



National Theatre production of *Cymbeline* at the Cottesloe. Designer, Alison Chitty. Lighting, Gerry Jenkinson. Director, Peter Hall. Photographer, John Haynes.

Shakespeare productions at their London theatres. At the National's largest Olivier auditorium Peter Hall's staging of the three late plays, *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* can currently be seen, having started life at the smaller Cottesloe in the spring and come to the Olivier via Tbilisi and Tokyo. So far I have seen only *Cymbeline*, which seems to have travelled well. Again the basic setting by Alison Chitty is relatively simple: a large, open stage with central ramp projecting into the stalls to permit entries and exits through the central aisle, backed by a sky-painted screen with central sliding panel. Above the set is suspended a large wrought metal disc, embellished with astrological signs and tilted at an angle. Centre stage the Olivier's revolve, working rather precariously, tips and turns to shift the scene to primitive Milford Haven. Costumes ranged from ancient British, to Roman, to Jacobean, yet somehow managed to maintain a dramatic unity, and Miss Chitty and the Props department had certainly gone to town on blood and dismembered bodies. If at times it seemed rather more a pageant than a play, that perhaps is what Shakespeare intended.

I was less happy with the RSC's production of *The Taming of the Shrew*, directed by Jonathan Miller, which came to the Barbican Theatre from Stratford. Stefanos Lazaridis' highly operatic setting of Italianate impressionist painted flats may

well have fitted the Stratford stage admirably, but in London its general effect was overcrowded, with much masking and preventing of one from seeing fully up-stage unless one's seat was right in the centre. Martin Chitty's costumes looked drab for Verona, and the general effect was dull. Much better was the RSC's staging of Chekhov's *Three Sisters*, intended for the Barbican, and given a fine set by Timothy O'Brien. His raised podium, with matching canopy, offered a convincing blend of naturalism and stylisation, and it was a good idea to extend the first act out of the house into the land beyond. Louise Belson's understated costumes looked as though they actually belonged to their wearers and had been lived in for years, and Robert Bryan's lighting was, as usual, skilful and effective. It is a pity that there has to be such a visual contrast between RSC productions designed for the Barbican and those that move there from Stratford, but certainly the hexagonal shape of the Barbican stage cannot help.

## TECHNICAL ADVICE ON THEATRE DESIGN

The Theatres Trust has become increasingly concerned by the building of new theatre spaces and even new theatres without specialist technical advice for the architects and builders. This advice is no longer available from the Arts Council of Great Britain but it can still be provided by the Theatre Planning Committee of the Association of British Theatre Technicians, an expert body of national stature. Although very low, indeed virtually nominal, fees are involved. Surprisingly and unhappily little use has been made of the facility in recent years. In an attempt to help, the Trust has consulted with the Arts Council and the Association and it has been agreed that all new enquiries will be notified to the Association and that the availability of this specialist advice will be known as widely as possible. Both the Trust and the Council believe that independent expert examination is essential for any theatre project seeking public funds and is highly desirable in every practical circumstance, whether or not public funds are involved.

### NOTE

The Theatre Planning Committee is not, of course, a substitute for a complete consultation service, but it does provide access to a body of expert opinion which can cover a great deal of useful ground in a session of about 1 to 1½ hours duration.

### Contact:

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