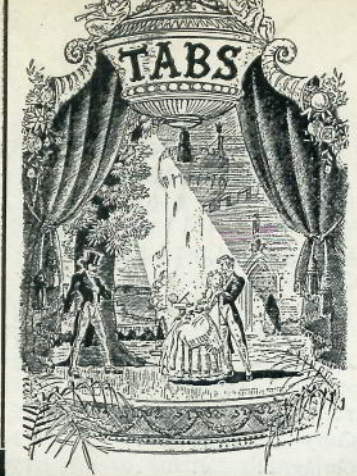




TABS

DECEMBER 1966 VOL. 24 No. 4



Cover picture: *New Lighting Control at rear of grand circle,
London Palladium.*

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No Seals for Thespis

In these certificated days of approval and design awards it is necessary to deal with one which is very important for theatre people. This seal of approval partakes of the nature of Sherlock Holmes, who at one and the same time, is so real to so many and yet is pure fiction. At least Sherlock was that; he existed in printed words on sheets of paper, collated and bound together. The fiction we have to deal with does not take any tangible form whatever, yet it appears to be permit, passport, insurance and excuse—all in one, the universal cover. If it is so powerful what form does it take? The answer can be given in a single sentence "Oh! by the way, we have consulted the ABTT". Sometimes the wording is stronger "the plans have ABTT approval". If questioned "what is the ABTT?" the answer may run for all we know, "The Association of British Theatre Technicians, they approve theatre plans technically on behalf of the Arts Council and the Theatre's Advisory Council."

Now this, we are informed, is complete nonsense and it seems right to us to use the very wide circulation of TABS to put the record straight. This will save a lot of heart burning in the future. What in fact happens, we understand, is this.

Anyone can consult the ABTT at any stage in the conception and building of a theatre. It is even possible to consult them about an existing theatre whether days or decades old. The consultation involves handing over a fee but its effectiveness will depend on there being a clear idea of the field to be examined on the one hand and a willingness to adopt the advice on the other. If the consultation

is in general terms, for example, "What kind of theatre should we build", the advice is bound to be couched in general terms also. There will be many alternatives hedged around with ifs and buts. Probably the most convenient time for a first consultation is the sketch plan stage for there is less difficulty in making changes and yet there is sufficient framework to hang a useful discussion on.

The consultation takes place with the ABTT's Architectural and Planning Committee which is representative of the many technical branches of the theatre including the architects themselves. Whoever initiated the enquiry, the architect himself is present to explain the scheme. A lively discussion ensues which is a stimulant in itself but a written report also follows. The report once issued the ABTT can take no further action. Sometimes the matter is re-opened by the submission of further plans but at all times the service remains advisory. Even where the client has been directed to the ABTT by the Arts Council, as the result of an application for a grant out of public funds, it is not mandatory to act upon the advice. From this it can be seen that there can be no question of an ABTT approved theatre as even if this were considered desirable, and it is very questionable, the ABTT could not go into the necessary detail.

An ABTT committee can neither design nor supervise but it can provide the unique service of gathering a number of theatre experts together to let those responsible for a new theatre, or a revision of an old one, see what kind of reception their plans evoke. A preview while it is still a matter of ink and eraser. For the rest it is up to the client and his architect and should they need a more detailed service they should employ a theatre consultant.

The Theatre Centre

A visit to a familiar corner of Fitzroy Square in London, namely number nine, reveals a transformation. The place has been redecorated and there is an occasional new carpet about, but it is not these changes, striking though they are, of which we write.

Over the doorway there appears in gold letters the legend "The Theatre Centre", and this does come as a surprise to those of us who have known the place hitherto as the "British Drama League". Just as our National Theatre was at last able to get going by occupying the Old Vic, so now we have a nucleus on which many ancillary services of theatre can home.

We are happy to report that, unlike the case of the National Theatre, this is no cuckoo-like takeover. The B.D.L. not only remains but acts as host, landlord and concierge to the other members of the centre. Thus all the many facilities, including the famous Drama League Library, continue exactly as before, while under the same roof the Theatres' Advisory Council (TAC), Association of British Theatre Technicians (ABTT), Council of Repertory Theatres (CORT) and National Association of Drama Advisers (NADA) are all to be found.

Page Freeze

TABS is in postal difficulties, and one result of this is a return to thirty-two pages with the next issue.

This journal has been running in recent issues at forty pages, with the result that we have crossed the great divide between one postal rate and another. What with postal reform and international standardisation we are not sure where the exact frontier lies, so are playing it safe at thirty-two. A lot of fuss over a few pence? In England an increase of 2d. per copy but multiplied by a figure approaching twenty thousand is a sum to reckon with. Even worse is the sense of not getting value for the extra, only one or two sheets in fact folded to make four or eight pages. Much better we think to slip in a special number from time to time, when the occasion or subject warrants it, and then top it up to the brim permitted by the relevant posting stage, as we did for our special theatres number of June last or our Jubilee issue of March 1964.

No Waiting

All the World's a stage,
And all the men and women merely players:
They have their exits and their entrances;
And one building in its time plays many parts.

The photograph below by Maurice Jackson of the old theatre in South Street, Chichester, merits close examination.

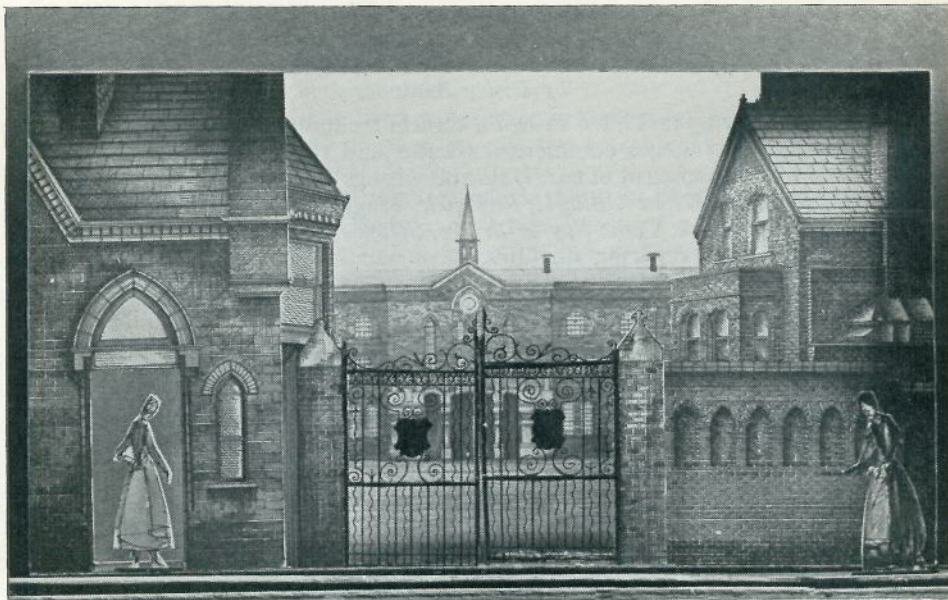


ANYONE FOR GIMMICKS?

