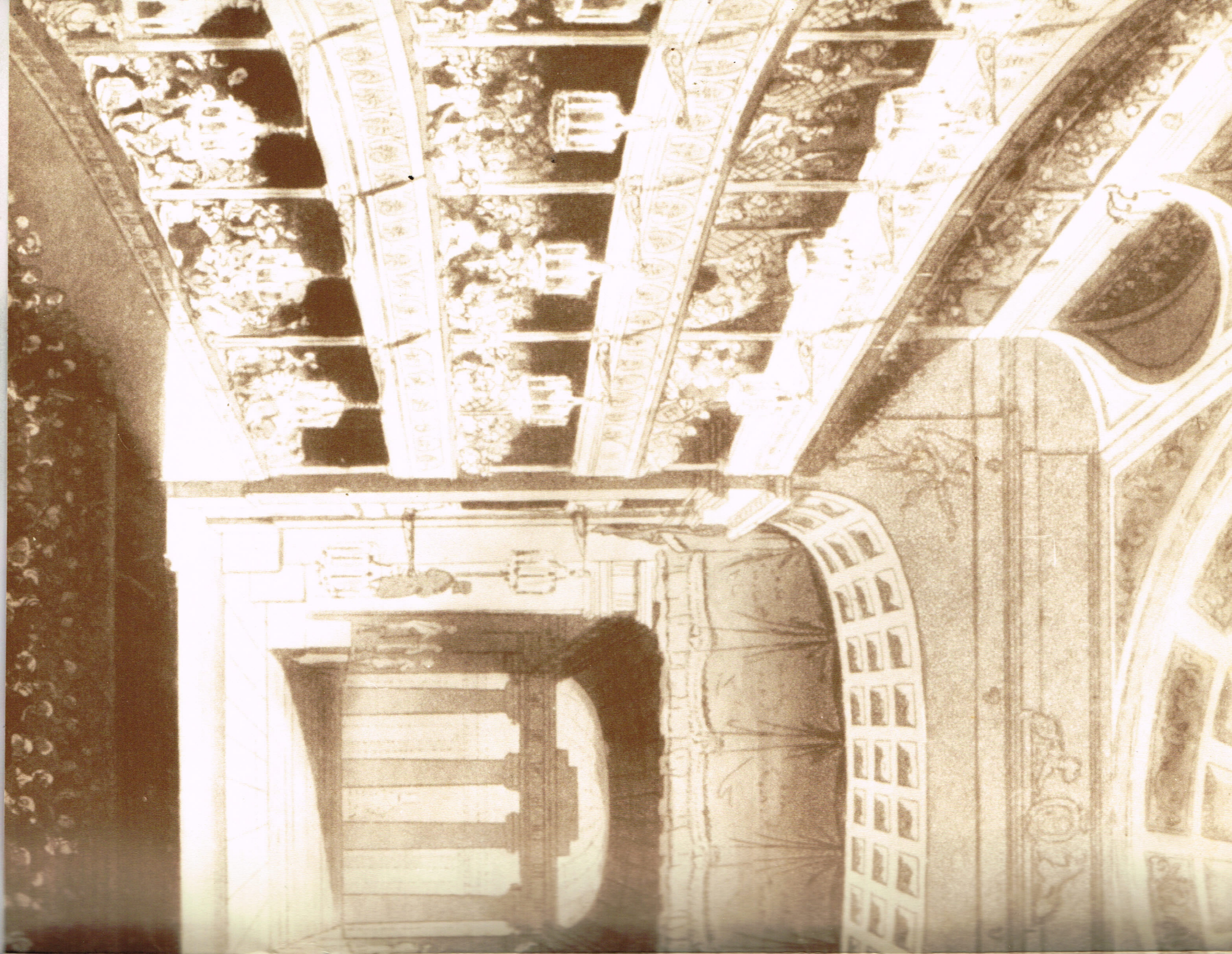


ALL THE WORLD'S A STAGE

SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE

SEPTEMBER — OCTOBER 1973





All the World's a Stage

Australian-British Theatre Exhibition

to mark the opening

of

The Sydney Opera House

by

Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II

on

October 20, 1973

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Organising Committee

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John Bull at the Italian Opera: a caricature by J. Rowlandson aimed at the growing popularity of the Italian opera at the King's Theatre in the Haymarket, 1811.

H.R.B.



INTRODUCTION

by

Hugh Paget, C.B.E.

In "As You Like It" the banished Duke speaks of the world as "this wide and universal theatre" and Jaques responds in the same vein:—

"All the world's a stage,

"And all the men and women merely players;

"They have their exits and their entrances;

"And one man in his time plays many parts.

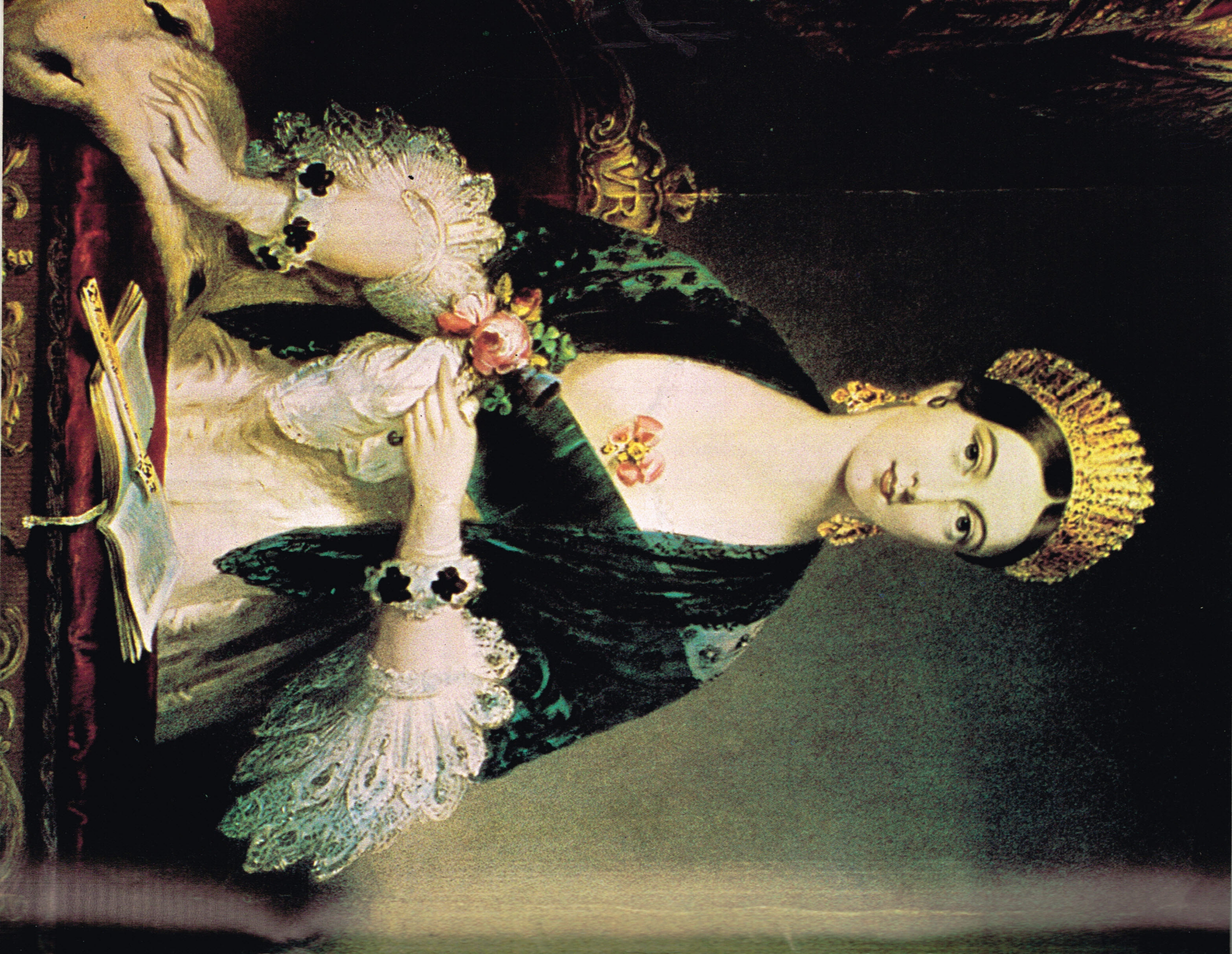
"His acts being seven ages."

Shakespeare, as a playwright and an actor, could see the life of man as a drama in any part of the world — Verona, Denmark or The Forest of Arden. When, however, in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, he makes Quince say, as he and his fellow-actors enter the wood near Athens: "This green plot shall be our stage", he is thinking of it as an actual stage upon which they can rehearse their play.

When in January 1788 the Englishmen in the first fleet under Governor Phillip landed in Australia they found that this new continent was no less a stage on which the drama of human life was being enacted than England itself half a world away, although the actors were strange and unfamiliar to them. These, (the aborigines) soon found themselves spectators of a new human drama as they witnessed the re-creation by these white strangers, at Port Jackson, of their own remote and unimaginable world. It must have been a source of wonder and mystification to people whose lives were lived, as it were, on so bare a stage and with so few 'properties', to see, as the English laid the foundations of Sydney, what elaborate machinery the newcomers required for the performance of their own human drama. The settlers did, in fact, endeavour to reproduce their own civilisation, the way of life in their own country, as speedily and as fully as possible. It

is a remarkable fact, as Miss Margaret Williams has pointed out in the article which follows, that this included the theatre from the outset and that, in these primitive pioneer conditions, the first performance of an English play was given in Australia a few months after they had landed. This was part of a long tradition, as Professor Glyne Wickham and Mr George Rowell, of Bristol University, have shown elsewhere in this book: it was also one which clearly had remarkable vitality and which was also widespread throughout society, for it is significant that George Farquhar's play, "The Recruiting Officer" (a rather insensitive choice one would have thought) was performed "by a party of convicts".

