

EXACTLY ten years ago, as I write this piece, a bronzed figure could have been seen striding across the sandy beach somewhere near Adelaide and even nearer the fine Hardy vineyard whose cellars we had been visiting and whose product we had been sampling. The man was not one of those surfing giants beloved of the media, for on reaching the ocean he did little more than swim a few strokes and paddle & splash. When at last he returned up the beach his knobby knees revealed that this was no Aussie he-man but a Pommie-Bentham. Where were the Aussies? They were there alright but lurking covered-up against the sun; they were not tanned yet! But I was, having come from an unusually fine Summer over here. And this is the secret of visiting Australia; go there in early Spring – our Autumn, in other words.

Mind you it was not only my bronze which made me such a show-off; indeed the gloom of the wine cellars had more to do with it than the lure of the sun. We had spent the entire morning there and had even been able to sample their acoustics, as the Australian Opera Company happened to be enjoying a Sunday outing there. It was a joyous sampling of their 'Magic Flute' which, memorably with kangaroos, we were to enjoy a few days later. Lunch had been dominated by champagne served through an adaptation of petrol filling station hosepipes. We did not miss the ritual twisting of wires and popping of corks, the trigger happy barmen only too ready to give your glass a squirt spell efficient promptitude!

I could fill the rest of this article with our happy encounters with the wines of Australia: the last night of our conference was spent in a hospitable, or so it appeared, wine merchants where we were free to roam around the vintages. So much so, that when Helmut Grosser (then of Cologne Opera) and I emerged we thought we saw the moon in full eclipse – and it really was! The rest of the world seems not to know what it is missing. Australia has moved a long way from their pavilion at the 1924 Wembley Empire Exhibition dominated, as I remember it, by a life sized effigy of HRH the Prince of Wales modelled in butter. Days when the only reason my Father drank Emu burgundy was to collect the wine glasses they gave away – early pioneering in the coupon territory.

Pioneering, however, was still the impression I took away from that visit of mine and it remains with me to set me avidly viewing any films from down under. Pioneering, of course, in the sense of a vast empty continent with civilisation perched around the edges here and there; but also very



by Frederick Bentham

BACK TEN YEARS & OUT FOR TWO HUNDRED THOUSAND



Bandstand in grounds of Adelaide Festival Theatre.



Adelaide Street Scene.

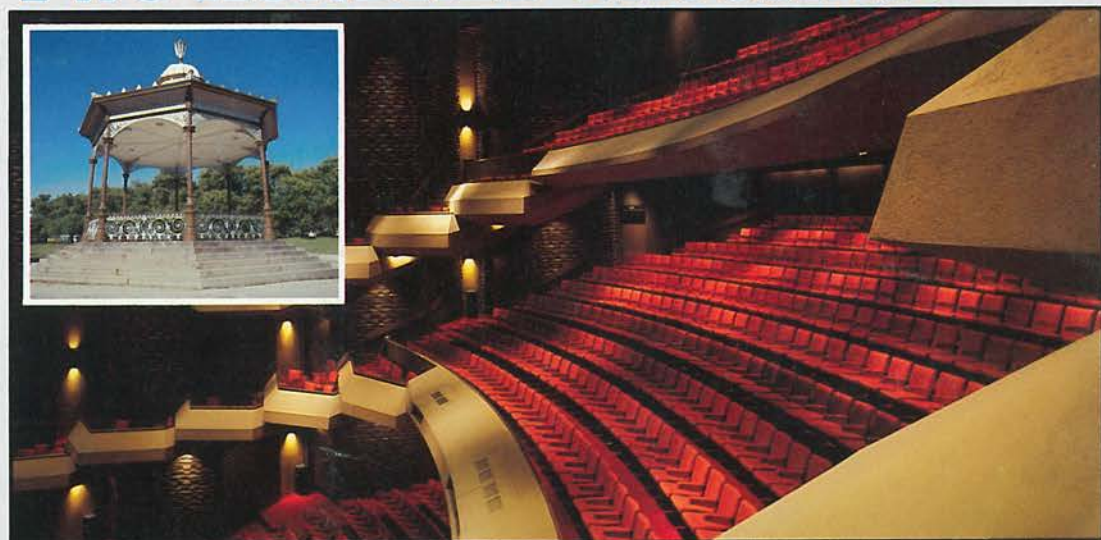
real pioneering in theatre. The Adelaide Centre, just completed then in 1974, must still remain a model well worth study as a sensible and stimulating solution to the problem of such a building enterprise in a city. From the lovely girl attendants in their white blouses and long bright red skirts, copied in dreary mauve by our National on the South Bank, to the siting by the river with a 'Victorian' bandstand in the grounds every prospect including the architecture and planning pleased. And few indeed are the enterprises of this

nature that I have seen worldwide of which I have been able to say this.

By now the reader may have picked up the clue in paragraph 3. I was not there as a sea-sampling tourist or a wine-taster but to attend a theatre conference. And what is more an International one with no delegates from the United States whatever – not one! I had been asked by the Adelaide committee to name the overseas delegates to be invited and had warned them that one hint of the words 'Theatre Conference' in the States would produce a deluge of delegates dedicated to travelling from one conference to another. Thanks to this

seemed to have done all the better without me because all the theatres, halls and television studios I saw used Strand equipment.

Everyone, did I say? Well everyone except one would be more correct; and what an exception – Sydney Opera House! It was the award of the contract to Siemens which produced a two page editorial on the subject in 'Tabs' of September 1963. This was special to Australia. Instead of 'Adaptable England' which dealt with the sudden craze for adaptable theatres in this country, the Sydney subject was something we in Strand could not adapt our minds to. How did we lose the contract for the stage



Interior of Adelaide Festival Theatre (1992 persons).

restriction our total of international delegates could be flown around in a couple of Cessnas instead of jammed into a Jumbo Jet.

This flying around in the week before the conference was not only very pleasant for us but did give some idea of the problem of theatre for communities which was what the show was all about. To state the obvious; Bathurst, Mildura and Whyalla were not the same as Adelaide, Sydney and Perth. In the course of my month I saw in some detail just under forty theatres. Fortunately I wrote about many of them in 'Tabs' and 'Sightline' on my return.* None of us had been down under before and I found myself regretting that I had not used my role as technical director in Strand Electric as an excuse to go there years earlier. Maybe it was the thought of that long long air journey or the bronzed beach rivals that put me off. However Denis Irving, then in charge of Strand Electric Australia,

lighting controls to Germany? No lost Test Match of recent years can have been investigated with such fervour; after all we have become accustomed to that fate. Our Sydney story, however, belongs to history. Now the German controls have been replaced by Strand Galaxy memory systems. What we were beefing about in those distant times was *the figures*. The tenders were:- Siemens of Germany £A 426,450, Graham Brothers of Sweden £A 247,823, and Strand Electric £A 234, 274. The closeness of the last two was surely significant. It is only while writing this short article that a possible explanation of the award of the contract to the German team has occurred to me. It was surely committee confusion with a Test Match series that victory went to the highest scorer – by nearly £A 200,000!

Photos by Roderick Ham.

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