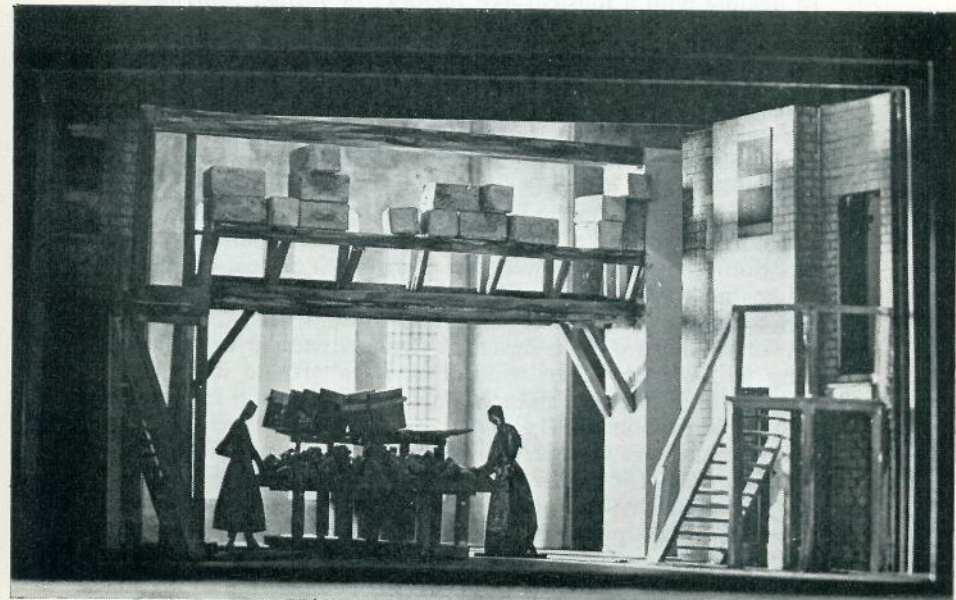
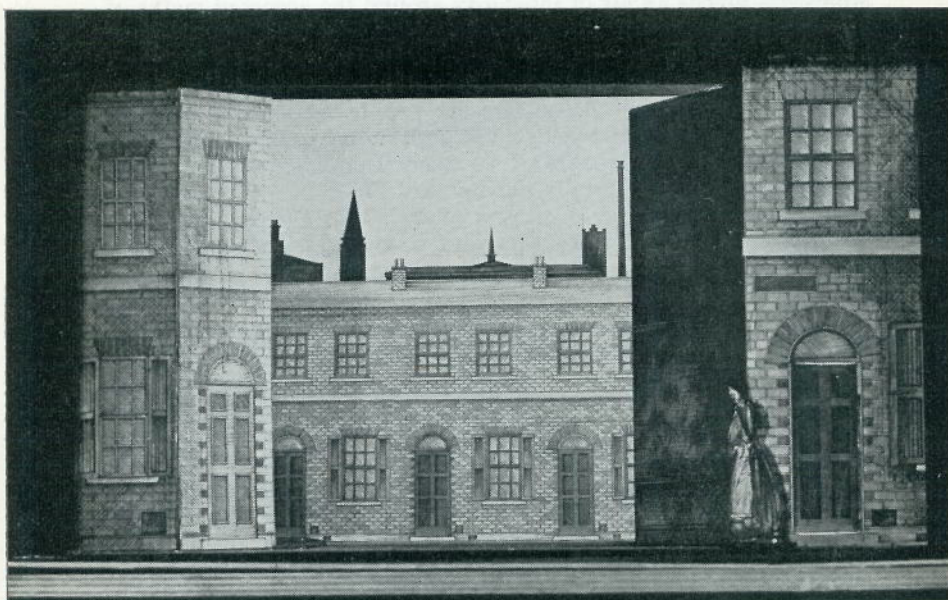
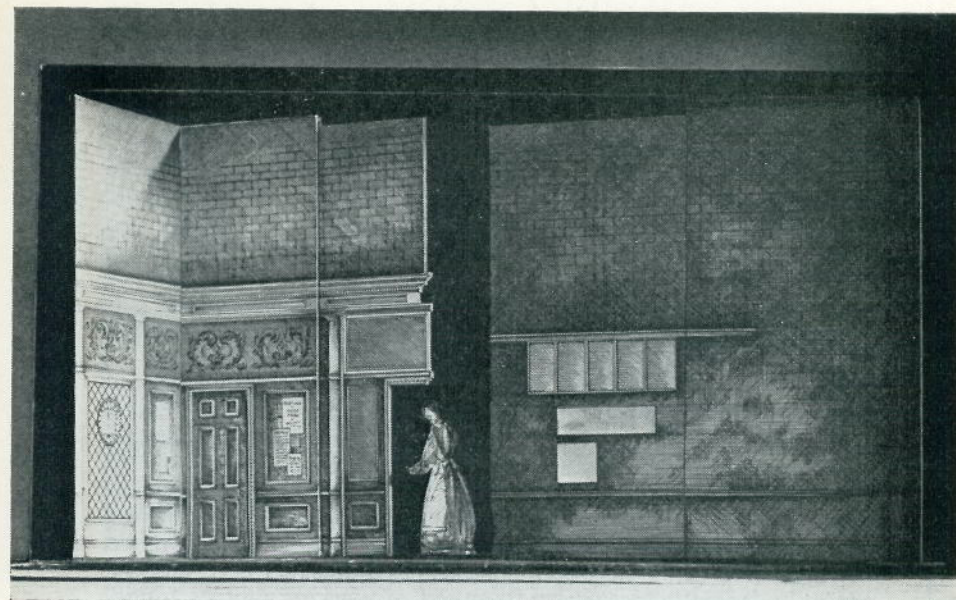
by Disley Jones

The last seven years have shown a certain technological advance in craftsmanship in the commercial theatre and the time is ripe for some sort of appraisal of the rights and wrongs of so-called progress. Sean Kenny's *Oliver!*, *Blitz!!*, *Pickwick*, *Maggie May*, and my own *Instant Marriage*, *Come Spy With Me*, *Strike a Light*, and *Jorrocks*, whatever their differing qualities, have had in most respects and certainly from the design end, one thing in common—the ambition not only of keeping a show moving swiftly from scene to scene lest the audience be given time to pause and think about whatever inadequacies may be inherent in the total entertainment, but also to surprise and satisfy to the fullest extent a jaded and apathetic public for a particular type of theatrical experience which is finding it increasingly hard to make the grade. The West End theatre of pleasurable undemanding entertainment is a thing of the past. The yardstick has become that of the opportunist gimmickry of *West Side Story* and *Oliver!*, the yardstick of critics and public alike which appears to have become fixed in their minds as a definitive form.

To refer to opportunism and gimmickry is not in my mind an act of criticism or intended as condemnation but as mere analysis. Too few people of the theatre are prepared to admit the quite obvious distinctions and terms of reference; presumably because such admission breeds an air of insecurity around the accepted myths of the theatrical profession. The situation is hardly helped by the lack of critics who can be trusted to judge a theatrical entertainment on its own terms unless its total effect is governed by at least one predominant star personality. Too few people, critics and audience alike, have sufficient knowledge and understanding of the workings of the theatre to be capable of a reasoned understanding of what they are watching. Where is the Bernard Shaw of today who can analyse two or three performances of say, Miss Dorothy Tutin, in the same role as he did of Mrs. Pat Campbell? The commercial theatre works today in a catchpenny atmosphere and far too many shows are thrown on the stage like chips on a gambling table; sometimes quite blatantly on the red or the black and sometimes with a little cant about “chemistry”. Not for nothing are the names of Cochran, Diaghilev, Edwardes and Shepherd cherished in the memories of those who saw their shows. Few and far between today are the opportunities for working in an atmosphere of integrity and reason. In this kind of milieu, it is not surprising that there are those who can react to something like the work of the Berliner Ensemble with bitterness and hatred; it is possible to pity the neurosis but hard to forgive ignorance. The work of the Aldwych company one feels is constantly under the cloud of suspicion, doing all those funny foreign plays is sort of permitted on account of the



Four models by Disley Jones for Strike a Light.



Shakespeare—not quite the same thing as a slap-up classic by Feydeau at the National.

What has this digression to do with the heading of the article? It has everything to do with it. It has to do with the continuing superficiality of the majority of theatrical entertainment and the attitudes bred in artistes, directors and designers alike, in my work as in that of everyone else. Consciously, as I start on a show nowadays, I have already prepared myself for the climate surrounding it, and have almost automatically rejected half my natural impulses which I presume to stem from basic artistic integrity. I retain half of them and attempt to marry them to an adopted set of false values in order to create a vocabulary both verbal and visual which will enable me to converse with and work for the people who employ me and to attempt to interpret their intentions to the audience.

In order to achieve the desired result, I usually design a show at least twice. I must first do it my own way and as I see it. Then as the director, or more often as the director instructed by the management, sees it; then usually a third time in an atmosphere of good old British compromise both artistic and financial, incorporating whatever original ideas of my own that I have managed to retain, sell hard enough or have quietly incorporated whilst one or two red herrings were being chased. In black and white, this may sound a perfectly normal approach and method of working, but its fundamental fault is that it is based on a mutual distrust rather than on common interest and thought aimed at a unity and perfection of style.

In dealing with a musical like *Jorjocks* or *Instant Marriage* or even *Strike a Light* it seems unnecessary to point to the absolute necessity for a strong sense of style, but the truth is that far more emphasis is usually placed on one or two performers or certain numbers in the misguided belief that one artist or one show-stopping number will save the night. If, like myself, you can approach the battlefield with your eyes open to the hard facts, you will make as many allowances as possible for every expected and unexpected contingency that might arise, management quirks, artistes' whims and directors' fancies alike. To assume, as many an uninitiated young designer does, that you can sweep the board with a sheaf of finished set and costume designs like a Beaton or a Bakst in the old days is misguided and impossible; but you can as I said, work up an overall framework which in itself is designed strongly enough to stand the buffeting of the many alien winds that blow around it. But this "framework" by the very nature of its conception will most likely turn out to be the kind of "gimmick" that I have referred to. All that really matters is whether it is a good gimmick or a bad one. Sean Kenny's set for *Oliver!* was a good one—pseudo Brecht—pseudo constructivist—pseudo realistic—however you care to criticise it, it stood up to every demand made of it, integrated itself with the action and contributed heavily to the whole show; but if I make bold to think differently of his set for *Hamlet* it is to say that

a bold conception was destroyed utterly within twenty minutes of the curtain rising by the arrival of what looked like nothing so much as a cocktail cabinet in a niche, and this because the vast architectural conception had not made provision for the mundane but inevitable clutter of stage properties. On the subject of designer's gimmicks it might be fairer to analyse my own and I will try to do this on four shows.

Instant Marriage. Saddled with a small revolver which the management insisted I utilise I hit on the idea of adding an outer ring which would carry nothing more than a solid built version of the old-fashioned "wipe" for the street scenes coupled with a pair of Periakti. In fact absurdly simple, but sufficient to completely baffle the vast majority of people who saw it. Having evolved the structural necessities of the scenes, I set to and painted it in pop-art primary colours using unconventional high gloss paints wherever possible with no shading whatsoever, giving it at one and the same time a *hard-edge painting* look and the appearance of a modern "Epinal" toy theatre sheet, thus at one and the same time matching the superficiality of a musical farce with the physical solidity necessitated by the rumbustious action. More than one gimmick in this one in fact but well on the ball where opportunism is concerned; the nicest compliment anyone ever paid me was by a friend who had seen the film *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* abroad beforehand and remarked on its similarity of style. When I later saw the film I could only agree and parry with the statement that great gimmicks often think alike.