What was it that gave such vitality to the theatrical tradition in England? This is surely due in large measure to the genius of William Shakespeare. As George Samson has written: "As long as there was a stage to put them on, the plays of Shakespeare have, in some form or other, kept their place on it. The theatre itself has changed beyond recognition during the last three centuries, but the plays of Shakespeare have fitted all varieties of building or no building, all methods of presentation, all styles of acting and all tastes in drama". As Shakespeare's contemporary, Ben Jonson, wrote: "He was not of an age, but for all time!" and, to quote Dr Samuel Johnson: "The stream of time, which is continually washing the dissoluble fabrics of the poets, passes without injury by the adamant of Shakespeare". To these tributes of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries may be added one of the nineteenth by Samuel Taylor Coleridge who referred to him as "the greatest genius that perhaps human nature has yet produced, our myriad-minded Shakespeare". In the twentieth century, no one who has seen the Peter Brook production of "A Midsummer Night's Dream" recently performed by the

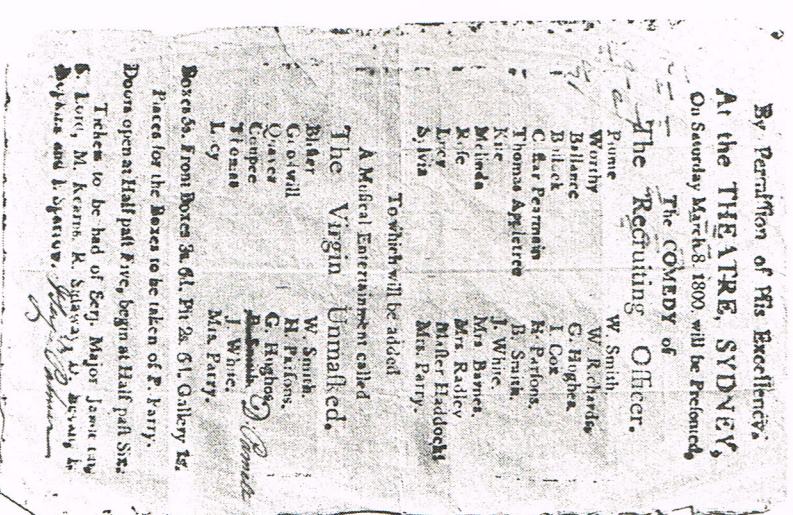


Her Majesty Queen Victoria in the Royal Box at Her Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket, 1838 after a (Opposite) painting by E. T. Parris.

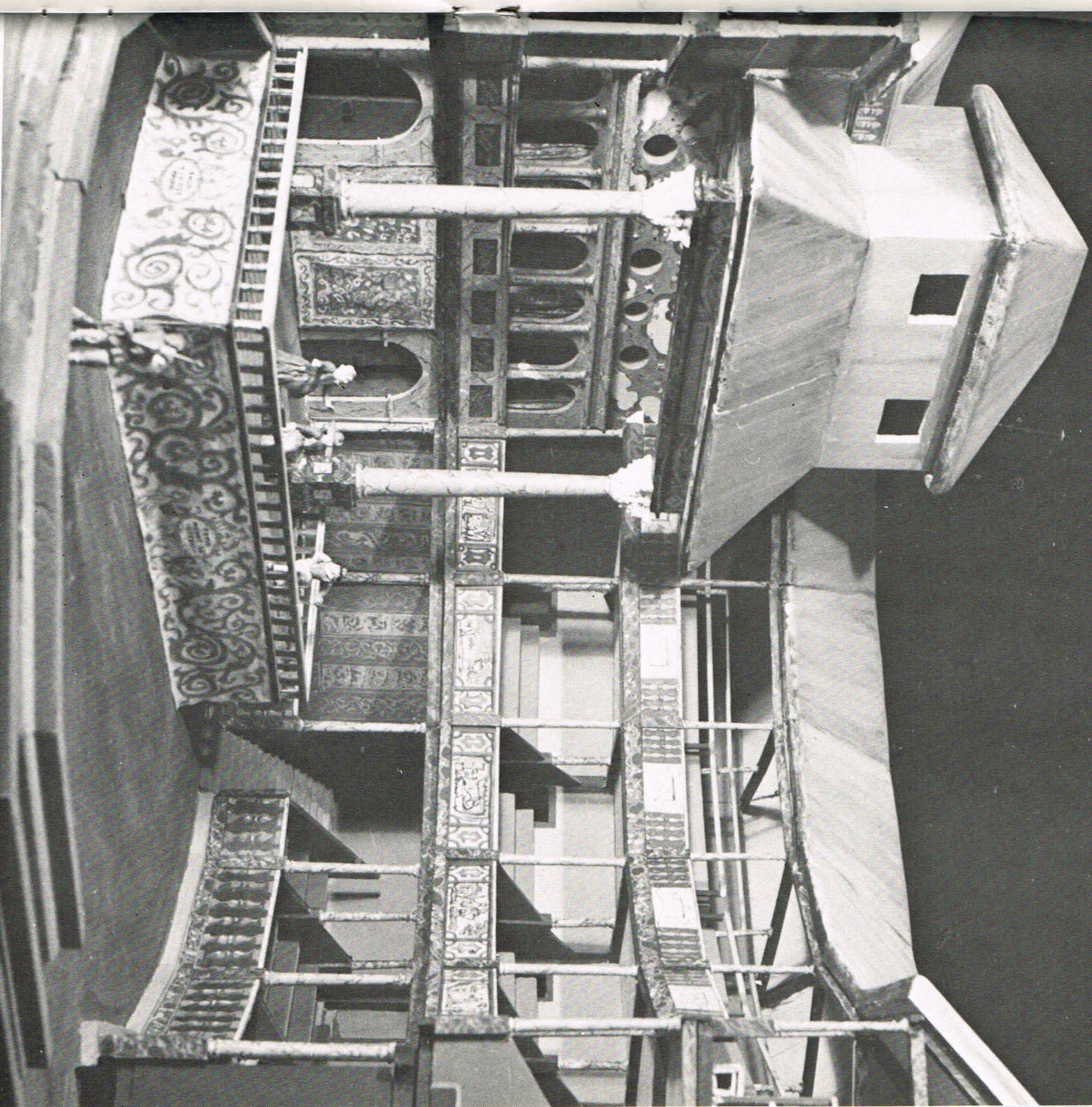
Royal Shakespeare Company in Australia, in Britain and elsewhere, can doubt that Shakespeare is, in a very real sense, contemporary. As a Russian poet (Samuel Marshak) has said: "Shakespeare's characters are alive because in them each generation finds itself". One remarkable aspect of Shakespeare is that his work survives translation into other languages so that his plays have long been part of the regular repertoire of the theatres of France and Germany and of other countries. The fact remains, none the less, that only those whose mother-tongue is English can fully appreciate and enjoy the plays and poetry of Shakespeare which form an essential part of the cultural heritage of Britain and Australia.

This common theatrical tradition and its development in both countries is, indeed, the main theme of the exhibition to which this little book relates. As we have seen, the history of the theatre in Australia virtually begins with the European settlement of the continent so that the first part of the exhibition endeavours to tell (although necessarily very briefly and selectively) the history of the theatre in Britain up to that time, which is, in effect, the common heritage of both countries. The remaining (and larger) part of the exhibition is devoted to the history of the theatre in both countries from that time to the present day. One fact which emerges very clearly from a study of the parallel development of the theatre in Australia and Britain is that each has contributed very notably to the other in a variety of ways throughout their joint history. In earlier times the tours in Australia of such leading English actors as Charles Kean provided a great stimulus to the development of the theatre in Australia; at a later date opera in Britain was dominated by the superbly gifted Australian prima donna Melba and this sort of interchange has gone on ever since, in ballet, as well as in drama and opera. A position in ballet comparable with the position of Melba in opera in Britain is that achieved by Sir Robert Helpmann, while Australian ballet has gained greatly from Dame Peggy van Praagh's

devotion of her great talents to it. A famous British producer, Sir Tyrone Guthrie, came to Australia (at the invitation of the British Council and with the support of the Chilley Government) first in 1949 and thereafter played a significant part in the theatre in Australia to which he was greatly devoted. Such instances could be multiplied and others are cited in Miss Williams' article on the Australian Theatre but enough examples have been given, I think, to show the relevance of the theatre in each country to all that is comprehended in that word in the other. The terms "theatre" and "stage" do not refer in this context only to the drama as such but to opera, ballet, vaudeville and music hall. Insofar, however, as the continuity is greatest in the history of the drama, less emphasis has been placed on opera and ballet (especially with respect to the British contribution) which derive primarily not from Britain but from Italy and Russia although both arts have long flourished in the United Kingdom.



The Recruiting Officer by George Farguhar was the first play performed in Australia, on June 4, 1789. A playbill of the production of 1890.
By courtesy of the Mitchell Library.



*Model of an Elizabethan Playhouse made by Dr. Richard Southern.
Lent by the Drama Department, University of Bristol.*

The oldest theatre in Australia is the Theatre Royal in Hobart. This is fitting, for the name of the capital of Tasmania provides interesting links with the English stage. When the city was founded in 1804 it was called after Lord Hobart, the then Secretary of State for War and the Colonies. He was the eldest son of the Hon. George Hobart, who was Manager of the Great Opera House in the Haymarket (burnt down in 1789) and with his brothers, John, 2nd Earl of Buckinghamshire (whom he later succeeded in that title), and Henry Hobart, M.P. for Norwich, played an important part in the introduction of Italian opera into England in the eighteenth century. Lord Hobart's mother, Albinia Hobart (after her husband's succession to the title, affectionately known as Lady Bucks) was one of the leading lights in the Brandenburg House Theatricals, the centre of amateur theatricals of a professional standard in fashionable London in the reign of George III. Originally

