

mental films; certainly nothing from Hollywood! The first film was *Unfinished Symphony* and before long the auditorium was half empty and Fred was able to languish in a luxury loge which then as a £3 per week man he certainly would not have been able to afford. Whether the distinguished guests had found their way to champagne or just did not like Continental films he never discovered.

Post Second World War there was a feeling of democracy in the air and a fresh start. One cannot help wondering what would have happened if Churchill had been returned instead of Atlee as Prime Minister and United States might then have not landed us in the soup by cutting off Lease-lend. Maybe we would not have had to wait until 1958 for the 900 seater Belgrade Coventry to open. Perhaps since sooner or later I am bound to get on to the 790 seat Playhouse of 1987, the 756 seat Nottingham Playhouse of 1963 is more appropriate. Taking into account these two Civic firsts we see that our theatre building boom was based on the sixties and the early seventies. However it is perfectly true that there were enough mistakes in the air to inspire the ABTT to include theatre planning among the aims that gave it birth on March 3rd 1961. It is interesting that, as Iain stresses in his article, new theatres became a thing of Committees and Consultants. However I don't think they hijacked (ie. seized control) so much as rescued theatres. Also at least two theatres, the NT Olivier and NT

Lyttleton, were built by a prima donna who seems to have taken little notice of his committees and consultants. Who were the new Civic theatres rescued from? Why, from *theatre* people of course! They are, or at any rate were then, hopeless at planning. Firstly they seldom are able to read architectural plans; secondly they are so narrow minded or should the word be selfish. The actor manager is the classic example; but I have very much in mind a project which is under consideration at the moment. It lacks an oberfuhrer, so to speak. In consequence each expert head of department, and they really are expert, has laid claim to the space he believes he needs. At the opposite pole what of decisive directors? In one case I remember well the director demanded that a low barrier of concrete be built around his thrust stage. He insisted it must be a permanent discipline — hence concrete. Fortunately his consultant faked that wall to look just like concrete; because before the theatre opened that director took another job far away. Why is the Nottingham Playhouse stage such a peculiar shape? The answer is that the director wanted sliding stages; but he left for Bristol before the building was completed and his successors preferred a revolve.

Let us take a look at the pros. end of the Old Vic for some further examples. It reopened with some *comparatively* modest alterations for Michael St Denis and George Devine. When Michael Elliott took over in 1962 Richard Negri designed the extrava-

ganza in the photograph. Exit Elliott left and enter Sir Laurence right; whereupon Sean Kenny erects an outsize wooden shed affair suggesting that the pros. end of the theatre had fallen down and funds wouldn't run to a rebuild in brick and fibrous plaster. None of these people, it should be noted, made any attempt to improve the dodgy sightlines from the stalls of the Old Vic. Curiously none of this seems to have had any effect one way or another and many were the memorable Productions drawing good houses. This would appear to prove two things: people will put up with anything so long as the heart of the show is good; and that, as I declared in TABS in 1963*, the picture frame proscenium theatre is "The Most Adaptable Theatre of All". When one looks at what happened to the London Coliseum for White Horse Inn in 1931, it must be noted that even with a pros opening 54ft10 and the great revolve Erik Charell and Ernst Stern spread the show over the boxes right up to the circle.

The great preoccupation in the 1960s was sightlines, hence the end stage with a stepped auditorium; of which the Leatherhead Thorndike with 530 seats is a good example but the new Birmingham Rep with 901 is not. In part the aim was that all members of the audience should see the whole width of the stage with its scenery from more or less the same *angle*. At this selfsame time there was an active anti-scenery school whose desire was close

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