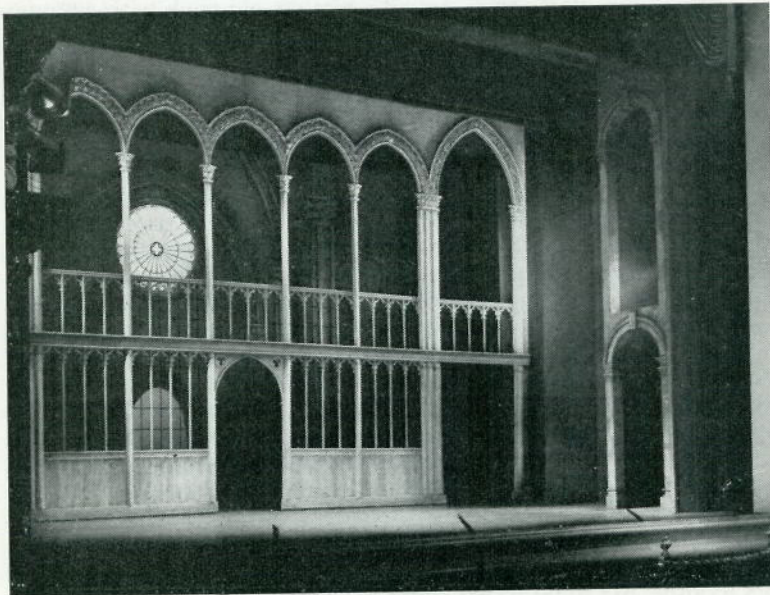
Come Spy With Me. An all-white set gimmick with acknowledgements to Ned Sherrin and the utter impossibility of a stage like the Whitehall. With the help of Bill Tottle and his staff automation was brought into full play here through the absurd demands of the script and the lack of space in the wings for even the actors, let alone stage hands. Far too expensive an outlay for such a small theatre but far too expensive a show anyway. If managements must put on shows with scripts that demand anything from a traffic island to the top of the G.P.O. Tower I would advise that larger theatres be utilised. However, the audiences seem to accept the sort of make-believe production in this sort of cabaret context.

Strike a Light. A very old gimmick like this one—twin revolves—seldom fails and was much used by Oliver Smith and the deceased Q Theatre at Kew Bridge. Doubled it up with a gantry of slider tracks and flown gauzes. Sufficient permutations of scenery going in different directions served to keep most people intrigued as to how it was all done. Treatment frankly "tuppence coloured" (not even a 3 in. reveal) dictated by budget and the foreknowledge of a sixteen-week tour, also the fact that the previous show on the same theme, *The Matchgirls*, had been realistic in every sense and that this was intended as a more flamboyant "Dolly"-like musical.

Jorjocks. Desperation—another musical—and the third in six months. My mind reeled, and I designed it the usual three times



"Jorrock's" at the New Theatre, London. Above, "Sheepwash Heath". Below, "Handley Cross Abbey". Opposite, Jorrock's Warehouse partly lowered in showing lighting concealed in underside to compensate for hanging lines blocked when flown.



It is only fair to state that putting a show like *Jorrock's* into the New Theatre is almost as absurd as putting *Come Spy With Me* into the Whitehall, and until I started on it I had not appreciated what Sean Kenny had coped with in *Oliver!*, or how ingenious his solution had been. A total lack of wing space is the major problem, but whereas Sean had had only the one milieu of Dickensian London to cope with, in *Jorrock's* I had everything—from London to Ballroom to country town to open country. I also had the shadow



of well-known John Leech illustrations hanging over me (better known than the text in fact). In any theatre with sufficient wing-space I would have pressed for my first thoughts which consisted of somewhat Brechtian set-pieces against back projection, possibly on a large revolving ring. The resultant design, and the impressive flying gear evolved by Ian Albery came out of the sheer *force majeure* of there being no other way of getting some pretty solid scenery (necessitated by the action) off the stage. There was simply nowhere else for it to go except up, and so up it goes. In the final designs I had hoped to achieve something of the success of the *Instant Marriage* designs—a fusion of the lightness of the John Leech drawings with sufficient solidity to effect realism. In the final result I don't feel it quite comes off. For reasons that I could not go into now, certain sets are far too realistic and differ from the others which retain the quality of illustration. The permanent cyclorama is to my mind one of the more successful features, being a development of a combination of PVC and Hanson Gauze with which I experimented in a revue called *Nymphs and Satyrs* and I owe a great indebtedness to Richard Pilbrow for some skilful low-key lighting. If it is visually one of the less successful shows I have designed I feel that it is because the basic gimmickry is not strong enough and the inherent weakness of design for a musical of this type is due to striving after a kind of subtlety which requires a very firm and personal realisation—the type of design which Visconti and Zeffirelli can realise through complete control of their productions. In the chaotic atmosphere typical of the commercial theatre to which I referred at the beginning of this article it is practically suicidal to embark on such a concept. In any case, I don't intend to try again for some time—at least, not until I have thought up some new gimmicks.

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THE COMMUNITY AUDITORIUM

by Percy Corry

Following an article in TABS (June 1965) in which it was suggested that the needs of the amateurs were being neglected in the general discussions about Civic Theatres, and that the amateurs, if they wanted to be considered, should exert themselves, a joint committee was formed by N.O.D.A. and B.D.L. to do something about it. It was recognised that in most provincial areas the facilities available for the production by amateurs of plays and musical shows are quite inadequate. In many towns the closing of commercial theatres and cinemas is aggravating the problem. It is recognised that the existence of a Civic Theatre with a resident professional company does not ease the situation for the amateurs. It is not realistic to expect such a professional company to vacate the theatre for occupation by the amateurs when they wish to perform.

In most of the large urban areas there is a need for a theatre in which the local amateur dramatic and operatic societies could perform regularly. Such a theatre should be available to the community as a whole: it should not be exclusive. It should be available for choral and orchestral concerts, for "pop" and chamber music, for non-commercial films, for meetings and conferences. It could also be available for professional touring companies presenting Children's Theatre, and scaled down drama, opera and ballet. For all such varied uses a flat-floored multi-purpose hall is completely unsuitable: a raked auditorium is a necessity.

A major problem in the planning of a suitable building for these varied purposes is the very real difference in the seating capacities required. Questionnaires were distributed by the joint committee to the member societies of N.O.D.A. and B.D.L. Completed forms were returned from 98 areas, many of these referring to groups of towns. There was a significant difference between the seating capacities suggested by the N.O.D.A. groups and those proposed by B.D.L. members. Of the eighty N.O.D.A. replies only 15 per cent asked for less than 500 seats: nearly 50 per cent suggested capacities from 500 to 850. By contrast, the B.D.L. suggestions were 40 per cent for 350 or under; and 50 per cent suggested 400 to 600. All the N.O.D.A. replies asked for a proscenium stage and over 40 per cent thought a fly-tower desirable. Of the B.D.L. replies, over 70 per cent suggested adaptable or open stages and 40 per cent thought a fly-tower desirable . . . the only point of complete unanimity.

At the N.O.D.A. Annual Conference, held in Buxton at the end of September, delegates spent about three hours in discussing this matter, probably to the frustration of some who were anxious to discuss new releases and other more immediate problems. A suggested prototype of a theatre with adjustable seating capacities was illustrated by drawings, slides and a model prepared by Mr. R. G. Adams (a Sheffield architect and a member of A.B.T.T.) with the writer (also A.B.T.T. member) acting as stage consultant. This project provided for:

Large Proscenium Theatre					
With Orchestra Pit	..	..	..	..	848 seats
Without Orchestra Pit	..	..	..	..	872 seats
Small Proscenium Theatre or					
Intimate Concert Hall	..	..	..	..	412 seats
Open End Stage Theatre					
Large Auditorium	..	..	..	..	704 seats
Small Auditorium	..	..	..	..	270 seats
Large Concert Hall with					
tiered stage	..	..	..	..	872 seats
Conference Hall with tiered					
seats on stage	..	..	..	..	1080 seats

It is hoped that the joint committee will be able shortly to publish a comprehensive report including the drawings of this prototype suggestion which could, of course, be adapted to varying local requirements, provided it is accepted that dancing and mayoral banquets are not to be planned for. This is not a suggestion for a multi-purpose hall. It provides for permanently tiered seating, an essential requirement for all the suggested uses. All ancillary accommodation is omitted. It is merely a suggested auditorium and stage, to which may be added all other facilities required. In many cases it would doubtless be an integral part of a centre for communal entertainment.

In discussing schemes of this sort it is desirable to get away from the name "Civic Theatre" which should be reserved for a full-time theatre, whether it be exclusively professional, amateur, or a combination of both. The project now considered is referred to as a Community Auditorium as that name more exactly indicates its function of providing facilities for performers of all sorts to appear before audiences for whom proper provision is made. The word "auditorium" is used extensively in America for this type of building and we should not jib at this additional transatlantic extension of our vocabulary.