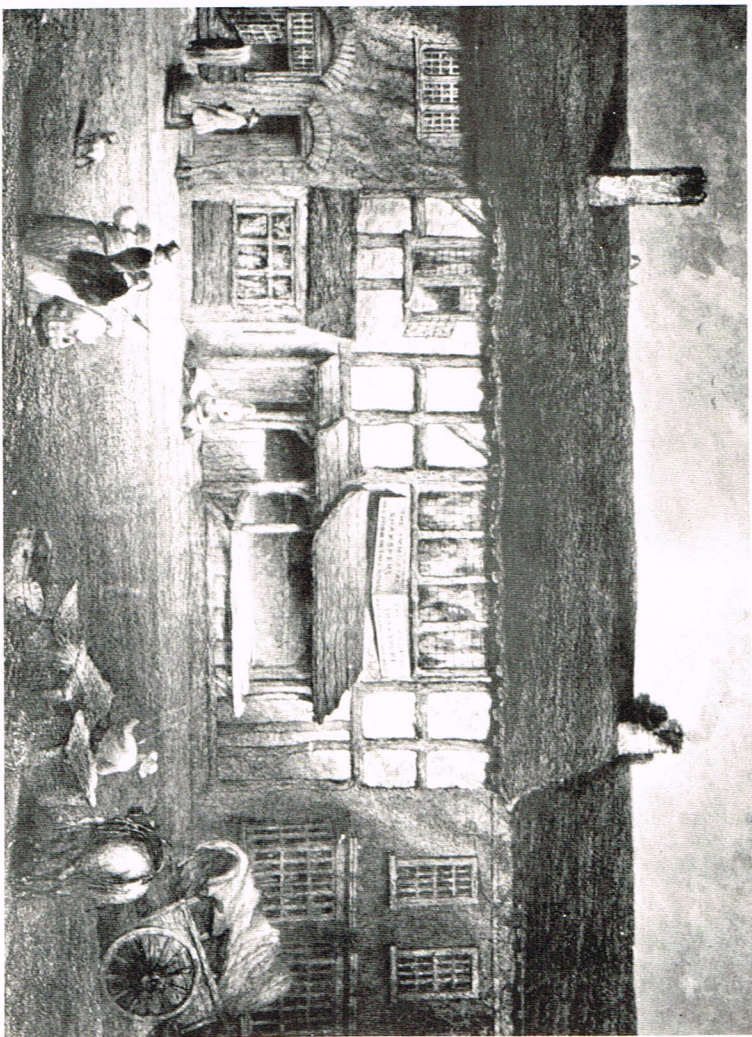
a very beautiful woman, the ample proportions which she later developed did not escape the merciless eye of the caricaturist James Gillray by whom she was frequently portrayed. This is a useful reminder, incidentally, of the high level of amateur theatricals achieved in both countries.

Britain and Australia are united by history and divided by geography and this fact and all that it implies can hardly be better illustrated than in the history of the stage in both countries. This then is the theme of the exhibition to which this book relates; a theme not inappropriate we believe for the festival marking the opening by Her Majesty the Queen of the Sydney Opera House — the newest (and already world-renowned) building for housing the performing arts in Australia, and not unworthy, we hope, of this historic occasion.

© Hugh Paget 1973

The house in Stratford on Avon in which William Shakespeare was born: from an engraving by J. H. Ellis after J. T. Clark.

H.R.B.



(Opposite)
The Hon. Mrs. George Hobart, later Countess of Buckinghamshire, in the role of Cowslip, in "The Agreeable Surprise"; caricature by J. Gillray, 1795.

Lent by Mr. Hugh Paget.



"—AY, HERE'S THE MASCULINE TO THE FEMININE GENDER."

J.S.G. del. & sculp.

Orig. June 13th 1795, by H. G. Gillray, N. 37, 1600 Bond Street

THE AUSTRALIAN THEATRE

by

Margaret Williams

Given the least propitious of circumstances, theatre in Australia got off to an early start. The First Fleet, with its cargo of convicts and their military warders, arrived at Botany Bay in January 1788, and on 4th June the following year Australia's first theatrical performance took place. In a small bark hut decorated for the occasion with coloured paper, a cast of convicts and officers presented George Farquhar's comedy of military manners, *The Recruiting Officer*, to an audience of the Governor and officers in honour of George III's birthday. Captain Watkin Tench, one of those who attended, noted that 'a prologue and epilogue written by one of the performers were also spoken on the occasion; which . . . contained some tolerable allusions to the situation of the parties, and the novelty of a stage representation in New South Wales.'

Perhaps the anonymous author of the prologue sensed something of the incongruity of an English comedy acted by a motley group of prisoners and their gaolers in a wilderness on the other side of the world from England. Yet someone with a lively sense of humour must have chosen the play, which sends up the foppish army officers and even more pointedly shows up the collusion of English J.P.'s who helped 'press' the lower orders into military service. What better play for officers and convicts to perform together?

It is out of just this mixture of English tradition and Australian reality that theatre in this country has grown. On the face of it, the distinction between 'English' and 'Australian' blurs again and again in the next century and a half. So many of the best-loved stars of the Australian stage have come from the English theatre, and so many Australian talents have made their names abroad, that it seems impossible to separate the two. But the Australian theatre story has a vitality all its

own. Convicts and gold-diggers, land booms and depressions have had a hand in shaping it and have helped to give it a distinctive flavour quite different from the English theatre out of which it grew.

Perhaps it was the early link between theatre and the convict class, who continued to get up performances at Parramatta and Norfolk Island, which helps account for the disavour into which theatre seems to have fallen with officialdom in New South Wales. In 1796 a Mr Sidaway gained permission to build a theatre in what is now Bligh Street, and some of the 'more decent class of prisoners' were permitted to attend. Mr Sidaway's theatre opened with the melodrama *The Revenge*, and it is with this performance that the famous Barrington Prologue is associated:

"From distant climes, o'er widespread seas we come,
"Though not with much eclat, or beat of drum;
"True patriots all, for be it understood,
"We left our country for our country's good . . ."

But Mr Sidaway's theatre, the first in Australia, did not last long. It was closed and demolished on the Governor's orders in 1798, thanks to the rowdiness of its audiences. In 1800 another theatre was in business in Sydney, apparently under the Governor's patronage; it presented *The Recruiting Officer* again, with the farce *The Virgin Unmasked* as an afterpiece. But from the turn of the century to the 1830's there was little theatre in New South Wales apart from convict performances. At late as the 1840's officialdom decided that the convict theatre group at Emu Plains was a threat to stable government, and ordered the disbanding of the players.

The real credit for establishing a



IN the "Green room."

Lola Montez, an Irish dancer who toured Australia in the 19th century and had a great success in Sydney. Melbourne and the goldfields.

By courtesy of the State Library of South Australia.

professional theatre in Sydney belongs to a stage-struck merchant named Barnett Levey, who in 1829 began to present 'At Home' musical evenings in the Assembly Rooms of his Royal Hotel in George Street, part of an eccentric complex of buildings which included a warehouse five storeys high topped by a mill. Mr Levey's evenings consisted of songs and sketches, many of them performed by the merchant himself, but even this innocent entertainment met with the suspicion of the authorities, who steadfastly refused to grant Mr Levey the theatrical licence he so persistently sought. It was only with the arrival of Governor Bourke in 1832 that officialdom took a kinder view, and professional theatre in Australia was born in December that same year in the converted Assembly Rooms of the Theatre Royal with the nautical melodrama *Black Ey'd Susan*. Levey held together a professional company, not without a good deal of disharmony, until his theatre was destroyed by fire in 1838 — a company which included such later actor-author-managers as Conrad Knowles, Francis Nesbitt and Joseph Simmons, and, most talented of all, the lively Eliza Winstanley, daughter of a Mrs Winstanley who kept a public house named 'The Currency Lass' at the Rocks. Eliza became the darling of Theatre Royal audiences, and later of the Royal Victoria, Australia's first large playhouse which opened in 1838. In 1847 she set off for England, where she proved her considerable talent playing opposite Macready and Charles Kean, and became the first of a long line of expatriates to make their names on the English stage. In middle age she abandoned acting to fulfil another talent by becoming an accomplished authoress.

In other colonies, too, amateur theatricals were gradually developing into a theatrical profession. In Hobart, Samson Cameron conducted entertainments at the Freemason's Tavern in the 1830's (the early association between theatre and the liquor trade led to later restrictive legislation which until recently forbade Australians the innocent pleasure of a drink at interval!), while

Mr John Phillip Deane established a theatre in Argyle Street which produced plays and concerts until 1835. It was at this time that Hobart's first playhouse proper, also named the 'Royal Victoria', was built in Campbell Street. Under its later name of Theatre Royal it stands today as the oldest theatre in Australia, now the home of the Tasmanian Theatre Company. In Adelaide another 'Theatre Royal' was operating in the Adelaide Tavern in Franklin Street, while in 1839 Mr Samson Cameron came from Hobart to open yet another 'Royal Victoria'; three years later Mr Lazar, formerly a Sydney manager, opened his own Adelaide theatre, the Queen's. Melbourne, a late starter, had to wait until 1841 for its first playhouse, a rickety wooden building known as the Pavilion (later dignified with the not very original name of Theatre Royal) next door to the Eagle Tavern in Bourke Street. What with the capriciousness of Melbourne weather and the Pavilion's jerry-building, audiences were well-advised to bring their umbrellas with them.

With the genesis of a theatrical profession, the stage was set for the entrance of Australia's first real entrepreneur. George Selth Coppin was born in Sussex in 1819, and as the son of a small-town theatrical manager was on the stage from his childhood. As a low comic song and dance man and actor of bit parts he made his way to the London stage in his late teens, where he acted with Kean and the Kembles, and then set off on a wandering theatrical life which in 1843 brought him to Sydney at the age of 24, an experienced man of the theatre in a country where the professional stage was just beginning to find its feet. His early managerial ventures took him from Sydney to Hobart, Melbourne and Adelaide, but by the mid '40's he had settled in Melbourne with his own company at The Queen's Theatre Royal.

It was the gold rush that finally made Coppin, but not on the goldfields. By the early 1850's the rush was in full swing, and Melbourne was temporarily left without its audiences. Meanwhile theatres sprang up all over the diggings, playing farces such as

Diggers and Bushrangers and *The Stage-struck Digger* to audiences who interjected loudly throughout the performances and tossed nuggets on stage to their favourite performers. One of these was the firebrand Irish dancer Lola Montez, mistress of the composer Liszt and Ludwig I of Bavaria, who bewitched Sydney and Melbourne as well as the goldfields with her outlandish behaviour, her cigar-smoking, and her notorious 'Spider Dance'. But soon the diggers started to make their way back to the city to spend their newly acquired fortunes. Coppin, who had just lost his fortune in speculation on copper in South Australia, soon had four theatres doing brisk business in Melbourne, including the Olympic, his famous 'Iron Pot', a prefabricated monster built for him in Manchester by Bellhouse and Co., large enough to seat £350, which eventually had the dubious honour of becoming Australia's first Turkish baths.

