

STAGE MANAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATIONS

The crucial decision *not* to enclose the stage management control was made early on and indeed confirmed after the temporary tent. Instead, in common with the lighting and sound control, the Stage Manager works in the open from the second balcony. The total space for all three operators including equipment is only 5.8 m². Not only is proper contact ensured with the stage and performance, but also between the individual operators. No cue lights are needed between them and at most only a nudge is necessary. However, being 4.9 m above the stage creates a certain sense of isolation from the rest of the stage management. This places a very definite reliance on the communication systems installed, but more important, responsibility is placed on the other members of the stage management team to be aware of the performance at all times, and to be able to act almost intuitively.

The main parts of the system are as follows:

Show relay and paging to all Dressing Rooms, Green Room and most technical areas.

Technical and Stage Management ring intercoms, these are two-way receivers which can be plugged into points inside the module and around the hall. This system is mainly used during technical rehearsals and for one-off performances.

Direct telephone links to key points of the building. These are fixed and are therefore always there in an emergency.

Stage Management paging loop which was intended to enable the stage management operator to maintain links with the floor Stage Manager at all times. It has yet to work, and I am sure that the stage management have developed some sort of sixth sense.

Cue lights—these are not generally needed as the skin of the theatre is transparent, and they are mainly used for noises off and long entrances.



MMS lighting control removed to ground floor level for rehearsal

Two pairs of two-way radios which are used on one-off performances (particularly involving the hall) and for use by lighting and sound designers.

I have dwelt on the theatre module because it is the nucleus of the Royal Exchange Theatre Company and the only one of its kind. Its design has obviously had ramifications on the rest of the building in which are situated full Production, Administration and Front of House facilities.

Initially the Wardrobe, Workshops, Rehearsal Rooms and Stores were going to be situated in a rather grand outside warehouse. Thankfully, sanity prevailed, the plans for the Royal Exchange were scrutinised, some extra office space in the building was leased and all the facilities were shoe-horned into this building. With everyone being under the same roof, despite certain shortcomings in space allocations there is created a definite sense of purpose,

the public is not forgotten and a much greater company feeling is created.

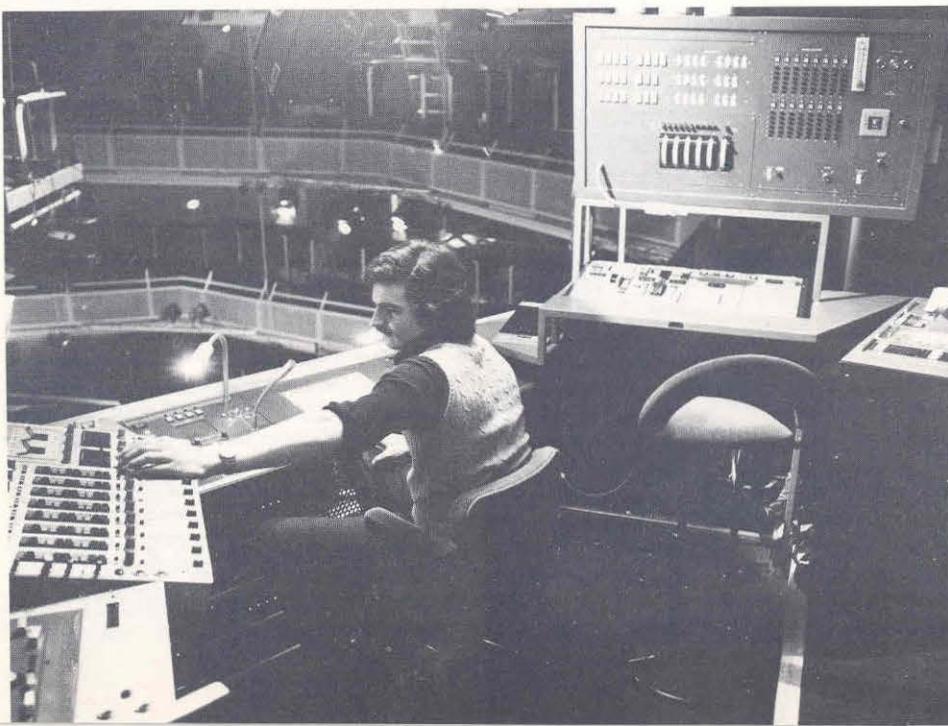
The carpenter's shop, prop shop, painting area is all one linked space—the dividing line between sets and props is narrowed in this form of theatre and is under the control of one head of department. Although the amount of settings and props need be less, the quality and attention to detail has to be extremely high.

The same applies to costumes and wigs which are made in a space which is perhaps, least ideal, rather like a long corridor. Most of the rehearsals take place within the Royal Exchange and as few productions as possible will be rehearsed in London. This maintains a company identity and ensures that the making and fitting of settings and costumes takes place within the same building.

The dressing rooms are in converted Cotton Company offices on the first floor. The Green Room now occupies the old National Westminster Bank premises. The new Front of House toilets have taken the place of telephone booths. The Restaurant was the Reading Room, and the Cafe Bar is below.

In conception we hoped to be creating a theatre which was not overpowering in structure or mechanics, but which enabled proper focus to be placed on the actor and the play. A building that was appropriate to a major regional Repertory Company which needed as few people as possible to run it, thus enabling real responsibility to be placed on most of the staff. Intentionally there is no studio theatre, ensuring that all energies are channelled into the one auditorium. This auditorium is presenting regularly 14 performances a week and this is only possible with flexibility and co-operation from all departments.

Lighting and sound control position on the second gallery.



*Theatre conceived by Richard Negri
Designed by Levitt Bernstein Associates in
collaboration with Richard Negri
Main Contractor: J Jarvis & Sons
Theatre Consultants: Theatre Projects
Photographs: Brian Linney.*