

Technical Data

Curtains and Materials

The appearance of the stage from the audience viewpoint is extremely important and of considerable help to the artists. A well-proportioned proscenium opening with attractive curtains and effective masking will put an audience in a contented frame of mind to accept the performers, while the opposite effect will occur through bad presentation. Atmosphere is important to both artists and audience to obtain maximum benefit from any performance. In this respect, visual impact is first centred on the closed curtains and therefore selection of the right type of material and design for these curtains is important. Materials must be acceptable to lighting effects and at the same time blend with the decor. They must contrast or harmonise. Velvet has been a popular fabric in theatre design with the result that it has been associated by the general public with "theatre". Plain colours enable curtains to enhance the setting, sometimes provided with a contrasting band of colour of applique design imposed on the facecloth. However, other materials are becoming available, incorporating man-made fibres with a range of patterns and contrasting shades which can also be considered, particularly when a contemporary style is intended.

In view of the variety of different qualities of material now available, we recommend that advice be taken when considering curtains to ensure the right choice is made. It must be borne in mind that to conform to licensing and Fire Regulations, all curtains must accept flameproofing or be inherently flameproof in themselves, factors which cannot apply to certain types of material. In this connection recent developments in flameproofing chemicals have resulted in the availability of a "Pyrovatex treatment" which when applied to the cloth does enable the user to clean the material several times without reducing the effectiveness of the flameproofing treatment. This is a considerable step forward as normal flameproofing solutions being water based are removed during cleaning which means that the user must re-flameproof after cleaning. The Pyrovatex treatment has now been accepted by a number of local authorities for situations where licensing is required, and while initially this is more expensive than traditional methods of flameproofing in the long term it should prove beneficial to many users.

The curtains used to mask off the actual acting area of the stage fall into two categories, (a) Curtains to blend with the stage setting, usually made up in a neutral grey or black colour in either a twill or repp material, (b) Curtains to enhance or create a highly

decorative effect, usually made up in silver or gold satin material, whose shiny surface enables the light to be reflected.

To create a decorative backing this satin material is often arranged in swags to form a festoon, the folds or folds in the material collecting and reflecting the light.

For arena and studio workshop, curtains can be made up in two contrasting shades, black and grey reversible and edges fitted with press studs so that a single curtain wall or separate sections can be arranged in either colour.

Curtains should be regularly cleaned and flameproofed every two or three years. Velvet materials should always be made up to hang with the "pile down". If cleaning with a brush always work down the curtain with the pile, not upwards. Under no circumstances should a vacuum cleaner be used as this will cause creasing and puckering of the pile.

On stage curtains, no attempt should be made to remove marks with a water solution as this will only cause white spots to appear, due to the flameproofing solution working through the cloth. If stored away folds must be kept to a minimum and storage space should be well ventilated. When in position, curtains should hang just clear of the stage floor to avoid wear along the bottom edge. Curtain tracks are specially designed for the stage and corners, fitted are always provided with brackets to allow adjustment of height, so that the curtain drop can be altered to permit changes in the curtain material or shrinkage after cleaning and flameproofing. However, when making up, curtains should always be given generous hems so that any shrinkage that may occur in later date through cleaning can be compensated. Curtain materials are specially dyed to suit the total yardage required and a repeat of the same colour can never be guaranteed. There will always be a slight variation in shade.

Making up stage curtains is a specialised process and entirely different from that associated with normal domestic curtains. Fullness is pleated in permanently and special spring tab hooks are fitted to the heading. Fullness varies between 50% and 100% according to application and curtains are always webbed to ensure that they hang properly. Allowance must be incorporated in the initial making up for shrinkage and adjustment that may be necessary over the years, due to the need for flameproofing which has to be carried out regularly every two to three years, on fabrics not inherently flameproofed.

Stage Gazes

A theatre gauze (mosquito type netting) has the facility of appearing solid when lit from the front, but vanishing altogether when lighting is brought up from behind, thus enabling dissolve sequences to be introduced on to a stage. Often the gauze is

ainted with a scene, perhaps an exterior view, so that the dissolve to the interior setting becomes more effective.

From the lighting point of view, success depends upon the front lighting being so positioned that it does not pass through the gauze and the best way of achieving this is to use individual spots and floodlights where the beams can be angled clear of the cloth.

Aniline dyes should always be used for painting the gauze, as opposed to normal scenic paints which, when dry, would tend to clog the net and spoil the dissolve. Gauze material can be obtained in black, white or grey. Widths of 9 ft (274 cm) or 12 ft (365 cm) being available to minimise seaming and again, as with cyclorama cloths, seams should be kept in the horizontal and arranged either at the top or bottom of the cloth to clear the major part of the visual picture. Due to the light weight of the material, gauze curtains should be weighted to hang taut and kept wrinkle free as again these will obstruct the dissolve. Grey material, when hung behind a window backing, can be used to simulate fog or mist.

With the high cost of curtain material and the importance of offering a good visual appearance it is essential to seek advice when planning the provision of curtains to a stage or acting area. In this respect we offer a Planning and Advisory Service which will prepare schemes and specifications covering all the points outlined above and make recommendations as to the type and type of material to be used.