Coppin has been called 'Father of the Australian theatre', a title he surely deserves, for it was he who began the practice which has dominated Australian theatre almost to the present, of bringing overseas celebrities for prestigious tours. It is hard to say whether the practice has done a service or a disservice to the Australian stage. Certainly it has ensured that Australians saw the best of overseas theatre, but it has all too often reinforced the belief which has died hard in Australia, that 'the best' by definition came from abroad. In the early days, however, there can be no doubt that it greatly enriched the local stage; more than one of Coppin's visiting celebrities became more strongly identified with the Australian theatre than with his homeland. One of these, the first of Coppin's imported stars, was the golden-voiced Irish tragedian Gustavus Vaughan Brooke, who came to Melbourne from the London stage at Coppin's invitation in 1855, and eventually went into partnership with him. His Shakespearean roles endeared him to his Melbourne audiences, who were greatly saddened by the news of his death at sea in 1866 on a return trip from England. Especially moving was the

story that he had gallantly given up his place in the lifeboats to help work the pumps, and had delivered a farewell message to his Melbourne public from the sinking vessel.

Also brought to Australia by the enterprising Coppin were the Shakespeareans Charles Kean (son of the famous Edmund) and his wife Ellen Tree, who arrived in 1863, at a time when their fortunes were at low ebb in England (a circumstance which still occasionally brings English stars to the Antipodes). Shakespeareans, both actors and 'hans', seem to have been the vogue of the 1860's — Barry Sullivan, the Irish tragedian, the more *outré* but less talented Walter Montgomery, the Americans Edwin Booth and Laura Keane, and the English husband and wife, Robert Heir and Fanny Cathcart. The tour of Madame Celeste, from the Paris stage, in 1863, brought the first Continental performer to the fast-growing Australian stage.

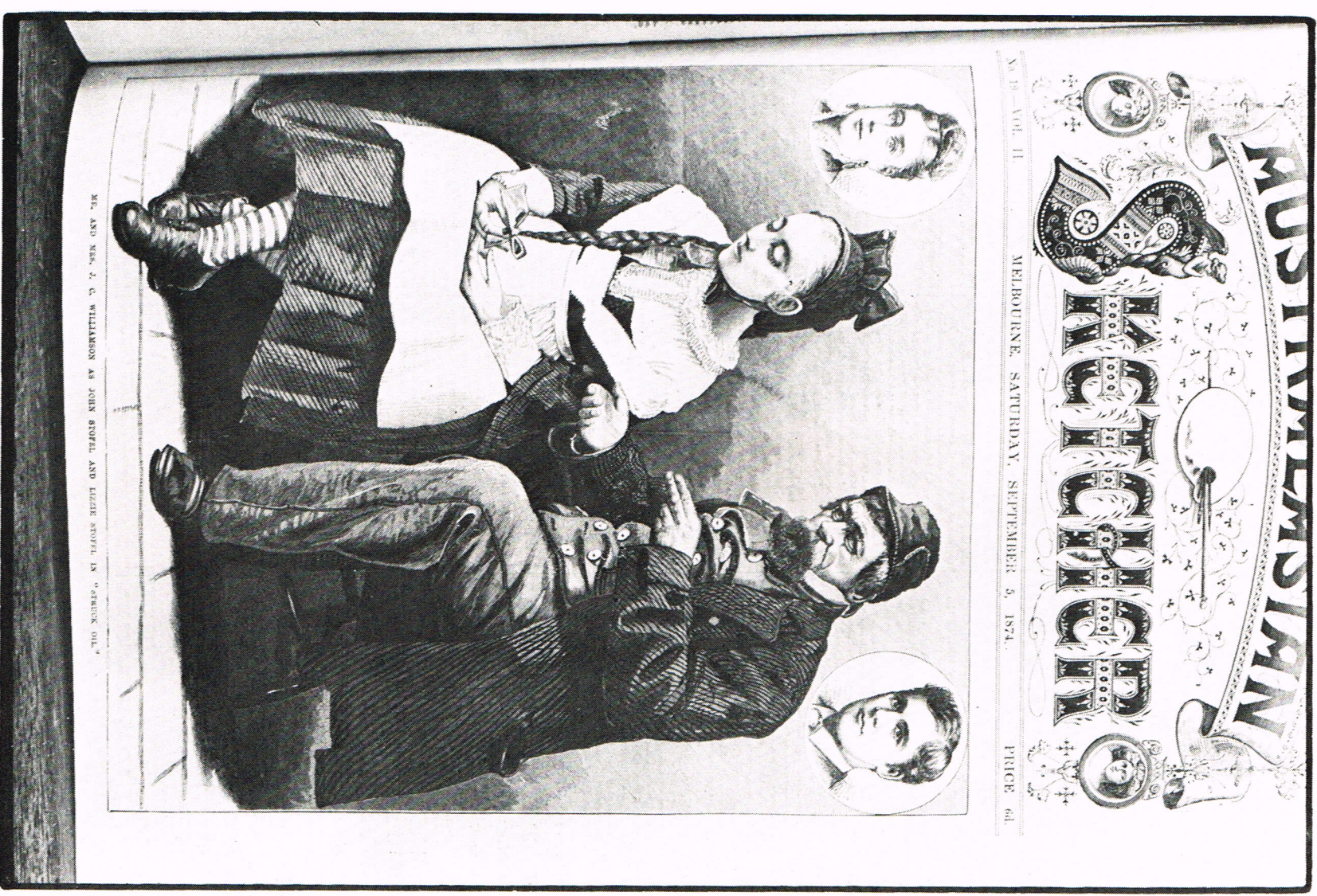
But the most influential of all Coppin's imported artists had yet to arrive. In 1874 Coppin engaged a young American actor named James Cassius Williamson and his wife Maggie Moore to play an Australian season. They came with a play whose original text had been given to Williamson by an old Californian miner — a simple story of Dutch migrants in Pennsylvania entitled *Struck Oil*. It had been a hit in America, and it took Australia by storm. Williamson, who had initially come to Australia for one year, stayed to found in 1882, with George Musgrove and Arthur Garner, the 'Triumvirate' which gradually evolved into the entrepreneurial management known simply as 'The Firm'. Like Coppin, Williamson continued to bring the best (sometimes not quite the best) overseas talent to the Australian public; his policy was to stage the latest hits from the West End and Broadway, with the occasional dash of 'culture' in the form of a prestige opera, ballet or Shakespearean season. Over the next half-century 'The Firm' gradually absorbed virtually all its rivals, and as J. C. Williamson Theatres Limited still dominates the Australian commercial theatre today.

'The Firm' did not have the field to itself to begin with. In 1885 the famous actor-manager and writer of melodramas, Dion Boucicault, came to Australia with his son Dion junior and daughter Nina. The younger Boucicault remained in Australia, and together with the English actor Robert Brough, founded the Brough-Boucicault Comedy Company, based on the New Bijou Theatre in Melbourne, perhaps the finest company Australia had yet seen. In the 1880's and 1890's the Brough-Boucicault Company presented the latest sophisticated comedies from the English stage, including those of Oscar Wilde, thought by some to be too 'advanced' for Australian audiences, as well as Sheridan and Shakespeare. Early in the 1890's the company disbanded, partly because of the financial slump in Melbourne after the land boom, which hit the theatre hard; but Boucicault and his wife Irene Vanbrugh returned to Australia a number of times until the late 1920's, playing in stylish English comedies such as J. M. Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton*.

Thanks to 'The Firm' and its rivals, the years from the 1870's to the First World War saw the finest and most varied theatre Australia has ever enjoyed. A new generation of young Australian stars sprang up, and created a theatre vital enough to bring many of the finest English and American actors to Australia for extended tours. The great Italian actress Madame Ristori toured in 1875 in *Maria Stuart*, playing her famous role of the Scottish queen in Italian; Mrs Brown Potter and her leading man Kyrle Bellew came from the States to play in Shakespeare and Sheridan. The appealing English actress Jennie Lee toured as the pathetic street wailo in the dramatisation of Dickens' *Bleak House*; and Janet Achurch came in 1889 with the latest outrage from London, *A Doll's House* — 'Ibsen's cranky sermon', one critic called it — which even in a specially censored version for Australian audiences failed to impress. The English Shakespearean actor Wilson Barrett brought his *Hamlet* in 1908; Tittel Brune, a vivacious young

