

THE ROYALTY THEATRE

The opening of a brand new professional theatre in London's West End is surely a matter for rejoicing. Your editor attended the first night and is pleased to report in spite of the ominous warning "good viewing" given to his wife by a cloak-room attendant the evening was indeed a stimulating theatrical occasion.

A lot of trouble has been taken and money spent to provide London with a bang up-to-date theatre. Yet all is not as well as it should be. It is not because the theatre bears the "stigma" of an auditorium designed round a proscenium type of stage. True, this is enough to give the apostles of "vital theatre" a fit of hysterics, but in fact there is plenty of room for more than one proscenium stage of 1960 as compared with the previous latest West End model of 1931. What niggles at the Royalty is more subtle—a reference in the publicity to fluorescent lighting in the dressing rooms gives a hint to what has been missing—the guiding hand of the man of the theatre. Compare the photograph of the permanent stage lighting equipment (flooding beyond the No. 1 bar) with that, also by Strand, used by Mr. Joe Davis to light *The Visit*. The former is what West End theatres expect to own and the latter is more or less what today's productions demand.

Out front the right equipment has been installed but the positions are questionable. In part this is the result of traps the one-tier house always sets, and in this case, also, a ceiling position could not be provided to give a steeper angle for spot beams. At the sides of the auditorium (stage box area) there is a shortage of permanent positions and it is not difficult to visualise the usual makeshifts appearing.

The proscenium opening can be enlarged or reduced in width by moving-walls in front of the house tabs. Real imagination is here—to avoid the sense of let-down when tabs rise to reveal acres of false pros. Unfortunately, the perch lighting is not carried by these proscenium walls and also the walls are much too light in colour. This means that although there is a very nice recess behind these moving proscenium walls which could have carried the lanterns, the lanterns are in fact mounted in a more orthodox perch position well off-stage. The sides of the auditorium are not much help either, since the lighting positions, at any rate at present, are severely restricted.

What arises out of this, of course, is the question, "Whose fault is it that there are these targets for criticism?" I said earlier that what was needed was the guidance of a man of the theatre, but this guidance is by no means easily provided. Men of the theatre have a way of seeing the theatre through their eyes alone, and their ideas would cater for their particular techniques to the detriment of those requirements of others. In the "progressive" or "vital" theatre, call it what you will, there is no shortage of people to come forward and take your plan in hand, but when it comes to a practical non-experimental working theatre, the problem is rather different.