

# LIGHTING+*Sound* International

PLASA

published in association with the Professional Lighting and Sound Association



The Max Bell Theatre, Calgary Centre for the Performing Arts.

November 1985  
Volume 1 No.1

£1.50

## RICHARD PILBROW and Theatre Projects

The new, slim-line Theatre Projects operation is now all in one place in Langley Street, Covent Garden, and Richard Pilbrow has his particular corner on the third and top floor. Number 10 Long Acre has gone, and so have all the peripheral bits and pieces that mushroomed in the late seventies and early eighties.

It was no secret that the old multi-creative group was getting itself into trouble and would not last in the same format for long. Months and months of board meetings have been and gone, some interests have been sold off and others tidied up and trimmed in size.

In Pilbrow's words "we had to stop, or rather pause, after 27 years and take a look at what we were doing and what we **wanted** to do for the future. We identified the strengths and weaknesses and disposed of peripheral interests."

Some of the interests Richard Pilbrow calls "peripheral" would be looked upon by others, and that obviously includes the organisations that bought them, as highly important. But at the same time it gives us a clue to his own thinking and aspirations. He's one of theatres' born empire builders, with the constant urge to create something.

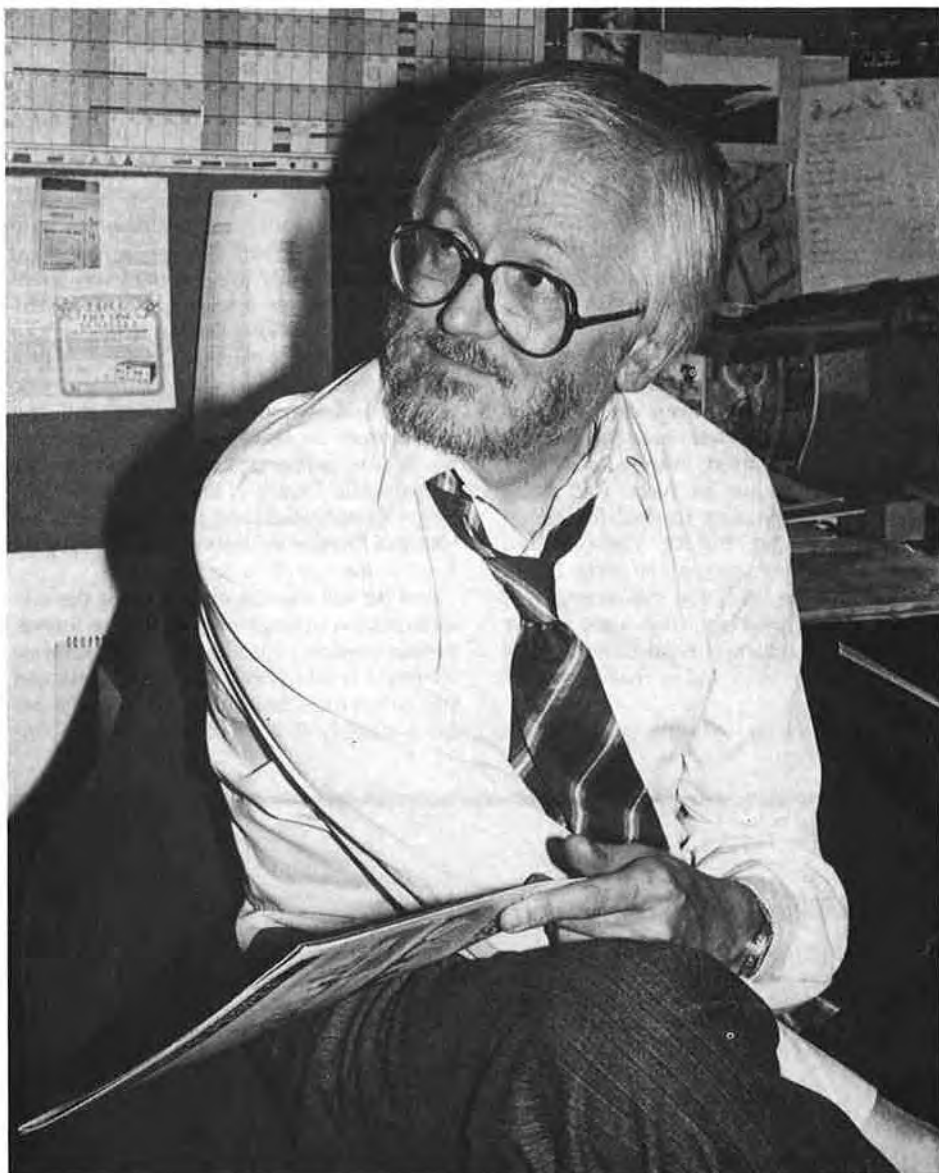
"We decided we wanted to do two things: to create things theatrical, and to produce terrific theatre. We'd ridiculously over-extended ourselves."

So Theatre Projects' future is these two things embodied under three headings: to design, to produce, and to offer theatre consultancy services. To do it they have a simple structure within which to operate. Theatre Projects Limited is the holding company, and Pilbrow its chairman and head. He is joined by David Collison (managing director) and Anthony Field (finance director). There are two main arms under the holding company's umbrella: David Staples heads up Theatre Projects Consultants Limited and Pamela Hay leads Theatre Projects Associates Limited. Other directors involved with consultancy include Iain Mackintosh, Alan Russell and Jeremy Godden.