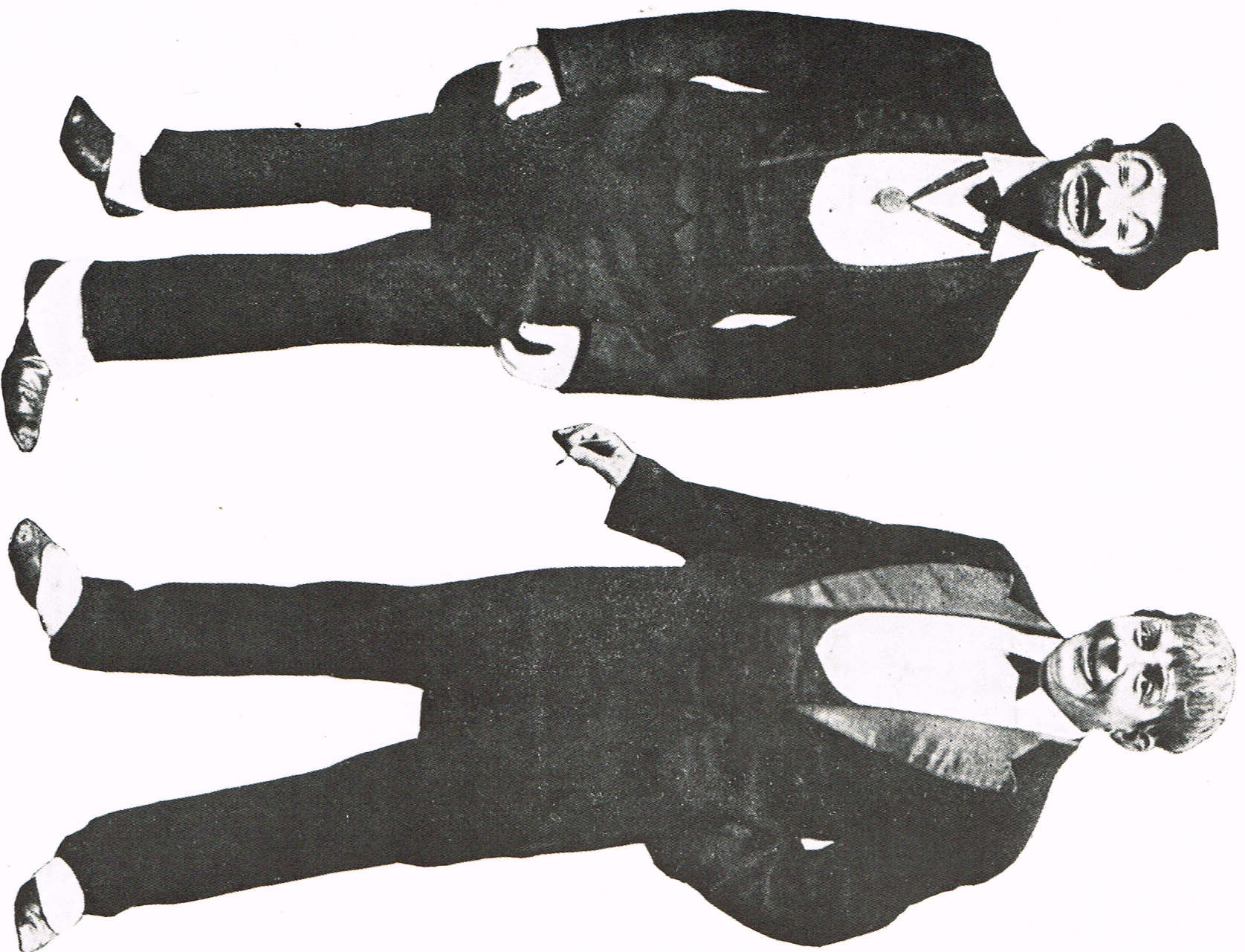
American, scored a success in her boy's part in *L'Aiglon*, and thereafter claimed Australia as her homeland. More sensational than all these put together was the 1891 grand tour of Sarah Bernhardt, larger than life, with her parrot as travelling companion, and playing in French her famous roles in *Camille*, *Jeanne D'Arc* and *La Dame Aux Camelias* with *Frou Frou* thrown in for light relief. Another legend in his lifetime, Henry Irving, came in 1911 in *Hamlet*, together with his celebrated melodrama *The Bells*, and a dual virtuoso role in *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

These came and went — some came and stayed. A long lean character actor, George Titheradge, who had arrived in 1883 at Williamson's request, stayed to help found the Brough-Boucicault Company and remained based in Australia, playing in a variety of serious and comic roles, until his death in 1916. His daughter Madge also went on the stage, and eventually made a name for herself in London. George Rignold left a London career in 1878 to become one of Australia's foremost actor-managers over the next twenty years, forming his own company with leading lady Kate Bishop. It was Rignold who opened the Sydney Theatre Royal, only recently demolished, with his famous production of *Henry V*. It was Handsome George, too, who invited the English matinee idol, with his leading lady Ada Ferrar, to play in the famous melodrama of early Christian martyrdom, *The Sign of the Cross*; Knight also captivated the Australian public with his washbuckling roles in *The Prisoner of Zenda* and *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. Oscar Asche, an Australian of Scandinavian descent, who had left Australia as a youth to study acting in Norway, returned with his own company headed by the English actress Lily Brayton to play Shakespearean roles in his homeland. Asche later succumbed to 'show business', and his 1911 tour of Australia saw him in *Kismet*, a sorry decline after his splendid *Othello*. Asche returned to London to become the unlikely author of the Arabesque extravaganza *Chu Chin Chow*, the long-running smash hit of post-war London, which he also brought home to Australia.



In 1874 George Coppin brought to Australia a play called "Struck Oil" (a story of Dutch settlers in Pennsylvania) which took Australia by storm.

By courtesy of the Mitchell Library.



Two of the most famous stars of Australian vaudeville were known simply as "Stiffy and Mo".

Not all the plays and players came from abroad. Young Australian actresses such as Eugenie Duggan and Essie Jenyns, who starred in the W. J. Holloway Shakespearean Company, Frances Ross and Carrie Bilton were the pin-up girls of their day, playing in the all-Australian melodramas which the nationalism of the 1890's generated. Alfred Dampier, an English Shakespearean actor who came to Australia in the 1870's, subsidised his weekly performances of the Bard with his local melodramas *Robbery Under Arms* and *Marvellous Melbourne*, while George Darrell wrote and starred in his own Australian tear-jerkers such as *The Sunny South* and *Transported For Life*. Bland Holt, still remembered as the King of Melodrama, staged his bush spectaculars most famous of which was *The Breaking Of The Drought*, with its sensational fire and drought scenes, as well as a diving exhibition and an 'electric garter-buckle ballet.' In 1912 Holt's one-time partner William Anderson presented one of the most famous of all Australian plays, *On Our Selection*, dramatised from Steele Rudd's sketches by Bert Bailey, the actor who played Dad Rudd in the original stage production and in successive stage and film versions of the Rudd family for the next twenty years. The *On Our Selection* characters became part of Australian folk-lore, and were heard in the long-running radio serial *Dad and Dave* as late as the 1940's.

But the days before the First World War are remembered above all as the golden days of variety, with Harry Rickards, performer and manager of the Sydney Tivoli, as the king of vaudeville. In 1891 Rickards brought the famous English comic Fred Leslie, with his London Gaiety Theatre Company, on an Australian tour; Leslie returned to Australia a number of times, and was followed by the 'greats' of the English musical hall — Marie Lloyd, Little Tich, Frank Thornton. In 1902 the musical *Flora Dora* brought the vivacious Grace Palotta to star with George Lauri and Hugh Ward, later to become manager of the Williamson's pantomimes; and the pantomimes were the most extravagant of all the extravaganzas. It was said that

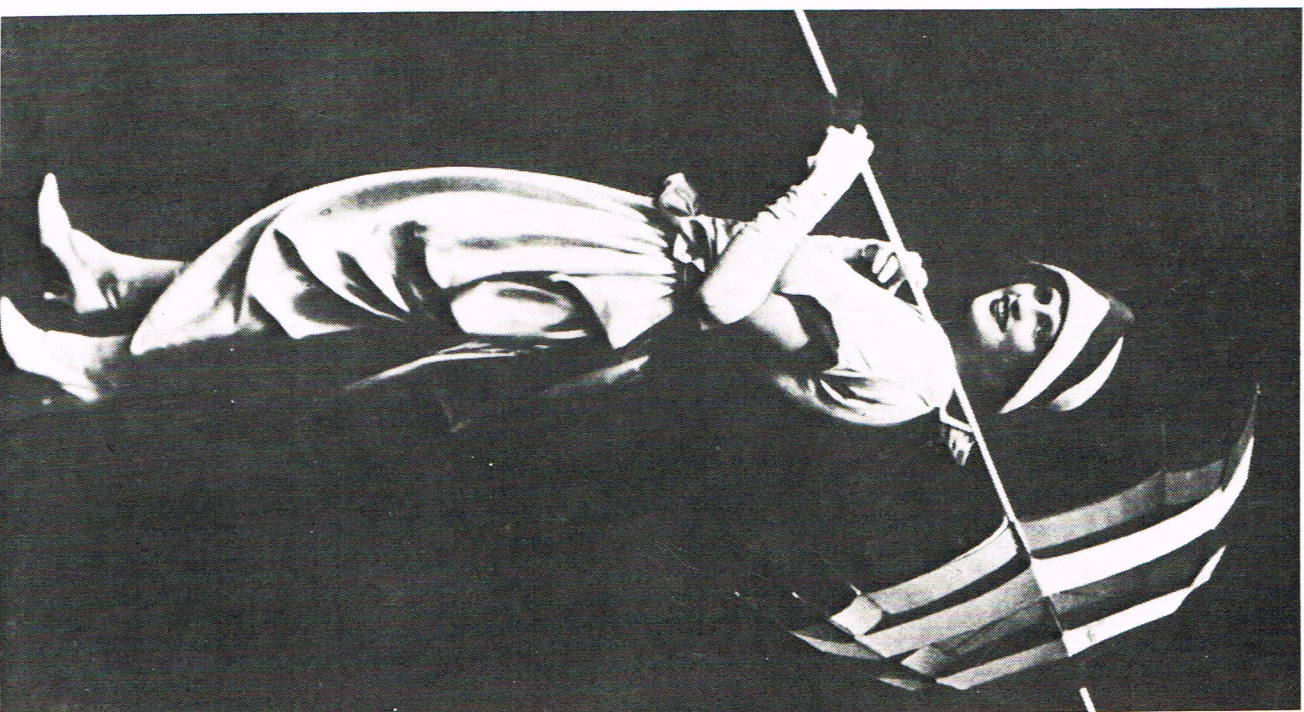
Williamson and Ward spent as much on the Christmas panto as on all the rest of the year's shows put together. Carrie Moore, Ada Reeve and Billie Barlow were 'principal boys', while English comedians such as George Gee and Alfred Frith, and Arthur Stigant, who played the 'dame', were regularly engaged for the Christmas season and became as familiar to Australian audiences as the local stars. Australians like the chorus girls Lorna and Toots Pounds, who had made their names on the English stage, returned to their homeland to play in such glittering shows as *Rockets, Djin Djin* and *Atlantis, Or The City Of Zero*. It was not only the cities that saw the variety performers. The touring shows such as the Lynch Family Bellringers and the Black Family Musicians took their troupes through the outback, playing in tents lit by gas lamps to country audiences who still remember them with affection.

Of all the glittering stars of musicals and variety, the most captivating and best loved was Nellie Stewart. Born the daughter of an actress, Mrs Guerin of the Hobart stage, she was still a virtually unknown performer when George Coppin invited her to star in his pantomime *Sinbad* in 1881. Nellie never looked back. In her earliest musical role as the little drummer boy in *La Fille Du Tambour Major*, as Nell Gwyn in *Sweet Nell Of Old Drury*, as an enchanting barefoot Cinderella, in countless roles as principal boy and leading lady, she charmed audiences in London and New York as well as Australia, perennially youthful on stage throughout an acting career that lasted nearly sixty years and covered almost the full theatrical spectrum from pantomime to grand opera.

