

FRANCE/PRODUCTION

FREAKS ON STAGE

Based on Tod Browning's 1932 film about the lives of the characters in a circus sideshow, a stage production of *Freaks* premiered at the 1988 Avignon Festival. From there it moved to the Bouffes du Nord in Paris, the space that designer Laurence Forbin had in mind when creating the sets and costumes. According to Forbin, the idea to adapt the film for the stage was that of director Geneviève de Kermabon, who is comfortable working in the universe of the circus. "We have known each other since school," says Forbin, describing her relationship with de Kermabon, "and we often create projects together." For Forbin, the challenge in designing the 20 costumes for *Freaks* was to find the natural beauty in each of the characters, many of whom are played by non-actors in order to create the illusion of a real sideshow. "There is a beauty in each different morphology," says Forbin, "and even though some of these actors are missing arms or legs, they each have a personal beauty. This is what I

worked to bring out." A mainstay of any circus sideshow is the fat lady, for whom Forbin created a special costume to transform an actress to look like a woman weighing 400 kilos. "The actress had to be on the large side in order to carry this costume which is very heavy," says Forbin, who used multiple layers of polyurethane and latex mousse to pad the body, while the dress itself is made of satin and lace. The decor for *Freaks* evokes a circus atmosphere, although Forbin was careful to design a theatre piece which takes place in a circus and not simply replicate a circus ring. "We worked with lighting designer Alain Poisson to create a lunar effect in the lighting," comments Forbin, who wanted a night-like atmosphere with a certain feeling of obscurity, provided by light whose source is unseen. In accenting the most inventive, extraordinary elements in a circus, Forbin was able to let her imagination solve such problems as locomotion for a legless man. The production has toured

worldwide and continues this winter with dates in Naples, Italy (16 - 27 January) and additional engagements into the spring, including Glasgow in April of 1990.

ELLEN LAMPERT

■ Designer Laurence Forbin created a special costume for the fat lady in the stage production of *Freaks*. Multiple layers of polyurethane and latex mousse padded the actress' body, covered with a dress of satin and lace.

BERNARD GILHODES

AUSTRALIA/OISTAT CONFERENCE

STAGE AS SPACE: OISTAT IN SYDNEY

"Stage as Space," held 7 - 11 June, 1989 in Sydney, was the first OISTAT function to be held in the Southern Hemisphere. It attracted a wide range of speakers and delegates from all States, plus invited speakers from overseas, including Roderick Ham and David Cockayne from the UK, George Howard from the USA, Istvan Szlavik from Hungary, and Ernst Geidelbreht from the USSR. Over 100 Australian delegates were present, covering a wide range of occupations and interests.

An unusual feature of the conference was the use of a different venue for each of the three working days, each reflecting the theme for that particular session. This successfully gave all present an opportunity to see for themselves an example of each type of space being discussed.

Kicking off the conference, N.S.W. Minister of Arts Peter Collins announced the granting of A\$103 million (UK £42 million; US \$74 million) for the maintenance of the Sydney Opera House and talked of the government's support for the proposal to build a 1,600 seat opera/ballet theatre for the city. "I'm tired of hearing about professional companies bypassing Sydney because of the lack of a large lyric theatre," he told the crowd, adding that he hopes to see two such theatres in the city by 1993.

During the working session entitled "Contemporary Theatre Buildings", held in the Guthrie-style York Theatre at the University of Sydney, lecturers such as Serge Tampalini, John Morphett, Roderick Ham and Byron Harford spoke on a variety of topics including the psychology of productions, theatre marketing strategies, alternatives to traditional proscenium design, and the politics of regional theatre construction. After the

lectures, three set designers made presentations — Anne Fraser reviewing her 30 years of work for drama, opera and ballet companies; Casey Van Seville describing the difficulties of designing for a touring company; and Ernst Geidelbreht giving an eye-opening description of life in subsidized theater.

Day two was devoted to "Technical Theatre and Education." Held at the new home of the National Institute of Dramatic Arts, speakers included NIDA theatre designer Peter Armstrong, David Cockayne on British design training, Michael Pearce on audience viewpoint, and Mitsuru Ishii from Japan on theatres built in commercial buildings. Still others spoke on the difficulties of meshing building concerns with theatrical requirements.

"Recycling Old Buildings," the theme for the session held on the harbour at Wharf Studio, featured a speech by Vivian Fraser, who was responsible for the conversion of the wharf into an open stage auditorium for the Sydney Theatre Company. He was followed by Carrillo Gantner and John Beckett of Melbourne's Playbox Theater, who are currently converting an old malthouse into two theatre spaces; George Howard's descriptions of American theatres; this correspondent's speech on the trials of theatre consultancy in Australia; and acoustician Peter Knowland on the value of silence as a starting point.

Summing up the four days of work, Christopher Allen addressed the continuing dilemma of economics vs. aesthetics — whether architecture should lead or follow and the difficulties of design briefs.

It can be reported that the conference was a success and that Australasia would benefit from more of these exchanges.

DENIS IRVING