Such an auditorium does not supersede the Civic Theatre and the existence of a professional Civic Theatre does not make the Community Auditorium superfluous. Both are needed, but in those areas in which a professional Civic Theatre does not exist, it is assumed that visiting professionals would share the facilities provided by a Community Auditorium.

It is hoped that the report of the joint committee will provide informed guidance to local authorities and to local amateur organisations directly concerned. The returned questionnaires have made it evident that there is a lot of enthusiastic but isolated effort all over the country, that there is much co-operative interest in local organisations; but it is also evident that there is a deal of frustration owing to the lack of authoritative national guidance, both in the planning of suitable buildings and in their use and management when they are built.

Most of the projects actually planned or in course of planning have been thrust into national cold storage, which may not be a bad thing: some second thoughts may be useful. If, during the frosty winter of our economic discontent, communal needs can be more generally appreciated, the cultural summer that follows could, perhaps, be tolerably glorious.

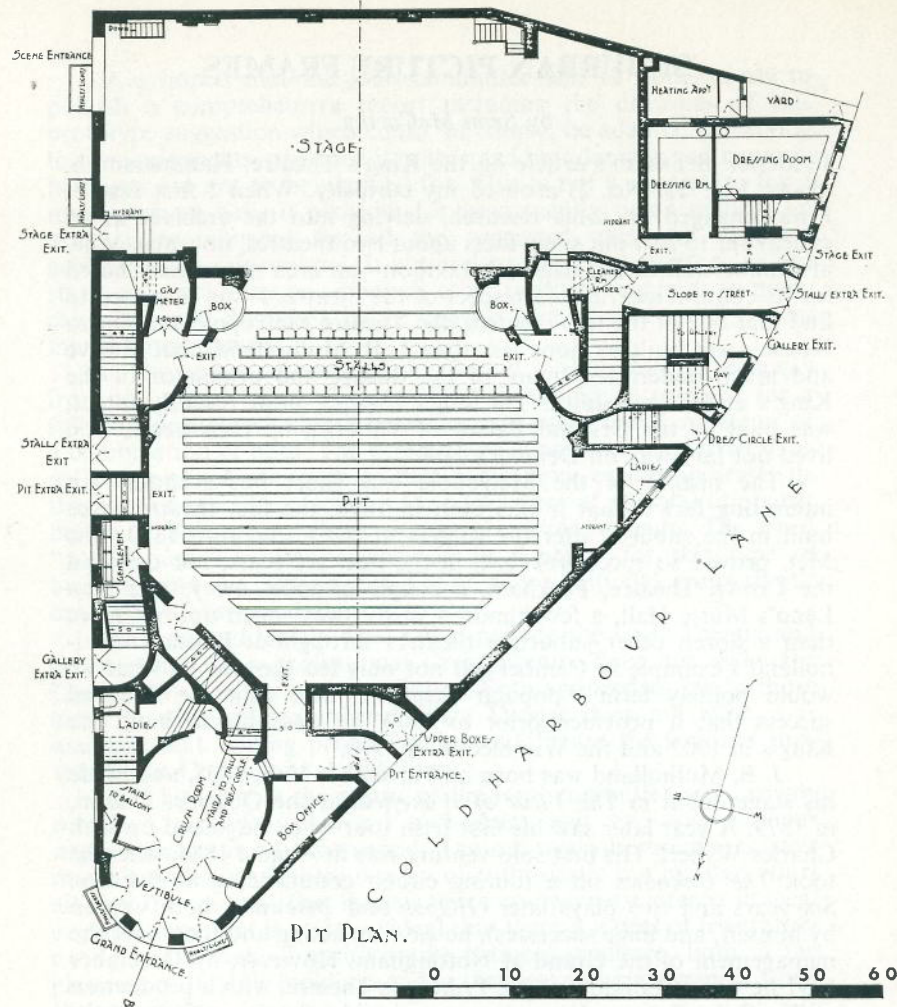
SUBURBAN PICTURE FRAMES

by Sean McCarthy

Frederick Bentham's article on the King's Theatre, Hammersmith, (TABS, Vol. 23, No. 2) aroused my curiosity. When I first read it I was engaged on some research, delving into the archives in an endeavour to sort out some facts about two theatres, now alas gone, at Camberwell Green in South London—an area not exactly noted for its cultural activities in respect of the theatre. I was surprised to find that one of the two theatres, the Theatre Metropole and Opera House—was built by none less than J. B. Mulholland, that illusive and much underrated figure of the theatre and originator of the King's at Hammersmith. The other theatre, until recently intact, was built as the Oriental Palace of Varieties by Dan Leno, who lived not far away on Denmark Hill.

The history of the Metropole was short but eventful. An interesting fact is that it was built in 1894, the first theatre to be built in the suburbs after the success of the Camden in 1890. The Met. proved so successful that, in the next six years, not only did the Crown Theatre, Peckham, a couple of miles away, and Dan Leno's Music Hall, a few hundred yards away, open up, but more than a dozen other suburban theatres throughout London. Mulholland's example in Camberwell not only led the way to what we would politely term "popular theatre", but, with the financial success that it provided prior to 1900, he was able to build the King's in 1902 and the Wimbledon in 1910.

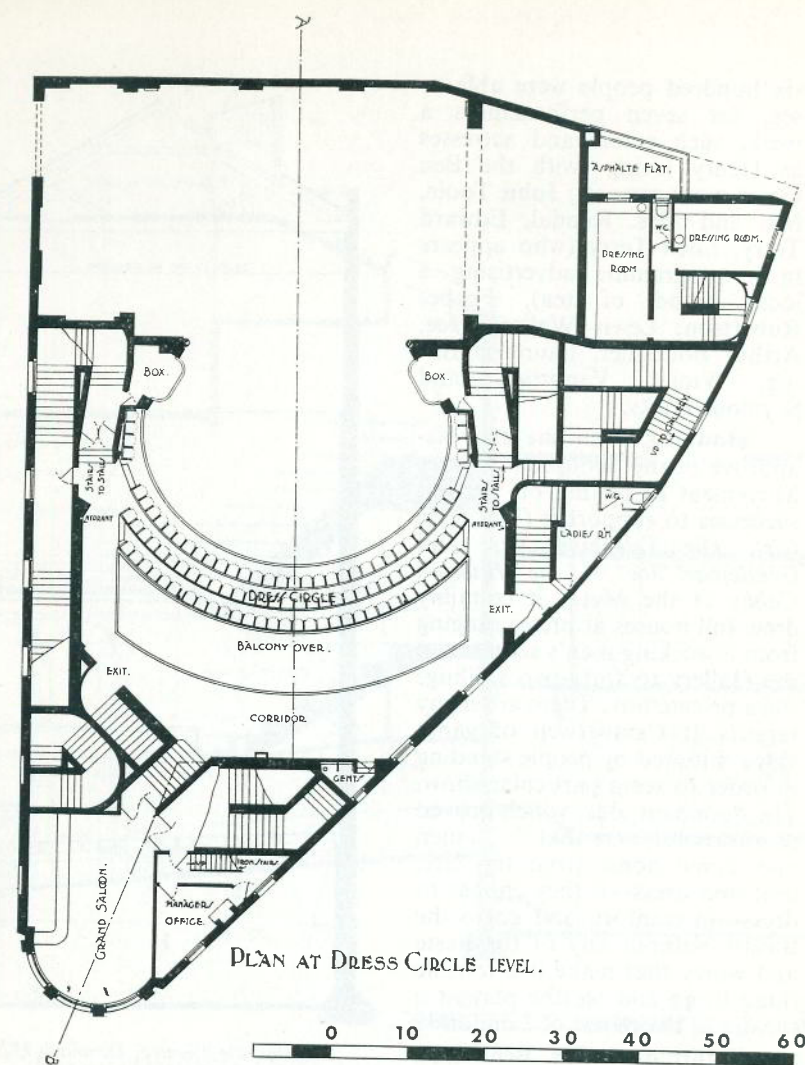
J. B. Mulholland was born on November 11th, 1858, and made his stage debut in *The Vicar of Wakefield* at the Queen's, Dublin, in 1879. A year later saw his first Irish tour when he joined up with Charles Wybert. His first solo venture was in August 1884, when he took *The Unknown* on a touring circuit commencing at Burnley. Six years and two plays later (*Hizpah* and *Disowned*, both written by himself, and huge successes), he gave up acting and took over the management of the Grand at Nottingham. However, by December 1891 he was in London, at the Princess's Theatre, with a production of *The Swiss Express*. His eagerness to build a theatre in the suburbs led him to Camberwell. I suspect that this site, known somewhat infamously on account of the rowdy Camberwell Fair of the 1850s, was emerging as a fairly wealthy suburb. The birthplace of Browning and Chamberlain and the home of John Ruskin, transport connected it with the Elephant and Castle and Surrey Theatres. Between the Elephant and Castle and Camberwell lies Walworth, with the South and Canterbury Music Halls, and of course Gatti's close by, at Charing Cross. The Royal Victoria Hall and Coffee Tavern (the Old Vic), was, at this time, a Temperance Music Hall under the management of Emma Conns, and its sole dealings with the legitimate theatre were when Henry Irving used it to rehearse his Company for productions scheduled either for the Lyceum, across the River,



Metropole Pit plan.

or for his various tours. Camberwell, then, was sufficiently far from the theatrical scene to warrant the rather dubious financial investment of building a theatre. The Princess's at the Oval, Kennington, by the way, was not built until 1898—after Mulholland's example.

