

built, a channel was dug under the auditorium floor and filled with water. This highly reflective surface carried sound from the stage and all acoustical problems of the house were eliminated completely."

I am now, not unnaturally, wondering if that water channel was included in the restoration. What a splendid excuse to go back soon!

Weill and Lenya

I have a problem. If there is an exciting event scheduled, I always seem to arrive the morning after or depart the night before. So, arriving in New York to find posters announcing yesterday's closure of the Weill/Lenya exhibition, I paused for a moment of self-pity, sighed my well-practised sigh of resignation, stiffened my upper lip, and made off to the Lincoln Centre in hope of a catalogue. But, happy end, for reasons

unexplained and unsought, the exhibition was still open. Design originals by Caspar Neher and Hein Heckroth. And others. Silhouettes by Lotte Reiniger. Evocative ephemera. The sound of Kurt Weill and Lotte Lenya. Both the exhibition and (possibly more important) the catalogue total joy.



Lotte Reiniger's 1928 silhouette of Lotte Lenya in *The Three Penny Opera*.

National Park Theatre

TABS of December 1970 described the restoration of *Ford's Theatre* in Washington to its condition at the time of the 1865 assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. With almost ten years of successful performances since the restoration, it was interesting to note how far modern theatre technology has been allowed to infiltrate. Well, there are speaker stacks on the stage with cabling taped across the carpeting from a mid-stalls sound console. And as the theatre is administered by the *National Parks Service* it is perhaps not surprising to find that a forest of lekos has sprouted across the family circle to augment the carefully concealed lighting positions of 1968. However it would take much more than the hardware of modern sound and light to even surface scratch the historical atmosphere of this hyper-emotive theatre building.



1977 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

It is constantly being said about theatre conferences that their importance lies not in the formal sessions but in the informal contact between delegates. Repetition of this theory does not make it any less true and the 1977 Conference of USITT (The United States Institute for Theatre Technology) was no exception. Entitled *Capitol 77* the proceedings, lasting three and a half days, occupied the ballroom and seven conference rooms of Loews L'Enfant Plaza Hotel in Washington, D.C. The official proceedings were under way by 8 a.m. daily and finished pretty close to midnight. With overlapping and parallel sessions for much of the day, no one could have attended everything. There was a marked absence of scheduled mealbreaks, but in the best theatrical tradition the cocktail hour was sacrosanct although even that was reduced to half an hour on one of the days.

But shed not one crocodile tear for your reporter. With his known disinterest in the details (if perhaps not the principles) of such topics as Recycling vintage apparel, Metrication, Lamp codes, and Information filing, he was able to construct a personal programme which scheduled adequate breaks for social contact and refreshment. (Was it a trick of the light or did I really drink *green beer* in a subterranean cocktail-saloon with a group of distinguished lighting alumni from Penn State?)

The problem with most of the official sessions was that the panel of experts was too large. By the time everyone had been introduced and made a statement, there was little time left for discussion from the floor. Just as the interest was warming up, the guillotine would fall. The concerned soon formed little cells and good discussion continued privately—in depth, as it is currently fashionable to say. But this did little to help communication—in both directions—between the experienced technicians and the encouragingly large body of students present.

Much of the informal contact took place in the exhibition area. Over thirty manufacturers were displaying their latest technological goodies and there is nothing quite like the pros and cons of some minor variations in channel-access-mode to set we technician's tongues a-clacking. The exhibition was dominated by the lighting manufacturers and their displays were dominated by intensity control systems. It really was quite depressing to see so much effort devoted to producing so many minor

variations (many of them just cosmetic) on the same theme.

Memory is moving down-market and the break point from manual must be getting near twenty channels. There seems to be emerging a modern equivalent of the traditional American 10-scene preset: it looks as if it will be unlimited storage from floppy disc, two (possibly 3) playbacks, time recording, cue linkage recording, and a small level-memory back-up. Information display is settling into VDU but it may be a couple of years before keyboard channel access finally ousts lever-per-channel.

And now for yet another replay of a very worn gramophone record: when will the manufacturers divert some of their control-system energy and resources towards luminaire development? No folks, there was nothing new at the top of the ladder. One chap had been having interesting thoughts about profile reflectors and another had restyled the profile box. So keen were we all for some luminaire action that we hovered like hopeful suitors—while admitting reluctantly that beam quality does not really register on a white screen at a throw of five feet.

With sound as the current growth area in theatre technology, it was surprising to find so few microphone, mixer and speaker merchants present. Perhaps, in another couple of years when memory hits the mixer, the story will be different.

Non-commercial displays included Student Design and Theatre Architecture and while it was all good stuff, nothing stimulated me enough to reach for my pen. I did, however, get very excited by a display of *The Research Centre for the Federal Theatre Project*. Between 1935 and 1939 the Federal Theatre Project, employing over 12,000 people at one time in nearly 150 separate units, produced 830 major stage plays in less than 4 years. It was virtually a National Theatre. Productions included a lot of experiment: particularly in the areas of design, lighting and sound. Extensive records were kept and the Library of Congress has placed on permanent loan to George Mason University some 7000 scripts, 500 posters, 15 cubic feet of designs, 45 cubic feet of photographs and over 750 bound-notebooks recording production details. From the examples on show, it was obvious that the collection is primary source research material which can give an insight into its period to a depth which may not be available in any other period—perhaps not even our own.

A major purpose of the USITT Conference is to conduct the annual house-keeping business of the Institute and its specialist commissions. From listening at keyholes and a regular reading of the USITT Journal (*Theatre Design and Technology*) I would guess that the USITT is in pretty good shape—so perhaps this is the moment to congratulate their outgoing President, that grand old man of theatre lighting: Mr. Ed Kook.