Overseas there are two subsidiary companies: one in the United States (New York) and one in Canada (Toronto). The company has also retained a 25% holding in the original Theatre Projects Services Limited, now part of the Samuelsons Group. Richard Pilbrow also admits to a few "interests" in other businesses, but we won't mention them here in case he reads this column and starts empire building again.

The huge talent of Pilbrow—design, creation, motivation—and all those around him at Langley Street is proved beyond doubt when you look around the walls and along the shelves in their offices. Projects passed, projects current, and projects future can be picked at random from all corners of the office and they span all corners of the globe.

They will have up to 50 or so schemes on the go at any one time, about a dozen being



**Richard Pilbrow.**

actively worked on whilst others sit waiting for the next committee or council decision in city halls around the world. About 60 per cent of their work is from North America and there are feasibility studies in progress on more than 20 auditoriums in the US including projects in California (six at least), New Mexico, Texas, New York State, North Carolina and over the border in Vancouver, British Columbia.

The recent openings of the three-auditorium Calgary Arts Centre in Alberta Canada and the UMNO Centre in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia are discussed in another part of this issue of **L+SI**. A new project about to be built is a 550-seat theatre in the new Beverley Hills Civic Center; already under construction in Portland Oregon is a twin-auditorium regional theatre complex due to open in late 1986. Over the border again in Toronto, TP's report on a new 2000-seat Opera/Ballet Theatre (and a 500-seat second space) for the Canadian Opera Company

and the National Ballet of Canada has been accepted. The budget is \$100m.

In Dallas their "master plan" for the cultural facilities needed for Dallas for the next 20 years has been accepted by the City Council. The report calls for spending of \$180m for the provision of an Opera House complex, and the authorities are already proceeding with land acquisition.

In California the refurbishment of a 1927 movie palace in Glendale to become the City's new performing arts centre has had its feasibility study presented by TP experts.

From the very biggest to the "smallest National Theatre we have worked on"—the Cayman National Theatre, a 308-seat auditorium constructed in Britain and shipped out for on-site assembly—Richard Pilbrow and Theatre Projects have by far the widest experience of any similar grouping in the world.

So how do they decide what equipment should be specified or recommended for

any particular project? And how do they compare standards of product worldwide? "I still think the best of British lighting controls are the best in the world—despite improvement of US products over recent years. As far as instruments are concerned it's hard to improve on things like CCT Silhouettes, for instance," said Pilbrow.

He feels there may well be a few surprises coming out of the US when the second generation of Varilites hit the market. "They are beavering away in Dallas to make them cheaper and therefore more within the reach of smaller theatres.

"A surprise this year was the TBA Technology Magic Lantern. If it works as well as the prototype did it will be fantastic. Tim Burnham has remembered one of the principles of lantern design—that it should be compact and neat. It's brilliant."

On the question of sound equipment David Collison joined the discussion. "The British make the best mixers and seem to lead in that area—it was years before the Americans even started. In the UMNO project in Kuala Lumpur we have used desks from Technical Projects Limited (based on the Isle of Wight), but US high-powered loudspeakers (Electrovoice and Altec for instance) have the quality in this direction. A Japanese sub-contractor took care of the amps, graphic equalisers and other control equipment, and they did a really fantastic job."

Low note as far as Collison was concerned

was that "in English-speaking countries we always find it difficult to get good sound contractors to handle the work."

Having decided on particular equipment, whether lighting or sound, the over-riding factor is whether or not it can be serviced and maintained by a dealer or agent within the country of installation. "We have to recommend equipment that has back-up in the country. In many cases consultants can lead the way. We have actually helped introduce dealers into a country," explained Richard Pilbrow.

Despite all this activity worldwide, the producing side (TP Associates) is, you feel, where Pilbrow's main interest now lies, with some lighting design thrown in for good measure. Currently the company has 'West Side Story' set for a long run at the Manchester Opera House, and an overseas tour may follow. For 1986 he is looking at producing two musicals, one new and one revival, and two plays—one new and one due in from Broadway. On the design front he lit the opening Gala Concert at the Calgary Arts Centre in late September (Jack Singer Concert Hall) and this month is at the National Theatre in London lighting 'Love for Love' in the Lyttelton auditorium.

And he will also be championing the current cause—pushing away behind the scenes to save London's Lyceum Theatre as a venue for major productions. "It is the biggest, and one of the most beautiful theatres and it will be a tragedy if it's lost. We lost the first

round, but it will be a 15-round fight to keep the place alive."

But maybe Richard Pilbrow and Theatre Projects' pièce de résistance is yet to come. The company is commissioned to design the final phase of the expansion of the BBC Television Centre—a television theatre to replace the old Shepherds Bush Empire.

"They want the character of theatre within the latest adaptable auditorium design to incorporate the latest in television techniques". Design work is under way and a concept established to produce an auditorium for almost every conceivable type of show, with a proscenium that can reduce from 90 feet to 30 feet. It will have all the latest video, lighting, sound and rigging equipment, and come on stream in the 1990's.

Richard Pilbrow, as confident as ever, predicted that "if Garrick walked on stage, he'd feel at home."

John Offord

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