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scared of the set at first, but then they worked on it for a long time and became very involved with it. Soon they adopted it as their home, and gradually, after about three weeks, it became part of them."

*Metropolis* has given Koltai his highest ever budget for a show, and he relishes the challenge of working on such a large scale. A sense of epic proportion has frequently informed his designs, usually dominated by one striking image — the white mountain in *Brand* at the National, the huge sections of female anatomy in Ken Russell's *Die Soldaten* at Lyon, a crumbling mansion for *Troilus and Cressida* at the RSC, and the lyrical trees for Terry Hands' *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Cyrano de Bergerac*.

Ralph Koltai was born in Berlin to a Hungarian father and a German-Jewish mother, and sent to England shortly before the outbreak of World War II. Joining the army, he later served with the British Intelligence at the Nuremberg Trials, and subsequently on War Crime Interrogation, before returning to London to study stage design at the Central School of Art and Design.

"The first time I was excited in a theatre was when Roland Petit and the Ballet de Champs-Élysées came over to the Prince's Theatre (since renamed the Shaftesbury), with designs by some wonderful French painters. Suddenly, I thought, 'Theatre can be really exciting!'

"Then there was Tyrone Guthrie's great production of *Tamburlaine The Great* with Wolfitt at the Old Vic in 1956, with

brilliant designs by Leslie Hurry; and the visit of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, led by Helene Weigel, to the Palace Theatre with *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*, *Mother Courage* and *Trumpets and Drums* — that was an amazing experience."

In 1962, Koltai designed *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* for the Royal Shakespeare Company, beginning a long relationship with the company which has since taken in nearly thirty productions, ranging from Shakespeare to Beckett and Pinter, quickly establishing himself as an RSC Associate Designer. For the National Theatre, his work has included *The Wild Duck*, *Man and Superman* and *Richard III*.

For the Royal Opera he has designed *Taverner* and *The Icebreak*; while at the English National Opera he has worked on *Carmen*, *Anna Karenina*, *Pacific Overtures*, and a magnificent *Ring* cycle.

By now, Koltai has designed opera, drama, and dance throughout Europe, in the United States, and in Australia. He won the London Drama Critic's Award for Designer of the Year first in 1967 for *Little Murders* and *As You Like It*, and then again in 1981 for *The Love-Girl and the Innocent*. At the Prague Quadriennale International Exhibition of Scenography in 1975 he was co-winner of the Individual Gold Medal and later co-winner of the Golden Troika National Award in 1979 and the Individual Silver Medal in 1987. He has also won two Designer of the Year Awards from the Society of West End Theatres, for *Brand* in 1978 and *Cyrano de Bergerac* in 1984. He was awarded the

CBE in 1983, and elected to the Royal Society of Arts the following year.

"Looking back on my career so far, I would put *Brand* quite high on my list of favourites, along with the all-male *As You Like It* and the *Back to Methuselah* that I did at the Old Vic in the late 60s, the RSC production of *The Representative* and *The Mabagonny* at Sadler's Wells that I did with the help of Lotte Lenya -- that was a real labour of love.

"Most of my work is symbolic, using metaphors and modern art, and hence quite sophisticated. *Metropolis*, though, is actually rather different. It's much more accessible, as the audience doesn't have any problems understanding what it is looking at."

Koltai has been a major influence on post-war theatre design. Between 1955 and 1972 he taught at the Central School, and 70% of British theatre designers aged between 28 and 45 are ex-students of his, like John Gunther, Maria Björnson, David Fielding, John Napier, and Sue Blane.

And while directing might be in Koltai's future, he's the first to admit that he's far from giving up designing. "People have been wondering about that. Directing and designing are not exclusive of one another. In Hong Kong I'll be doing both. Sure, I'd like to concentrate on directing right now, but, more than anything else, I'm looking for a new challenge."