Mulholland had his theatre designed under the theatre regulations of 1892 (the first theatre of its kind to be so), and from the little information I can glean from various sources it appeared to be an excellent theatre. It is surprising to note that a great number of the members of the local council were against the project from the start and condemned it as a "soul-snaring and decidedly frivolous



Metropole Dress Circle plan.

enterprise".

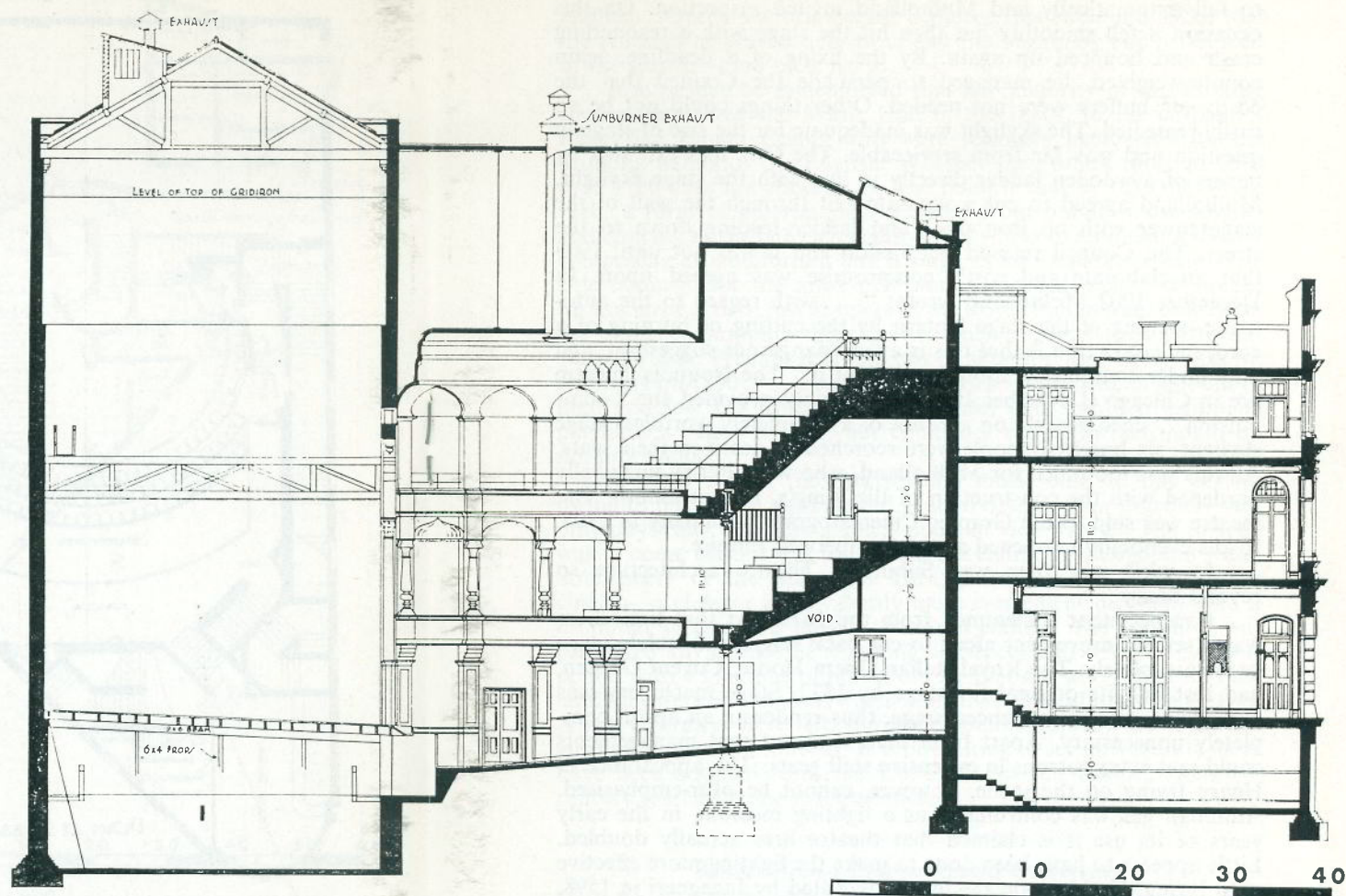
The design at any rate was neat and compact and occupied a triangular plot of land at the junction of Denmark Hill and Coldharbour Lane. An Odeon cinema now stands as a rather unfitting monument to this pioneer theatre. The auditorium, of gold, cream, light crimson and peacock blue, was comparatively spacious for its day and well ventilated. The stage was of a fair size with a slight rake, capable of suiting the requirements of the numerous touring companies that were to visit. Nearly one thousand

six hundred people were able to see, for seven performances a week, such actors and actresses as Henry Irving (with the Ben Greet management), John Toole, Mr. and Mrs. Kendal, Edward Terry, Ellen Terry (who appears in a programme advertising a local brand of tea), Forbes Robertson, Lewis Waller, Tree, Arthur Bourchier, Laurence Irving, Violet Vanbrugh and Seymour Hicks.

However much one may disapprove of the Suburban Theatre Movement as relying on musical successes to support it (*The Shop Girl*, *The Telephone Girl* and *Gentleman Joe* — the *Hansom Cabby* at the Met.), it certainly drew full houses at prices ranging from a working man's sixpence in the Gallery to forty-two shillings for a private box. There are many reports at Camberwell of gangways cluttered by people standing in order to see a particular show. The dominant idea, which proved so successful, was that "... men may come home from the city, dine and dress—if they choose to dress—in comfort, and go to the theatre without any of the haste and worry that make it a terrible thing to go and see the play at a theatre in the centre of London".

Returning to Mr. Bentham's article, it is my belief that the architecture of the suburban theatres was one of the great steps towards a 'working-class theatre' and that their success was attributable to the care that went into their construction and working. Before expanding on this, however, it must be made clear that the Metropole closed down in 1904 for reasons outside the normal running of the theatre and beyond Mulholland's control.

As I said, the theatre was built according to the most recent L.C.C. regulations of 1892. These regulations were with respect to public safety in the event of fire and not necessarily, I hasten to add,



Metropole Theatre, Denmark Hill.
Architects: Sprague & Barton.

LONGITUDINAL SECTION.

what we expect today. They were seriously revised at the turn of the century and were applied to theatres carefully inspected under the Detailed Survey Procedure. One of the first theatres to come under this new system was Mulholland's. The Metropole was lucky in one respect; the architects had installed a fire curtain, built by Messrs. Merryweather. However, it did not satisfy the fire authorities of 1902 since it had no air buffers and was winched down by a stage hand who had to remain at stage level throughout the time taken in descent. It was adapted, by an elaborate system of counterweighting,



THEATRE ROYAL, YORK

As part of the improvements to this theatre a 3-preset 100 channel Thyristor dimmer system LP has been installed. The photo above shows the master control desk positioned in a side box to give the operator a good view of the stage through louvre masking. The luminous dimmer levers for all presets are on a wing unit within easy reach, as can be seen in the photo below. All selection and routing is by solid state switching instead of relays.



LETTER FROM AMERICA OR LINCOLN HAS IT

Miss Jill Lieder at one time your editor's secretary, now returned to her own side of the Atlantic, writes from New York.

Dear Ed.,

First another thank you for the tour of New York! I phoned Mr. Branigan to thank him for the tickets and in the course of the conversation mentioned that I, too, would like a tour of the Beaumont and the State theatres. Although I didn't get to walk on the expanded metal ceiling, I did get royal treatment and felt that the name "Strand Electric" is indeed the door to prestige and celebrity.

Jose Sevilla took me around the Beaumont and informed me that the seam at the top which you complained of in Caucasian Chalk Circle is not in the cyc but in the scrim (gauze to you) in front of it. This was not the only defect I noticed and was told about in the place. My actress blood boiled at the sight of what they call rehearsal space, but was I proud of Strand's Zen spot sitting way up in the bridges.

While I was there I took my first look at the library and museum. You certainly missed a beautiful component of Lincoln Center. There are exhibits including composers' manuscripts, stage designs, and photographs of a circus. One of the best attractions is a five-minute film done on a screen made up of smaller squares which sometimes combine to form one picture and sometimes show different facets of the performing arts all at one time. If that isn't enough, you can pick up one of four or five telephone-type gadgets and hear excerpts from operas, or pick your own recording and listen to it on one of the phonographs which seem to spring up all over the library. That is, if there's one not in use. (I tried to listen to a Brecht play today and found only the machines in the children's department free, and those are reserved for children younger than me.)

Since the Research collection wasn't open on my first visit (I was there in the morning, and that section of the library is open from noon until six), I browsed around the Drama Department of the General Reading Room—everything has its appropriate name. The first thing that caught my eye was Percy Corry's book and five copies of a book on sound. The lighting section here is close to non-existent, but remembering my difficulty at the British Museum in carrying out B.'s assignment of finding background information on Adolf Linnebach, I searched for his name in the catalogue and found only that, a name.