Musical theatre has always flourished in Australia. The first operatic performance took place in Sydney in 1834, and the Argyle Theatre in Hobart also included opera in its repertoire. Emily Doldene, who brought troupes of showgirls to Australia, formed her own opera company in 1877, while an extraordinary juvenile company, Pollard's Lilliputian Opera Company, composed entirely of children, gave diminutive per-

formances of Gilbert and Sullivan in the 1880's. The J. C. Williamson Comic Opera Company, with its leading singer Ivan Menzies, kept operetta and Gilbert and Sullivan alive early this century. But the story of grand opera in Australia really begins with the rise to international fame of Dame Nellie Melba. Born Nellie Mitchell in 1861, she studied in Melbourne under Signor Cecchi, an Italian tenor, and in Paris under Mathilde Marchesi (who also trained another famous Australian opera singer, Amy Castles), and in the early 1890's went to Covent Garden, where she reigned unchallenged for forty years. Her return to Australia in 1902 for a series of concerts brought her an overwhelming welcome from her home town, from which she took her stage name. She returned to Australia again in 1909 on a tour which took her off the beaten track to a number of country towns in the Australian north, and in 1911 to lead the Melba-Williamson Grand Opera Company, a milestone in Australian opera; the company was re-formed for further seasons in 1922, 1924 and 1928. It is most unlikely that Melba ever did 'Sing 'em muck', the startling advice she gave to the English opera singer Clara Butt on the eve of her Australian tour. In spite of her occasional imperiousness she was idolised by her Australian audiences, and still remains a legendary figure, perhaps the most gifted and vital theatrical talent Australia has ever produced.

The theatrical and musical 'boom' survived the advent of cinema, and the First World War, into the twenties, with a new gallery of Australian stars. Dorothy Bruntton was the vivacious star of musicals such as *Rose Marie* and of Williamson-Ward pantomimes; Florence Young, like Nellie Stewart seeming to retain a perpetual stage youth, was principal boy of countless pantomimes. A pair of elegant young dancer-actors, Madge Elliott and Cyril Ritchard, who had played in Williamson musicals and pantomimes, made their way to stardom on the English stage and in the film world. A girl from Bundaberg in Queensland named Gladys



Of all the stars of musicals and variety in Australia, the most captivating and best loved was Nellie Stewart.
By courtesy of the Mitchell Library.

Moncrieff, who had begun in Williamson variety shows and Gilbert and Sullivan, became a star overnight in 1921 in *The Maid Of The Mountains*, and was known and loved throughout Australia as 'Our Glad' for her roles in *The Merry Widow*, *The Chocolate Soldier*, *The Blue Mazurka*, and the Australian musical *Collier's Inn*, staged by F. W. Thring in 1933. The suave English actor Leon Gordon starred with a young Australian actress named Judith Anderson in *Tea For Two*. Max Oldaker and Claude Flemming, and the South African, Cecil Kellaway, who spent some years in Australia between the wars before moving on to Hollywood, were the leading men of the musicals, while on the dramatic side stars such as Leslie Holland, Leslie Victor, Arthur Greenaway, Andrew Higginson and Eardley Turner played in everything from farce to high drama. *Journey's End* in 1929 was the 'straight' play of its time; on the cultural side, Gaston Mervale presented his elaborate Shakespearean productions at Sydney's Theatre Royal. But in spite of a host of local stars and visiting celebrities, the theatrical gaiety of the twenties had begun to dim in the thirties. A crippling entertainment tax levied by the government hit show business hard, and hitting even harder came the depression, which knocked the bottom out of the lavish commercial theatre, so that it has never recovered the glamour and vitality of the good old days.

But one form did seem to thrive on the austerity of depression days — vaudeville. The city and suburban circuits and touring companies took laughter right into the outback and around the suburbs through the lean years of the thirties — George Sorlie's Tent Show, Stanley McKay Gaieties, Barton's Follies, Coles Varieties, the Midnight Frolics of Edgley and Dawe, and the Les Levante Touring Show. In Sydney there was Les Shipp's suburban circuit, which charged sixpence and a shilling, and at one stage employed a young comedian in baggy pants with a white clown's face and black greasepaint stubble, whose stage name was

simply 'Mo'. In his famous partnership with Nat Phillips as 'Stiffy and Mo', the pair kept audiences rolling with laughter during the depression days, and transformed the ordinary phrases of Australian slang into comic gold — 'You little trimmer!', 'You beau!', and the phrase that will always be remembered as Mo's, 'Strike me lucky!' The vaudeville acts played the city and suburban circuits, Clay's and Fullers, with their weekly changes of bill, but the real home of variety was the Tivoli, taken over by Mike Connors and Queenie Paul in the depths of the depression when no-one else wanted to use it, and turned into a palace of vaudeville. All the 'greats' played at the Tiv — Stiffy and Mo, Jim Gerald, George Wallace, Gus Bluett, Bob and Dolly Dyer, Gloria Dawn, Nellie Kolle, Syd Beck — stars that are remembered with affection by those who saw them, and whose performances on record and film remain to set a new generation laughing.

But the serious drama languished, in spite of the gusto of vaudeville and the glamour of imported American musicals. In direct counter to the commercial there sprang up a number of 'little theatres' and repertory societies, many of which struggled on for only a few years, but which were often adventurous in their choice of dramas that the commercial managers would not take a chance on. Some were amateur groups, like the Adelaide Repertory Society, founded by Bryceson Treherne in 1908 and today the oldest theatre group in the country. Others were professional companies such as the Melbourne Repertory Theatre, founded in 1911 by its actor-manager Gregan McMahon. McMahon, who had received his early theatrical grounding in the Brough-Boucicault Company, carried on its tradition of elegant and sophisticated productions of classical and contemporary plays, particularly those of Shaw, and some of the early work of the Australian playwright Louis Esson. Throughout the 1920's the Gregan McMahon Players, in conjunction with Taits, continued to provide a valuable training ground, as Brough and Boucicault had in their day, for a

new generation of Australian actors, among them Coral Browne, whom McMahon 'discovered' and who went on to stardom in the English theatre, and Doris Fitton, whose Independent Theatre in Sydney, founded forty years ago, has lived staunchly up to its name in its choice of plays. The Independent has always included a notable number of Australian plays in its repertoire, the best and certainly the best-known of which was *Rusty Bugles*, centre of a censorship storm in a teacup in 1948. May Hollinworth's Metropolitan Theatre and Kathleen Robinson's Minerva Theatre in Sydney during the 1940's were starting points for a number of actors and actresses who have since made their reputations at home and abroad, Leo McKern, Ron Randell, Frank Waters, Bettina Welch, Kitty Bluett and and Dinah Shearing among them. In Melbourne the Little Theatre, now St Martin's, Frank Thring's Arrow Theatre, and Wal Cherry's Emerald Hill, the Twelfth Night in Brisbane, the Repertorys in Hobart and Perth, the Adelaide University Theatre Guild which first produced the plays of Patrick White, and any number of others kept the serious drama alive in Australia as late as the 1960's where the commercial managements rarely ventured beyond proven imported successes.

Shakespeare survived, however, through the Alan Wilkie Company which, with Wilkie's wife Frediswyde Hunter-Watts as leading lady, brought Shakespearean productions and occasional comedies of manners to Australian audiences in the 1920's, the necessary economy of the productions resulting in very simple staging which threw into relief the elegance of the costumes and the integrity of the acting. Many of today's leading actors received their early training with Wilkie's company, including Marie Ney, who went on to play in Shakespeare at the Old Vic. A disastrous fire at Geelong in 1926 effectively put an end to Wilkie's company, though he attempted to recoup his losses for a time by supplementing the Shakespearean bill with potboilers; the Shakespearean mantle fell to John Alden, whose company toured

widely in Australia and gave valuable classical experience to many of the actors and actresses well-known today in Australian theatre and television, Neva Carr Glyn, Nancye Stewart (Nellie's daughter), Dinah Shearing and Ron Shand among them.

But in spite of the gallant efforts of the little theatres and the spectaculars of the commercial stage, Australian theatre between the wars had little to offer to many of its talented actors. The long line of expatriates making their reputations abroad continued dispiritingly into the 1950's and 1960's — Leo McKern, Judith Anderson, Peter Finch (discovered by Olivier during the Old Vic tour in 1948), Robert Helpmann, Keith Michell, Diane Cilento, Zoe Caldwell and a host of others left Australia, like earlier generations of actors and actresses such as Merle Oberon, Marie Lohr, Errol Flynn and O. P. Heggie. Between the extremes of show-biz entertainment and aspiring but often less than polished semi-professionalism these found no niche in the theatre in the homeland, and the English theatre is richer for their talent. Australians usually saw them again only in a brief visit as international celebrities on tour, such as Cicely Courtneidge's visit with her husband Jack Hulbert in 1948, Cyril Ritchard and Madge Elliott, in *Private Lives* in 1951, and Robert Helpmann and the Old Vic's tour in 1955, with Katharine Hepburn as leading lady in *Measure For Measure* and a rum-bustious *Taming Of The Shrew*. Australian theatre in the 1950's still depended for its serious drama largely on the prestigious tours of overseas companies such as the Old Vic, with Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh, which came in 1948 with *Richard III*, *The Critic* and *The Skin Of Our Teeth*, the 1955 tour of Sir Ralph Richardson and Meriel Forbes, and the visit in 1957 of Sir Lewis Casson and Dame Sybil Thorndike in *The Chalk Garden*.

The real turning point for the Australian theatre from the dichotomy of sagging commercial theatre and struggling 'reps' came in the 1950's, though perhaps the effects are just beginning to be felt now. In 1955, the

Sir Robert Helpmann as Dr. Coppélius in *Coppélia*, first performed by The Australian Ballet at Her Majesty's Theatre, Sydney, in 1962.

H.R.B.

(centre, pages)
Charles Keane's production of Shakespeare's *King John* (Act III, Scene I) at The Princess Theatre in 1852.

