbo that awaits every writer or composer in the years immediately following their death. We must wait a little longer, not only for the pleasure of rediscovering these fiery, witty and perceptive critiques but also for access to his unpublished journals. Meanwhile we have Kathleen Tynan's superb example of the biographers craft (no!, not just craft but *art* – she too knows when logic is not enough) giving us confidence that the editing of the rest of his works will be in capable hands.

Ronald Bergen's *illustrated companion* to **THE GREAT THEATRES OF LONDON** is generously illustrated with colour photographs guaranteed to titillate all lovers of theatre architecture. With a target market of theatregoers in general and London tourists in particular, the potential sales allow high quality printing to be offered at a lower price than is normal for this type of book. Fifty four theatres rate full essays and there are notes on a further fourteen beyond the mainstream. The style is slick and informative. How, when and why built. Hits and flops. It takes about 600 to 1200 words according to the lifestyle of a particular theatre. Concise yet still room for a few judicious quotes and comments to stimulate any theatreperson's thoughts.

For example, Shaw on Phipps (Her Majesty's): 'He has the good taste – a very rare quality in England where artistic matters are in question – to see that a theatre which is panelled, and mirrored, and mantelpieced like the first-class saloon of a Peninsula and Oriental liner or a Pullman

drawing room car, is no place for Julius Caesar, or indeed for anything except tailor-made drama and farcical comedy.' Or Edward Fitzgerald on Macready's assumption of the management of Covent Garden in 1837: 'It was the application of the limelight that really threw open the realms of glittering fairyland to the scenic artist.' And I, for one, did not know that the failure of Noel Coward's first west end play was blamed on the economy-conscious Lady Wyndham (Dorothy Moore) who removed half the stage lighting.

However it is primarily for the pictures that I will conserve this book on my theatre shelf. Their importance is that, with the proper exception of a few historicals, they are all photographs of the theatres as they are today. The shows advertised on the canopies and set on the stages are either still running or came off very recently. This could make the book a valuable record when today joins yesterday. For the technical theatre buff, perhaps the most interesting feature is the evidence of just how standard the advance lighting bar has become during the last decade, with very few (if notable) exceptions.

Looking set to inhabit one of the greatest of these London theatres – Her Majesty's – for the foreseeable future is Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Phantom*. So it is not surprising that this show should rate what is probably the most comprehensive and plushiest souvenir yet to appear for a west end musical. George Perry's **THE COMPLETE PHANTOM OF THE OPERA** is a luxuriously illustrated 170-page A4 hardback. Apart from full pictorial documentation of this latest phantom, including an account of the show's genesis and a full libretto, there is considerable material on Charles Garnier's Paris Opera and Gaston Leroux's novel *Le Fantome de l'Opera* which inspired the films and the subsequent current phantom industry. (I remember the 1975 pleasure of visiting the Opera's centenary exhibition in the foyer. I missed then, and so failed to report in Tabs, as I then was, on an important fact for which I am indebted to this new book: when the unfinished Opera was taken over as an arsenal for the siege, the vital food supplies included a million litres of wine.) A very nice bit of bookery: I want to see *Phantom* even more after reading it. But, oh dear, I wish I could plan my life far enough ahead to match such a hit's advance booking schedule.

In her introduction to the **THE ACTOR AND HIS TEXT**, Cicely Berry writes of