Today I visited the Research Library on the fifth floor and had about the same success with B.'s project as I had in London, and with about the same obstacles. First an admission pass. Using TABS as a reference I had no trouble getting a year's permission to use the Theatre Collection (distance must have added force, the British Museum only gave me a week). I found an issue of *Bühnentechnische Rundschau* listed under Linnebach, filled out my call slip,

traded it for a number, and while waiting for the magazine looked at the books lining the walls. Besides the usual *Who's Who in Theatre* and casting directories, there were theatrical biographies in all languages, even one in Danish—a chap by the name of Olsen, but that's as far as I got into the book.

The issue of *BTR* I was waiting for was missing, but I was informed that I should also look in the "non-book" catalogue. This huge wall of drawers contains the listings for clippings, manuscripts, blueprints of theatres, pictures of actors, shows, sets, and theatre, interior and exterior. In fact, the only thing I asked for and got a "no" answer on was the ABTT Theatre Planning Guide. Yes, they do have TABS, and a copy of the new edition of Mr. Fuchs's book*, which is more than Strand Electric can boast. Programmes, prints, posters, you name it, it's there. In fact, after finding everything under the sun, I was told that there is yet a third catalogue, this one of original manuscripts, costume designs, etc., that are kept "caged". There is a copying service in the library, though, and anything not under copyright can be reproduced.

The material now at Lincoln Center was, for the most part, transferred from the public library at 42nd Street. In fact, the really technical books on lighting, wiring diagrams of switchboards and other information that wouldn't usually come under the heading of stagecraft, are still in the main branch. They even have that publication† that is piling up in your second cupboard under the "foreign catalogues" basket, but it's in the Czechoslovakian section where they can file that alphabet.

Any questions? Anything you'd like me to look up? I'd love an excuse to go back to the rose colour carpeted luxury of that room. I even had to soften the contrast between that and the hard pavements outside by stopping in the dance collection and watching films of the Martha Graham modern dance troupe. This is certainly a far cry from the Charing Cross Library!

JILLIAN

(That's what I'm using for my professional name and I wanted to see how it looks.)

P.S. Russ Johnson told someone the other day that using the actor's point of view for stage right and left was strictly American. Having informed him that he was wrong, I began to have doubts and looked it up in *Stage Lighting* by Frederick Bentham at the Lincoln Center Library!

* *Stage Lighting* by Theodore Fuchs.

† *Acta Scaenographica*.



SATURDAY NIGHT AND SUNDAY MORNING AT THE LONDON PALLADIUM

by Frederick Bentham

This is going to be a nostalgic article. Rather than a paean for the new it is a lament for the passing of the old. By the time this issue of TABS has been published the London Palladium will be without its famous puzzle, the organ that never uttered a note. Ever since December 17th, 1941, there has been a cinema organ liberally endowed with stops situated in full view at the right-hand end of the grand tier. Yet in spite of obvious activity and a strong feeling that it was not like Moss Empires to throw their money about for nothing this organ utterly failed to make its presence felt. How far from truth, for here was probably the most overworked lighting control in the world. Since 1949 when the wartime console was replaced it has been estimated that there have been 2,000 working hours per year which means 34,000 working hours in 17 years. During this time there were 15,600 cues or dimmer movements per year, a total of 265,200 cues or dimmer movements in the 17 years. This is without taking into account testing, use of console for setting lamps, etc., auditions or midnight matinees and special shows. There have only been three major faults and only one major overhaul—that by Strand Electric in 1956, when concern was felt then as to the practical working life left. In 1962 another overhaul was undertaken by the Palladium Electrical Department themselves.

This information has been provided by the theatre. The large amount of work springs from a number of things. Firstly, a Palladium show always has lots and lots of lighting changes. The theatre is never used for straight plays with a few leisurely changes in a single standing set, and in consequence the switchboard never gets a holiday or a rest cure. The Palladium runs two houses every day, and on Saturday this becomes three; a matinee and two evening performances. During the war there were three shows daily and this still applies to the Christmas show. In addition to the normal work as a theatre, the Palladium functions as a television studio for the production of shows of which *Sunday Night at the London Palladium* is the best known. This goes on all the year round, for by no means everything made there is seen on the home screens. Indeed it is the American demand for spectacular shows in colour which is responsible for the great increase in loading on the new control that has taken over. There are now in fact 240 dimmer channels totalling 882 kW whereas the previous Light Console had 152 channels totalling 300 kW. The disparity between the numbers of control channels being accounted for mainly by special television lighting which can be brought in by change-over arrangements. It is obviously necessary to provide a quick change-over after curtain fall at 11 o'clock or so on Saturday night, for the place then has to become a television studio for Sunday.



New Lighting Control room at the rear of the Grand Circle, London Palladium. Main 240-channel console on the left and movable preset wing on the right.

The requirement for a new control for the Palladium set a curious problem, for here were people perfectly satisfied with their existing control. The Light Console suited the Palladium type of show and could give the ATV what they wanted without fuss or pre-planning. Two things were responsible for this—the great flexibility of use which stopkey selection permitted given a dexterous operator, and the presence of short circuiting contactors on the dimmers.

Unfortunately this is not the time to provide another Light Console, although 240 channels would not have presented much difficulty at the desk, a couple having been built some years ago for 216 channels, but there simply would not have been room for the extra electro-mechanical banks. Besides, these things are now obsolete and the art of making them is no more. The solution to the problem was to provide the thyristor descendant of the Light Console namely the system C/AE.

The standard 20-channel thyristor dimmer racks are convenient since they do not have to be mounted in line. They have easily been accommodated under the OP side of the stage, whereas the present dimmer bank is under the P side in an old band room. The new control desk is in a room constructed at the back of the grand circle which means that the two controls have been used during the changeover period, thereby avoiding any closure of the theatre. Circuits were transferred from one to the other, the new control doing more and more work and the old one less and less as the days passed. This is back to square one, for the same procedure was adopted when the Light Console went in. The Palladium does not close.

Discussion with Peter Penrose, head of production dept. Moss Empires, Keith Yates the electrician and Bill Platt the operator led to a modified 2-preset C/AE being adopted. This is in contrast to the 4-preset C/AE which the same number of channels were deemed to require at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden.

It should be remarked that system C/AE with instant memory selection groups was put forward rather than system IDM with instant dimmer memory. The reason lies in the way of working at the Palladium. There it would be an encumbrance to have to think in terms of dimmer positions. In consequence the dimmer levers of No. I preset are likely to be kept at full and those of No. II preset at zero, and common groups selected and added together when necessary by using the group memory pushes. The use of these pushes lights the dimmer scales selected in red and these can be raised on No. I or No. II preset red master. If the cue concerns full up combinations of light, preset I will be used and the odd channels requiring something less can be so adjusted on the dimmer levers. If however the lighting effect concerns channels to a lot of dimmer positions then preset No. II can be used.

Once any combination has been raised to full it can be transferred to the white master of that preset. The channels are then

known as "parked". This transfer can take place at any intermediate position along the travel of the red master so long as the white master is in approximately the same position.

Thus the white master could be travelling slowly to full and the red master used to return to zero and collect more channels to park in turn. Channels can be selected to de-park in the same way or a cross fade can take place between the groups on the red master and those on the white all within the same preset. Any dimmer levers selected on both white and red and so displaying will automatically be held steady so as not to change during the cross fade no matter what lap or lead is used. It is not necessary to bring one master to full before taking the other down.

Making up the memory groups takes place by touching the dimmer scales. This operates a reverser to light the scale in red, another touch and the light is extinguished. This hand selection can be used for operation direct, but normally the combination is captured on one of the forty memory pushes by using the master presetter toe push. Subsequent touching of that push puts the combination on preset I or preset II.

It would be pleasant to say that the control room is spacious, but as usual it is not, and the window into the auditorium has to be shared by the sound console, though this is in fact partitioned off. The lighting man sits with the window on his left side and preset I desk in front of him. Preset II is near vertical at his right hand, and somewhere over in that direction he has to see the TV monitors. These latter are not of course required for theatre shows. The planning for television was directed by Bernard Marsden for ATV.

During television the lighting supervisor can station himself in the same room and close co-operation with the lighting console operator is ensured.

The dimmer levers are arranged in five rows of fifty to each preset, one row being short by ten to make the 240. Preset I is an ergonomically curved desk with a row of thirty-six stopkeys along the top and over that the memory pushes for that preset. The stopkeys are for colour change selection, there being thirty-six motor-operated type each giving four colours, separately or in combination, and white. These are in constant use and the switchboard type of change would not be fast enough. Selecting by one stopkey and five keys representing O, A, B, C and D, as was Light Console practice, suited very well, so a similar method has been adapted to the present control even though the keys become push buttons. Some keys do still appear on the job, for under the master fader panel on the main desk there is a drawer which can be pulled out to disclose eight keys, four black and four white. These correspond to the white, red, blue and green, blackout and full-on keys of the old Light Console and enable any combination selected on the red master to be flashed to blackout or to full on rhythmically. It is now traditional to require this effect at the Palladium from time to time and it dates from the first days of the first production which

used the Light Console there. This was Robert Nesbitt's *Gangway*, and I remember George Black beckoning me down to the stalls and saying to me, "You say your machine can do anything, can you liven up the finale just before the interval for me?"