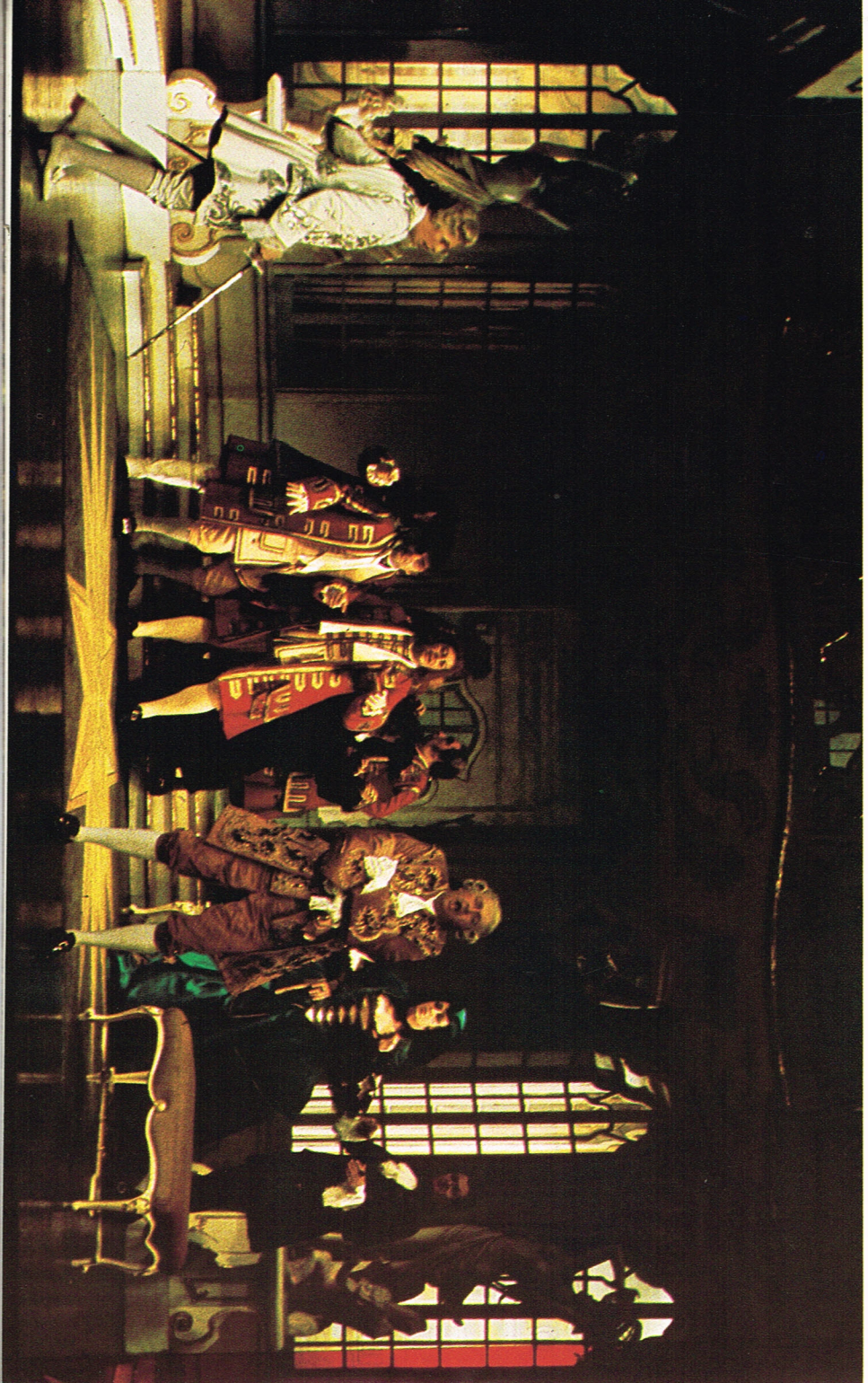


By courtesy of the Australian Information Service.





Scenes from *Der Rosenkavalier* produced by *The Australian Opera* in 1972.
By courtesy of *The Australian Opera*.



generation earlier would almost certainly have become theatrical expatriates.

The Australian Opera and the Australian Ballet were both initially established through the Elizabethan Theatre Trust, though both are now autonomous companies. The Australian Opera Company was formed in 1956. From the beginning it was a touring company, travelling thousands of miles between the capitals and provincial centres, and sometimes well off the beaten track, an expensive and complicated business for as elaborate a form as grand opera, but the company continues to clock up thousands of miles each year travelling the longest operatic circuit in the world. The first milestone for the company was the Adelaide Festival in 1960; in 1965, in conjunction with J. C. Williamson, it combined with a number of leading overseas singers to present a Sutherland Opera Season. Joan Sutherland had left Australia in 1951 as winner of a Mobil Quest award to study singing in London. She returned in 1965 as an artist acclaimed in all the world's great opera houses, almost as legendary a figure as Melba, and like Melba received with near-hysterical applause by Australian opera lovers. The heady success of the Sutherland season seemed to overshadow the company for a time, but it has steadily grown into a major company which today provides both training ground and permanent employment for singers who earlier would have joined the Australians crowding Covent Garden, and is now beginning to draw some of these home again. In 1957 Joan Hammond became the first internationally renowned singer to return to sing with the company, and since then Lauris Elms, Elizabeth Fretwell, Donald Smith and Neil Warren-Smith have all been leading singers with the Australian Opera.

The Australian Ballet was formed in 1962, with Dame Peggy van Praagh and Sir Robert Helpmann as its artistic directors, and since then has travelled even longer distances than the opera company, on international tours which have taken it from Mexico City to Phnom Penh. Before its formation ballet had been seen only occasionally in Australia,

Australian Elizabethan Theatre Trust was established, and with it the principle of government subsidy for the performing arts. The Trust, under its English director Hugh Hunt, formed its own company, the Trust Players, which included many names familiar to Australian audiences today — Ethel Gabriel, Ron Haddrick, Peter Kenna, Peter Aanensen, Leonard Teale, Judith Arthy, and Bunney Brooke. Early Trust productions brought Dame Judith Anderson home to Australia in 1956 to play her famous role of Medea, and in the same year, Leo McKern came home to play the leading role in Douglas Stewart's verse drama *Ned Kelly*. But it was not from these that the Trust received its first real filip. Hardly a year after its formation, a new Australian play by an unknown actor-author — *Summer Of The Seventeenth Doll* by Ray Lawler — was staged at Melbourne University by the Union Repertory Company, and was an instantaneous success. Its simple but moving story of cane-cutters who come down south each year to spend the lay-off season with their city girls, and who suffer the inevitable disillusionment of middle age living on youthful fantasies, went straight to the hearts of Australian audiences, and the Trust mounted its own production of *The Doll* which toured Australia before going on to success in the West End. Perhaps it was the filip given to the repertory theatres by the success of *The Doll* and the Australian plays which followed it, together with the principle of theatre subsidy, that helped to bring about the formation of permanent subsidised companies in each of the capital cities. The Union Theatre Company which first produced *The Doll* is now the Melbourne Theatre Company; this and the Old Tote Company in Sydney, the Queensland Theatre Company, the South Australian Theatre Company, the Tasmanian Theatre Company, housed in Australia's oldest playhouse, the Theatre Royal, and the National Theatre at the Playhouse in Perth are now the backbone of theatre in Australia, giving regular employment to actors and actresses who a

though the tours of the great Pavlova, of the Ballet Rambert in the 1940's, and the Borovansky Ballet in the 1950's had proved that there was a lively audience for it. It was during her 1926 tour that Pavlova was persuaded to take into her company a young dancer from Mount Gambier named Robert Helpmann, who later went on to the ballet school at Sadlers Wells and joined the Vic-Wells company. Helpmann is widely known internationally as both dancer and actor, and as an Artistic Director of the Australian Ballet has returned frequently to Australia to direct and dance, particularly in his roles of Dr Coppélius and Don Quixote, the latter with Rudolf Nureyev, who has danced in several of the company's productions. Helpmann has also created several Australian ballets for the company, including *The Display* and the exuberant *Sun Music*, which have been included in the Ballet's overseas repertoire.


Theatre in Australia today may lack the old rumbustiousness of the Tivoli days, or the super-elegance of Brough and Boucicault, but it is as varied and vital as at any time since the 1890's. J. C. Williamson could hardly have foreseen — or, astute manager that he was, could he? — that a century after his arrival his 'Firm' would still dominate the commercial theatre with the latest overseas successes. Thanks to subsidy, a number of the 'little theatres' are still going strong, including a new crop of fringe or 'alternative' theatres, La Mama and the Pram Factory in Melbourne, and Nimrod Street and the Old Tote's experimental offshoot Jane Street, which have fostered a new hard-hitting breed of Australian playwrights — David Williamson, Alex Buzo, Jack Hibberd, Bob Ellis, Ron Blair — whose work is now beginning to be staged by the professional theatres. The subsidised companies in each city are now firmly established; the Melbourne Theatre Company can now mount a prestige production such as its recent *The Cherry Orchard*, with Googie Withers in the leading role, in the larger 'commercial' Comedy Theatre, while still maintaining its regular subscription performances at its home base in Russell

Street. Theatre restaurants staging musicals and melodramas by artificial gaslight have sprung up in several cities. Vaudeville laced with social satire lives on in Barry Humphries' epitome of suburban respectability, Mrs Edna Everage. The major opera and ballet companies tour all the capital cities each year, while a number of smaller musical and dance groups are based on the major cities. Occasionally one of the great actors of the English stage, or an English company, makes a tour of Australia and is warmly received, but today such visits are the spice of Australian theatre, not its staple diet.

It has all come a long way since a little group of convicts and military men staged their play in a bark hut in a bush wilderness, but that first performance of *The Recruiting Officer* might well stand for all that the Australian theatre should be — a theatre that crosses all social barriers to bring people together, and which fuses a sense of the past with a shrewd awareness of the immediate present.

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PERTH.
W. A.



December 16,
1876.

Private Performance

given by

H.E. The Governor & Mrs. Robinson.

DEAREST MAMMA,

A Comedietta in one Act.

Harry Clinton	.....	Mr. H. C. Pinchof.
Edith Clinton	.....	Miss Hoeking.
Mrs. Broadway Russell	.....	Mr. C. H. James.
Lucie Broadner	.....	Mr. H. H. Hoeking.
Neddy Croker	.....	Mrs. Williamson.
Mrs. Honeywood	.....	Mr. M. C. Fraser.
James	.....

WHITEBAIT AT GREENWICH.

A PASTORAL.

