

TABS BOOKSHELF

TABS will in future review, for its 12,000 readers, books submitted on Theatre, T.V. or film technical subjects. We

intend to get experts from within the Strand Group and from our panel of authors, to review books on their own

particular subjects.

We were delighted that the first book to come in is by our contributor Graham Walne. To

review "Sound for Theatres" who better than the General Manager of Strand Sound, Mike Lowe, while the Editor grapples with "Curtains".

'SOUND FOR THEATRES'

Graham Walne

To be published by

John Offord Publications

THE illustrious editor of TABS recently handed to me the draft of a new book from Graham Walne of Leisureplan. He asked me to get someone in Strand Sound to review the book for this issue. Since it seemed like an excellent idea I readily accepted, tucked the folder under my arm and returned to my office with the intention of persuading one of our technically aware Strand Sound people to write the appraisal. This all seemed like a fairly easy job of delegation until I made the mistake of opening the folder and reading the contents.

A General Manager usually has to be content with gross margins, equity ratios, ROCE, RONA and WIDGETS and is not allowed to juggle with such terms as decibels, feedback, Hertz, PPM, woofers and tweeters. It could be because we don't know what they mean!

At last, here was a manual that not only explained their meaning but also their significance when applied to the reality of providing a good theatre sound system.

I read on.

Having explained the technical terms the manual then goes on to explain the problems and opportunities of acoustics in the theatre. Now I know why the Albert Hall has those flying saucers suspended in the dome!

The equipment section is fascinating and is introduced by the

sentence "Now we come to the most important part of the chain — the equipment itself". As a supplier of professional sound systems I have to agree with this sentiment and the one in the introduction where Mr Walne says "Suppliers are rarely able to offer, of their own manufacture, a complete system to a compatible standard". Whilst not always of their own manufacture, the major components of the Strand Sound chain are under one brand name and therefore carefully matched for performance and

guaranteed by Strand Sound.

I am by now deep into the section on examples of the problems of providing good sound in such diverse locations as swimming pools and churches, large venues and banquets when my secretary hands me a note from the editor reminding me that the review I promised is due to go to press tomorrow.

The section on sound effects, communications and the future is fascinating. In short, I have found a book which is highly readable, but also

gives me an insight into a very interesting sphere of activity and which I can understand. In addition I can appear to be reasonably knowledgeable the next time I have to listen to a sound engineer explaining to me 'why'.

If you are at all involved in sound in the theatre then you cannot afford to be without a copy of "Sound for Theatres" by Graham Walne. I confess I may hang on to the draft whilst I save up the £6.95 for the book which is due for publication in the City Arts Series by John Offord Publications.



Mike Lowe joined Rank Audio Visual in 1972 and at present is the General Manager of the Rank Strand (Auditorium Group) responsible for the Sound, Cinema, Seating and J.M.B. Hire facets of Rank Strand.

'CURTAINS'

C. Brereton, D. Cheshire, J. Dunbar-Nasmith, J. Earle, V. Glasstone, I. Mackintosh and M. Sell

To be published by John Offord Publications in November. Price not yet announced.

JUST outside the pleasant town of Sevenoaks lies Knowle Park, and within the park may be found the magnificent and ancient Knowle House, home of the Sackvilles since the days of the first Elizabeth. In 1670 His Majesty King Charles II announced that he would be coming to Knowle for an overnight stay. The then Lord Sackville anxiously enquired as to how many apartments would be required by the Royal Party. "I am only bringing an overnight valise," said the Merry Monarch. The next day a party of

seventy assorted courtiers and attendants, plus the King, arrived. In answer to his host's despairing excuses His Majesty merely remarked that "For a King, seventy people is an overnight valise!"

What brought this nightmare-like incident to mind? It was the sheer number of the authors of this offering. Seven, no less!

Beneath the bold names and initial letters which are all I can deduce from the galley proofs from which I have sampled this work, I think I spy the architect from whose loins have sprung two fine theatres which now embellish Scotland as well as Mr R. Pilbrow's prop and staff from 110 Longacre.

The others of the party remain an enigma. So to the book.

"Curtains" is a gazetteer of all the theatrical buildings of Britain — not only those currently in use for their proper purpose, but those that have suffered a sad sea change into Bingo

Halls or supermarkets.

I have, as I have said, only been able to sample this book from a few proof pages, so I can give no opinion on the number or quality of the illustrations that are to be offered, and these will, I think, be a major consideration as to whether "Curtains" will be an active pleasure to read and to own, or whether it will be only a well intentioned and efficiently compiled work of reference.

Judging from the sample submitted, there appears to be an absence of that anecdotal information that TABS readers will know to be my joy and my weakness.

I think I must admit to finding exact architectural descriptions a poor second to the story of the famous actors who have graced a particular span of boards, or of the playwrights who have bitten their first night fingers.

I believe many readers would like to have confirmed for them, for example, that the unlikely site of Irving's very last

appearance was the Theatre Royal Bradford. They may be pleased to be reminded that the Royal Court in Sloane Square had a noble past long before Mr Osborne, or that the other Royal Court, the one in Liverpool, had, some three years ago, the distinction of being the objective of a march by local housewives who were protesting that their current run of Bingo might be ousted in favour of a season of plays!

I suppose it is unfair to criticize a book for not being something that it perhaps did not set out to be — but by doing the book their way the Magnificent Seven have effectively stopped anyone doing it in my way for at least ten years. To sum up — the purpose is noble, because many a restorable theatre may be rescued through the publicity this book will give to its current plight, but I would wish the execution had been a trifle less exact and less noble, and a wee bit more interesting in the dilettante, gossipy sense.