The finale consisted, as is very familiar now, of the girls revolving on the outer ring of the revolve, the centre rising and so forth. There was a fair amount of stilted mechanical movement to which I added a revolving Acting Area pattern by setting up groups of them on the console pistons which were then pressed in rapid succession. No additional equipment was necessary for this effect.

The Light Console which went into the Palladium in 1941 was not in fact the one we have just taken out, but my original cherished one of 1935 which had been blitzed in our theatre on the same night as the House of Commons was destroyed. Between Robert Nesbitt and Stanley Earnshaw the notion was cooked up that this might go into the Palladium for his new show. Repairs to and re-wiring of the bombed console were carried out eagerly by Paul Weston and myself in our own weekends. The original Light Console had only 39 dimmers but there was a whole series of large changeover contactors associated with a kind of remote patching system which had allowed dips and auditorium colour lighting to be plugged up, from the console, when it was in the demonstration theatre. Thus the procedure was that certain circuits could be taken over from the existing Grand Master board and returned there when necessary, the dimmers being kept at full for the purpose—an early form of "park". The Acting Area floods, Cyclorama and new Upper Circle spots were ours alone. The position at the end of the circle, a little balcony annexe between the boxes and the circle itself, soon established the merits of a front-of-house situation even if it had to be to the side. This was the first London professional theatre to have a front-of-house position, and only the second to have an electric remote control, the first being Covent Garden in 1934. It was soon found that we could take our cues better direct and that has continued ever since.

The exposed position had a great drawback and a great advantage. Both these resulted from being so close to the audience. We could easily spoil their show for them by talking but on the other hand one became part of the show in a way that is quite impossible in a separate observation box type of room. Though the Palladium could not be said to be my kind of show even in those days, I always had a great respect for the professionalism there. Members of the audience cannot be aware how small the off-stage area is. Working to the wide opening that they see makes wing space minimal. Nor is there height or depth to compensate. When a ground row is used it has to be carried on a low truck bridge so that the stage can revolve under it. Yet this is a house with a reputation for the spectacular show and one may well wonder where they stow it all.

One last picture of the Palladium. During a winter power cut I was under the stage investigating the space available for the new installation when the area was invaded by a mixture of artistes, stage hands and others who promptly proceeded to manhandle the stage round and round—power cut or not, the Palladium stage revolved as usual.



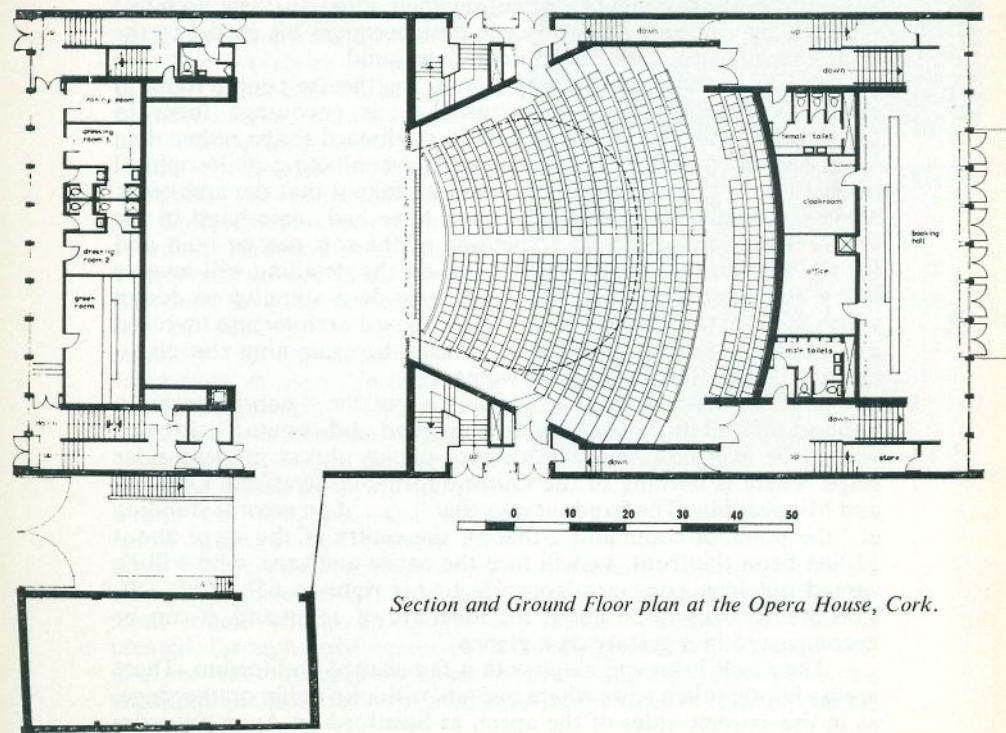
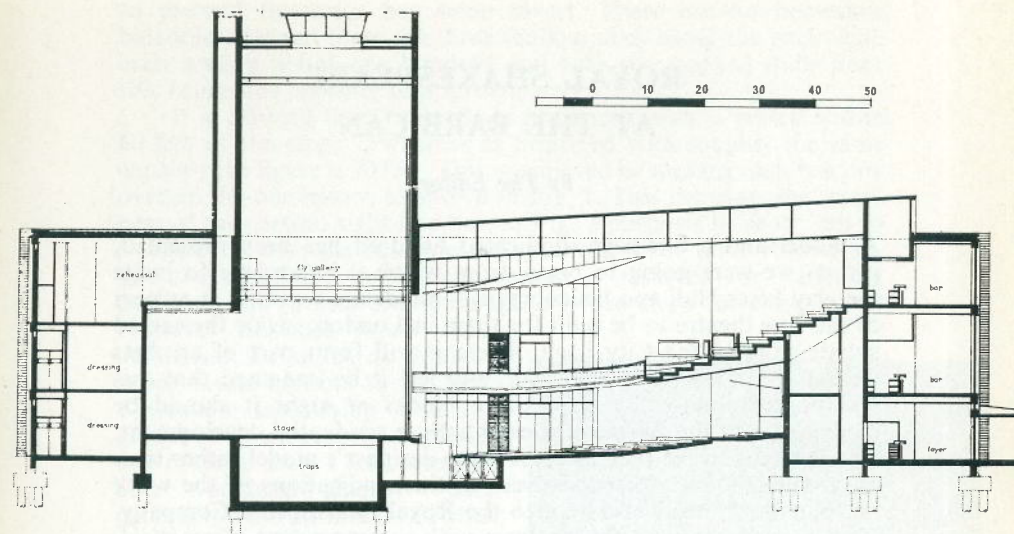
OPERA HOUSE, CORK

The Opera House, Cork, was rebuilt and opened in October 1965 to replace the old theatre which was destroyed by fire. Michael Scott, the architect, was also responsible for the New Abbey, Dublin, the subject of an article by Percy Corry in our last issue. Mr. Corry, who visited Cork recently, reports:

The total seating capacity is 996 of which number 387 are in the balcony. The theatre appears to be larger than the number of seats would suggest. The suspended ceiling panels emphasise the height which to me seems excessive for Drama. There is an over-liberal space in the balcony at each side, useful no doubt for circulation but which sacrifices something of intimacy.

Foyer and bar are commendably spacious and the stage is adequate in size. But the dressing-room accommodation has an austerity that, in spite of its modern concrete, is reminiscent of some of the older theatres.

The stage lighting installation can be summarised as a system LC transistorised saturable reactor control with 48 dimmers fitted and with provision for a total of 72. At present there are 13 F.O.H. circuits and 35 stage circuits, no patching, two presets, three groups.



Section and Ground Floor plan at the Opera House, Cork.

ROYAL SHAKESPEARE AT THE BARBICAN

by The Editor

A model and a five-page duplicated handout has been presented, just as we were going to press, from which it is possible to judge the way Peter Hall and his company's minds are working in respect of the new theatre to be built for them in London, inside the sacred square mile of the City itself. There it will form part of an Arts Centre to include a concert hall, and lest it be imagined that this will be surrounded by dead office blocks at night it should be explained that the Barbican is essentially a residential development.

It seems to me that this is a scene designer's model rather than an architect's one. There are very distinct indications of the work of John Bury, head of design to the Royal Shakespeare Company. Thus we seem to see a theatre team with a vast amount of practical, and successful, experience presenting their ideas to their architect in much the same way that a scene designer gives his model to the stage carpenter to work out in detail and build.

This is surely the right way round, for theatre people think in models not architectural drawings. Let us encourage them to express their ideas to their architect in cardboard shape rather than in incoherent torrents of meandering and conflicting philosophical discussion. In the present instance we can take it that the architects, Messrs. Chamberlin, Powell and Bon, have had some hand in the model if only to agree that something of the sort can be built and for the £1,300,000 budget. Their work on the detailing will involve many many problems, but these will provide a stimulus to design which is absent from the wood and cardboard architecture involved in building a model. One looks forward to examining the plans, meanwhile let us examine what we have.

The first and most striking point is not the "non-proscenium 'one-room' relationship between stage and auditorium"—for this was to be expected—but the absence of any thrust or peninsular stage. There is nothing of the Guthrie forms of Stratford, Ontario, and Minneapolis. The handout says that "... if an actor is standing at 'the point of command', that is, the centre of the stage about 12 feet from the front, he will face the entire audience, who will be spread out in a great arc from 65° to his right to 65° to his left. This seems to us to be about the ideal arc of command, it can be encompassed in a gesture or a glance".

