

materials become available, technicians spend less time in the industry, and safety regulations increase in number and stringency.

KEN SMALLEY

THE COMPLETE BOOK OF PUPPETRY

David Currell, Pitman Publishing

Ever since Izaak Walton's "The Compleat Angler", there have been so many books claiming to be the last word on particular subjects that initial reactions to this book—with a title that must surely be a misnomer—could justifiably be ones of suspicion; yet I can fairly say that this work is the most "complete" book of puppetry I have read in that it touches on almost all aspects of the medium, albeit some rather sketchily.

The TABS reader will find the lighting section very thin and outdated, and unfortunately the bibliography lists no reference book on lighting, sound or, for that matter, on any of the theatre crafts which have specific problems when related to puppet theatre. The book will, however, satisfy anyone wishing to learn how to make a marionette skeleton which flies apart, and how to make one puppet operate another puppet, but it contains almost nothing about techniques of production and direction of puppet performances.

The specialist script writers and designers of many Eastern European Puppet Theatres occupy the highest possible positions, yet David Currell dismisses these most important aspects of communication in only two lines, advising that scripts should be written "systematically"!

There is, however, an excellent chapter on historical and contemporary puppets and the methods of construction of various kinds of puppets are clearly detailed and illustrated. It is well produced, with 200 pages and almost 400 photographs and drawings, and is a "must" for anyone wishing to obtain a broad knowledge of the puppet arts.

RAY DA SILVA

STAGE DESIGN Howard Bay. Drama Book Specialists/Publishers, New York (Pitman Publishing in the UK)

This is not just a book for designers or would-be designers. It is essential reading for anyone hooked on theatre. It relates design to the other ingredients in the theatrical mix. It philosophises about theatre and design as was, as is, and as will be. And it gets down to the craftsmanship and organisation that makes design (including lighting) happen. The author is a distinguished Broadway designer and a distinguished academic. Bound between the covers of *Stage Design* is a lifetime's experience of making it happen and teaching others to make it happen—and the writing style is compulsively entertaining. This is not just another theatre book: this is a book about the reality of the stage. This is a book that we all have to read. And Mrs Worthington, if your daughter wants to put a design on the stage, do please give her Howard Bay for Christmas.

FRANCIS REID

Tabman's Postbag

The Editor,

TABS

Dear Sir,

Mr. John Wyckham lacks the courage to name the theatres he's criticising in his article "Ten Days to Tabs" (Spring Issue 1975); invents fictitious names and thereby allows himself to indulge in facetious comments without fear of reply. Very clever—but is yours a journal to be taken seriously or not? He writes about a visit to Boltingham and of having supper with the Theatre Director. Allow me please to scotch any suggestion that his comments have any current relevance to Bolton's Octagon Theatre. I have been Theatre Director at the Octagon since mid-summer 1971 and have never welcomed Mr. Wyckham here. Permit me to add that the Octagon Theatre now flourishes. The average attendance maintained for the past two years is 86%, and productions are of a standard to have won invitations to London, Norway and Sweden.

Yours truly,

WILFRED HARRISON

Octagon Theatre, Bolton

The Editor,

TABS

Dear Sir,

I am both delighted and saddened by Mr. Wilfred Harrison's letter. My delight stems from the knowledge that my article in your Spring issue provoked any correspondence at all. No mean achievement in a tri-annual magazine I'll warrant! I am further pleased that publication of his letter and this reply can only result in splendid worldwide publicity for The Octagon Theatre, Bolton. My passing sadness is generated by the thought that a director of Mr. Harrison's eminence should have indulged in "cap fitting" and ended up with a misfit.

Alas! There are NO perfect theatres in the British Isles; not even—one sadly admits—

those which have had the undoubted benefit of a Theatre Consultant as a member of the Design Team. Nevertheless, I must assure you that I and my colleagues in the Society of Theatre Consultants are dedicated to the development of better theatre buildings of all sizes and forms and positively not to 'knocking' the companies who use them. Hence the very carefully considered format, the cloak of anonymity and the light hearted approach of my article. For it to have been otherwise would have produced an alarming catalogue of apparent gloom or carping criticism resulting, as Mr. Harrison rightly fears, in bad publicity for a large number of theatres.

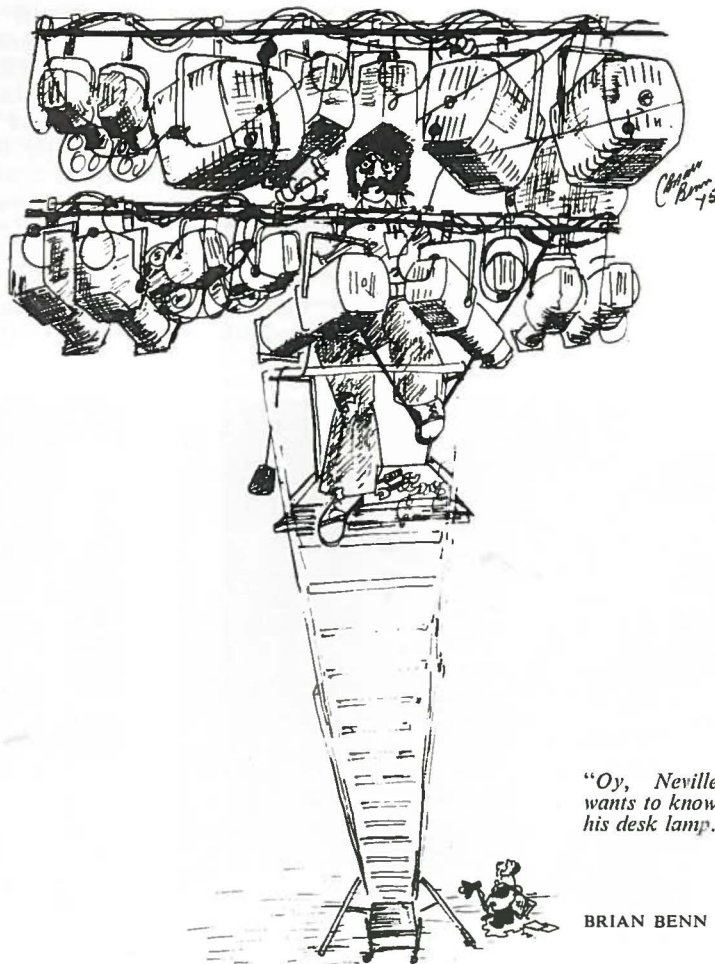
I can happily confirm, however, that whilst every one of the 'incidents' in my article is based on reality, none of them refers to The Octagon. Unhappily I must also confirm that I have never had the privilege of dining with any Director of the Octagon nor, in fact, witnessing a performance therein in the last five years; both of which omissions I would hope soon to remedy.

I wish Mr. Harrison and his company every success, both now and in the future, although this is probably assured since his type and scale of operation will surely prove demonstrably the saviour of British dramatic endeavour through the current national economic crisis. More power to his "thrust"!

For the record, however, there are theatres other than the Octagon which were "... noteworthy, at the date of opening, for the speed of the designers and builders, and the modest final cost." A most recent and contentious example is the new theatre at Woking which, incidentally, I have not yet visited!

By the bye! I am still cogitating the sort of rebuke I might have received had I invented the towns of Bill-ton, Birm-ton or even Nott-on!

Yours faithfully,
JOHN WYCKHAM



"Oy, Neville—the designer wants to know what to do with his desk lamp. . . ."

BRIAN BENN