

replicated, threefold, on the stage itself. Then, covered with streakings of grey pigments and anti-Semitic graffiti, the same set structure, under very different lighting, created a potent ambience for the subsequent production of *The Merchant of Venice*, set at the time of the Hitler war.

"Space is simply space," says Philip Prowse, "to be used in any way you like. If you think of it conventionally you tend to do conventional things with it. I just see it as solid space which can have holes knocked into it — and it doesn't matter where you put the holes so long as you can see the actors." There have certainly been



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occasions when Prowse's sets have stretched right out of sight in all directions, creating unease through a sinister atmosphere. For his own adaptation of three Jacobean tragedies by Ford and Webster (he called it *Painter's Palace of Pleasure* after the anthology) he visualised immensely high brick walls like a windowless Romanesque castello. Buchner's *Woyzeck* was set, for another director, Robert David MacDonald, in an inimical space suggesting a morgue or an asylum, the whole space unsettlingly clad in shiny black tiles stretching out *ad infinitum*. And a striking visual parallel was found for the undertones of subversion and decay in Balzac's *Vautrin* by, as it were, cradling the ebony and gold Second Empire grandeur within a grim scene of demolition — this at a time when the Gorbals district of Glasgow was being demolished and the theatre itself was surrounded by heaps of rubble and the sound of the Victorian tenements crashing to the ground.

Like all regional theatre companies in Britain in these economically stringent times, the Citizens' management is forced to work with a budget that is both narrow and rigid, though disbelief is sometimes expressed by London critics seeing a Prowse blockbuster and being told that it cost less than £10,000 (US \$15,900) to set and dress. But Prowse is the first to admit that working, as he has done for nearly 20 years, with the same experienced and ingenious production manager, Ian Ribbens, and a highly creative lighting designer, Gerry Jenkinson, makes all the difference between failure and success in bringing his concepts to fruition.

"On any handy bit of paper," Ribbens will tell you, "Philip will draw an idea of what he has it in mind to do — a sort of ground plan giving his ideas in general. And we will see straight away whether there are going to be any problems. Often enough it is only a matter of matching Philip's concepts with what is possible within the budget. The first result of this costing-out almost always amounts to far more than the money available. Philip then gets down to devising a way of getting the same effect but using cheaper materials or doing it in a different way. But I have to say that, almost invariably, we are somehow able to do things exactly as he conceived it."

The production of *Mary Stuart* already

mentioned, where the action, with one exception, is set indoors, either in the chamber at Fotheringhay Castle where Queen Mary spent the last days before her execution, or at Westminster where Queen Elizabeth and her courtier/civil servants conferred, is a case in point. The third act, which contains an apocryphal meeting between the rival queens, takes place in the rocky ground outside the castle. Prowse clad the scene very simply with black drapes on three sides, and shrouded the stage itself, and the variety of boxes which stood for furnishings, with the same black material. The men wore timeless drab clothing and only the two central female figures were in recognisable period dress, Mary Stuart in black velvet (with scarlet stockings) and Elizabeth Tudor in stiff golden panniers.

Act III followed Act II without an interval. As Mary entered, walking slowly round the stage as though relishing her

"Young designers seem to feel that they must have the latest mechanical things, but I still enjoy doing things with wood and paint."

first taste of the open air and relative freedom, the black drapes fell to the ground as she passed. Prowse would have liked to use voluminous lightweight silk which would have floated down in absolute silence, but the cost proved prohibitive. "As it was we had to do it with acres of black cotton material already in the store, and with a mechanism that cost next to nothing — simply rows of screw-eyes and wires that were pulled out when the time came. And that," says Ian Ribbens, "tended to be noisy in rehearsal, so Philip covered it with music — the faint sound of bagpipes." They also sent a highland mist swirling in to disguise the visible meeting of the heavy cotton with the ground.

Some Citizens' stagings — usually those Prowse productions with which the season now traditionally opens when, as somebody said, "It's good to send the boat out, dressed all over" — do cost a lot more than others. *A Woman of No Importance*, the play by Oscar Wilde which is comparatively seldom seen, set in a beautiful,