The result is an end stage with a fan-shaped auditorium. There are no idiotic token rows where one sits with one's chin on the stage, as in the extreme sides of the apron at Stratford-on-Avon, in order

to pretend the stage has some thrust. There are no horseshoe balconies, instead there are three shallow ones along the back wall, each seating about one hundred and with the stepped stalls floor this brings the capacity to approximately 1,200.

It is claimed that "the whole of the audience is seated within 60 feet of the stage", whereas at Stratford with roughly the same capacity the figure is 90 feet. This is achieved by making each balcony overlap the one below, as shown in Fig. 1. This increases the steepness of the vertical sight line but, as Fig. 2 purports to show, not to a serious extent; the balconies being only two or three rows deep. The very top one in the photograph is reserved for "lighting positions and projections", though it is too steep for these latter.

However it could house other auxiliaries, including, no doubt, a super sound console to reinforce Clarence's last dying Malmsey gurgle or to entweet the birdies in one of John Bury's less recognisable woodland glades! "Side galleries (in the normal theatre box positions) which will seat about another 100 people" are being designed but are not shown.

The two styles of tombstone planted hither and thither on the terraces of Fig. 1 do not arise, I am reliably informed, from any desire on the part of Peter Hall to stress the memorial side of his Shakespeare connection, but represent orthodox seats and unorthodox benches. The handout has something to say about the use of benches for some, presumably the groundlings in the front rows, or even "in the whole of the auditorium". Using these more or less people could be crowded in according to demand. I content myself in saying that this would not suit me. Any extra space I have earned between the arms of my stall through living a reasonably disciplined life I like to keep to myself and not to have it filched from me by some obese wreck alongside, no matter whether he was so created through misfortune or self-indulgence. Why assume the cheaper seats are only occupied by the young and what about the steaming hot last-minute arrival who just scrapes in, having run all the way?



Fig. 1

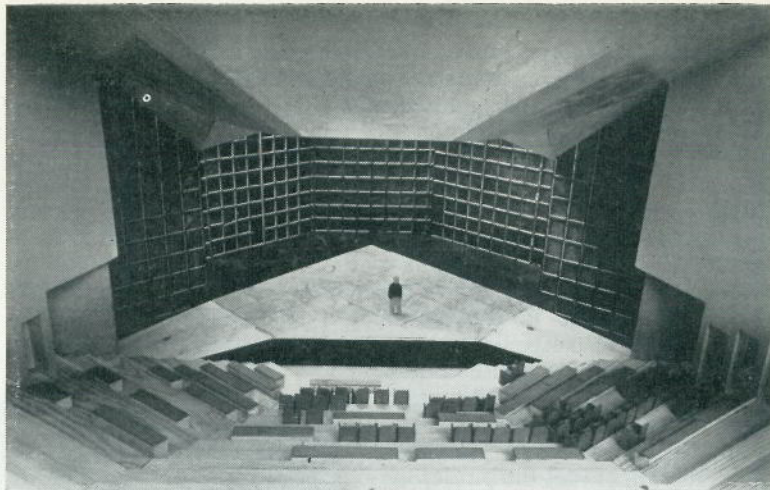


Fig. 2

The seat rows are to be continental type, continuous without gangways from wall to wall, but I hope they will not follow the practice of some German theatres and isolate each by terminating it in separate doors. When one catches sight of a friend in another row during the interval, the process can resemble hunting through drawers for a collar stud when trying to locate the row.

The stage appears in Figs. 2 and 3 and, as can be seen from the latter, above the sound-board ceiling, there is a stage fly tower with grid over the acting area right down to the front edge. To quote "this acting area is completely surrounded at the back by movable gridded screens. These screens fulfil the dual function of

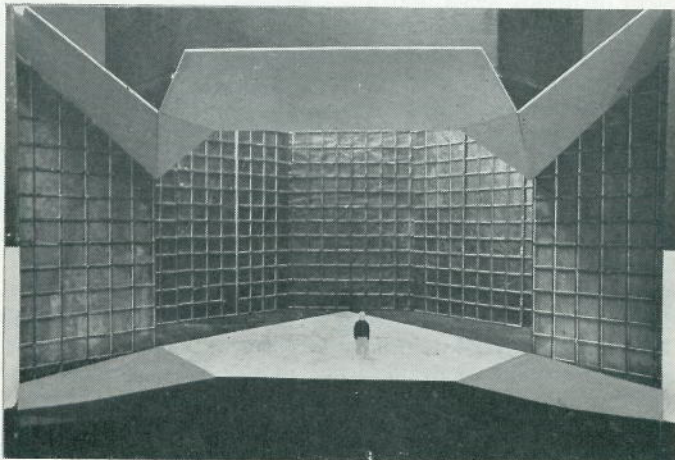


Fig. 3

masking the sightlines into the backstage areas and of defining the shape of the acting area. They can be set in a variety of positions. Set back they leave a large free area behind the acting area, set forward they completely enclose the acting area and create a complete one-room area with the auditorium. There are also intermediate positions in which wings are created. . . ."

"The gridded surface of these screens serves a practical as well as decorative function. Scenery can be attached, balconies hung, doors and windows can be created. These are the permanent working surfaces of the stage. Thus large areas of masking scenery are unnecessary unless they are specifically required for a given production."

The stage floor is to be as adaptable as the rest of the stage but remain simple. The opening brief says that any machinery that is to be "installed should be directed towards ease of operation of the theatre . . . giving maximum stage utilisation for both rehearsal and performance". Thus there are to be "three large lifts" directly behind the acting area to transfer large pieces of scenery to the storage areas beneath the stage. "The storage area will be entirely below stage so that the wing area can be left completely clear for the requirements of individual performances." Storage assumes an eight-show repertoire. The lifts will also serve productions by providing a dropped or raised level at the back of the acting area when required.

The handout refers to the form as an "'open' space stage", but one has a sneaking feeling that this is only playing with words, for what is really there is a theatre with a very wide, somewhat irregular and disguised proscenium. The line of this is where the shaped safety curtain drops in to "completely seal the acting area from the auditorium". There is nothing to be ashamed of in this for it is the natural result of wishing to use and handle scenery properly and, one may add, to light it well. There is further talk of dropping in of other prosceniums and of being able to make orchestra pits, so an insurance policy is being taken out in the stage area even if, thank goodness, the auditorium is not adaptable. As to the other important areas good things are promised, but it is not the business of TABS to go beyond stage and auditorium.

All in all we are privileged to obtain a preview of the brief that an eminently professional and experienced company consider to be appropriate for a house whose repertoire may consist of Shakespeare and the very modern in equal proportions. That the creative side of the brief owes a great debt to the disciplines and compromises imposed by the Stratford-upon-Avon theatre itself seems to me beyond doubt. What is more it is all the better for that, this is no design *in vacuo*. The architects of the Barbican are to be congratulated on obtaining such clients. It must be a real pleasure to work with practical men of the theatre who not only know but can recognise what they want. This is not always the lot of an architect who sets out to design a theatre.

BOOK REVIEW

The Design of Drama Spaces in Secondary Schools

This pamphlet, prepared by The National Association of Drama Advisers and published by The Strand Electric and Engineering Company, is timely. It provides many useful guide lines and it is to be hoped that it will be followed by reports and critical commentaries on new developments in school theatre building. With the wider adoption of comprehensive education, it should be possible to provide a greater variety of specialised accommodation in every new school or add new units to existing schools with confidence that they can be fully utilised.

Two types of accommodation are dealt with, the drama studio-workshop and the performance area or theatre. Flexibility in design to cover all types of production is emphasised. This seems to be based on the questionable idea that freedom is a pre-requisite for creative work, but the reverse may be nearer the truth; where no limitations exist, the artist must create them. Flexibility will have real utility only if it is the result of careful planning with the practical considerations governing every function kept in mind.

Each of the stage forms referred to have disadvantages and some may be of doubtful value for school work. For instance, sibilants on which intelligible speech depends are directional; facial make-up and expression are contributory to words; all lose their effect on part of an audience surrounding an arena stage. There are difficulties in lighting such stages with minimum equipment and without dazzling some of the audience. The use of a lighting grid in comparatively small and high areas could result in steeply angled lighting of limited value and preclude that valuable device, the overhead sounding board, which can be of considerable assistance to a young speaker.

Music, on which so many productions depend, is referred to only in its mechanised or electronic forms and the question of acoustics has only two references. The variations which can occur in the same room in different circumstances need careful study and it may be that some variable acoustic, easily understood and capable of use by the school staff, is the answer to this problem.

While the independent drama room and theatre may be achieved in the large comprehensive school, it is unlikely to find a place in plans for the smaller secondary schools where, owing to limited numbers, it could only have part-time use. In such schools, a dual purpose drama room-classroom might be feasible and it would be worth while having another look at the multi-purpose school hall and questioning the assumption that it cannot be re-designed for the proper presentation of drama.

The pamphlet is a clear and useful expression of a sectional interest. This would not be diminished by designing new school theatres so that they are suitable for public performances. Co-operation between local and education authorities could raise the standard of equipment for both school and public use and be of particular value in new development areas where such facilities are lacking.

CHARLES HUTTON, F.R.I.B.A.