Benjamin Buzard	.....	Mr. H. H. Hoeking.
Mrs. Lucetta Buzard	.....	Mrs. Williamson.
Edithmore <i>(just from London)</i>	.....	Mr. C. H. James.
John Shaul <i>(sailor)</i>	.....	Miss Hoeking.
Sally	.....
Mrs. Moore	.....	Mr. C. H. James.
Phonette	.....	Mr. M. C. Fraser.

Playbill of private theatricals at Perth.
By courtesy of the J. S. Batye Library of
West Australian History.



Dame Nellie Melba (born Nellie Mitchell in 1861) was the first of Australia's internationally famous
opera singers.
By courtesy of the Mitchell Library.

THE ENGLISH THEATRE

EARLY HISTORY

by
Professor G. W. G. Wickham

or comment on that occasion.

In this sense even those rituals of the Roman Catholic Church known as *Ordo* or *Officium* devised in the 10th century to celebrate the historical event of Christ's Resurrection were innately dramatic. This is made explicit in England in the *Regularis Concordia* of Ethelwold, Bishop of Winchester (c.975) in which he instructs priests how to conduct the ceremony of "The Visit to the Sepulchre" on Easter Sunday. Art, music, song, ritual and mime were harnessed to this Festival (and subsequently to those of Christmas and Epiphany) precisely because it was desired to enhance their significance in the Christian Calendar by marking them out as occasions for special rejoicing.

It was thus in the context of the ritual music-dramas of Christ the King that those creative initiatives were taken which established virtually all the theatrical and dramatic conventions that were destined to govern play-production throughout Europe for the next five to six hundred years. The acting-area (called the *platea*, i.e. place) was the central open-space of countless Romanesque basilicas: acting, costumes and settings were emblematic rather than behavioural and illusionistic, women being represented by men, costumes by vestments, and locality by symbols rather than by photographic replicas of the originals. It is three deacons who represent the *Maries* visiting the sepulchre; they wear surplices, albs and dalmatics, not historic Palestinian women's dress; the sepulchre itself is a hollow space below the altar-table, not a real tomb. The dialogue exchanges with the angel before the sepulchre are sung, not spoken.

The extension and expansion of these musical ceremonies to include Old Testament, and more especially non-Christian characters, altered their nature since non-

Like most British institutions, the theatre is of a mongrel lineage which, despite its Anglo-Saxon characteristics, shows much cross-breeding over the centuries and is ultimately derived from Roman stock. With English drama this is true in a double sense since it owes its formative inspiration to the Roman Catholic Church and most of its earliest conventions to those established in Imperial Rome. The very words theatre, amphitheatre, circus, play, act, scene, mime, etc (all direct translations from Latin), illustrate this clearly enough. So do such ruined buildings as the Roman amphitheatre at Caerleon in Monmouthshire of the 1st century AD, or the theatre at Verulamium (St Albans) of the 2nd to 4th centuries.

Perhaps more importantly, the Roman concept of a *ludus* (game or play) as a recreation embracing both athletic and mimetic actions was never forgotten in any country formerly within the *Pax Romana* despite the collapse of the theatre as an organised institution in the 6th century A.D. Indeed, the initial image "all the world's a stage" was first coined by St Augustine as an analogue of God's view of his own creation. Thus, when a new drama of Christian inspiration took root in England following the Norman Conquest in the 11th century, mimetic representations of an entertaining and instructional character on the one hand and athletic sports of a warlike or gymnastic kind came to be described equally as plays or games, or (in literate circles) as *ludi*.

In its mimetic context the mediaeval *ludus* was always regarded as a make-believe action: by entertaining it was designed to instruct, and thus, from an audience's standpoint, its significance or inner meaning was always more important than the realism of its external presentation. It existed invariably to celebrate an occasion, and it served to explain



Mrs Sarah Siddons (born Sarah Kemble, 1755-1831), a renowned tragic actress and the most famous member of the great theatrical family of Kemble.

(Victoria and Albert Museum)

Christians were considered ridiculous and therefore required to behave in a contemptible and thus a comic manner. The element of entertainment which found its way into a liturgical Office in this way did not conform with the gravity of its original purpose, so the Church took steps to remove these ceremonies from the centre to the perimeter of its rituals, and to redesignate them as *ludi*, plays.

Simultaneously, a shift of emphasis within Christian philosophy from Christ as God to Christ as Man, coupled with the rise of vernacular languages in the course of the 12th and 13th centuries, led the authors of such plays to explore Christ's Passion and Crucifixion in dramatic form. The new drama that arose in consequence was again firmly linked to a Festival of rejoicing, this time to the Feast of Corpus Christi promulgated by Urban IV in 1264 and instituted by Clement V in 1311. As the purpose of the Feast was to give thanks for the miraculous power of the Eucharist, and as it fell in mid-summer (the first Thursday after Trinity Sunday) it was natural for the bishops to seek to involve the laity in it as fully as possible. The rapid growth of towns at this time made it just as natural for this approach to be made through the craft-guilds governed by the new-rich princes of commerce. Since the primary purpose of the new vernacular plays—Passion Plays, Corpus Christi Plays and plays describing the life and works of Apostles, Saints and Martyrs (in short, "Miracle Plays")—was to urge repentance upon sinful mankind and to give thanks for the possibility of amendment of life obtainable through the Eucharist, the shape and content of the new English drama was firmly geared to its doctrinal purpose. Its structure was tripartite—a beginning in a Fall from Grace: a middle, or climax, in a redemptive sacrifice that atoned for that fall; and an end in alternative salvation or damnation for every individual on Judgement Day. In this structure lies the embryo of Christian orientated comedy as well as tragedy. What both possessed in common was a fall from prosperity into adversity: the new and

specifically Christian factor is the possibility of reconciliation with God and thus of a happy ending: only the wilful ignoring of Christ's example and exhortations to repent makes reconciliation impossible, separation from the Godhead eternal, and tragedy inevitable. This was still the structural pattern nearly two centuries later of Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* and Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.

In the new plays associated with the Feast of Corpus Christi the paramount need to involve the laity dictated the substitution of vernacular language for Latin, and spoken dialogue for chant, but not the abandonment of verse for prose: the desire to instruct and to urge audiences to repent led just as directly to a vast expansion of the narrative content and a corresponding increase in the number of characters and localities to be identified and differentiated on the stage. These changes, in their turn, enforced a reappraisal of production methods and of the managerial framework required to organize, finance and administer plays that involved more than a hundred actors (many of whom doubled several roles) and that lasted for at least one whole day and in many places for three or more consecutive days (York, 1 day; Chester, 3 days; London, 7 days).

The managerial problem was solved both in England and in countries of continental Europe by the creation of Councils or committees, membership of which was shared by Church and City fathers working as partners. Broadly speaking the Church made itself responsible for the author, the prompt-book actors' parts and any variations in the script from year to year: the lay members made themselves responsible for finding the producer, the actors, the costumes, the stages, scenery and machinery, and providing for the needs of audiences from initial advertisement of the performance to the punishment of ineffectual actors and rowdy spectators.

If we are to appreciate today the true nature and quality of this achievement, it is first necessary to recall that these dramatic undertakings were the product of Roman Catholic initiatives and that it was thus as

inevitable a consequence of the Reformation in Protestant countries that they should be attacked, destroyed and memory of them reviled as that the stained-glass and sculpture of countless churches should be smashed. It is only in modern times that any serious reappraisal of their worth has become possible. In England this started in earnest with the revival of the York Cycle at York in 1951 since when thousands of people have had a chance to see revivals of all the major religious dramas still surviving to us for themselves and to make new judgements of a less biased kind.

What we can now begin to appreciate is that the original Councils of Management, in finding and handling casts of a hundred actors or more, in financing and equipping productions of several days duration, whether on fixed stages as at Lincoln and in Cornwall or on mobile wagons as at York, and in stage-managing a Festival of extraordinary vitality and duration, matched the builders of Gothic Cathedrals both in their ambitions and their achievement. Nor did they do this without providing their audiences with variety. On occasion, plays re-enacting the life and works of the Apostles or local Saints and Martyrs were substituted for the Cycles. The Cornish play of St Meriasek is a case in point; the Digby play of St Mary Magdalene another.

A further alternative was drama of moral instruction structured on an athletic form of game or play, 'Tournaments', which depicted mankind attacked by the Devil and his agents, the Vices, and defended by Christ and his ministers, the Virtues. This too could be substituted for Corpus Christi Cycles to provide variety as was the case with the Creed Play at York and the Paternoster Play at Beverley and Lincoln. These Morality Plays, as they were called (of which the best known examples are *The Castle of Perseverance* and *Everyman*) possessed one advantage denied to all other religious plays. Although used as alternatives to Mystery Cycles in some places on Corpus Christi day, they were not tied organically to that Feast or to any other. Grounded in sermons rather than in other

parts of the normal liturgies, these texts could be performed at any time anywhere. They thus attracted the interest of minstrels (whose talent was mimetic rather than musical or acrobatic) as scripts which could be turned to commercial advantage. Severely shortened in length and substantially enhanced with humorous situations, characters and dialogue, they could be travelled by small companies of players who were prepared to double roles and to take the risk of trying to earn an income from acting rather than continuing to serve their noble masters as hewers of wood and drawers of water, or in some other menial capacity within the Household, throughout the year, with only the twelve-day holiday of Christmas and other occasional Feast Days excepted.

It was in these circumstances that the small companies of actors known as 'players of interludes' came into existence during the 15th century and made a spirited bid for recognition as professionals as opposed to amateurs in their craft of acting. By 1450 not only did the King and Queen maintain companies of this sort, but many of the more influential Lords spiritual and temporal had copied their example. When Henry VII ascended the throne in 1485 he possessed a personal company of four actors and a boy apprentice led by John English who performed Moral Interludes at Court when required, and in other places, both in London and the provinces, at other times. Henry VIII increased the number of actors at first from four to six and then from six to eight with two boy-apprentices to play women's parts. At home in their masters' banquet halls they performed at the end opposite the dais and high table, and could thus make use of the screen with its doors, the minstrels gallery above and rooms in the adjacent kitchen-area for changing their costumes. Italian example in erecting a raised stage had been copied in England before 1540. At fairgrounds and in the yards and gardens of inns they built temporary stages from planks nailed on top of barrels and backed by a 'traverse' or curtain.

It was at this point in the growth of both

religious and secular entertainments that the Reformation struck a heavy and unexpected blow against all further natural growth of dramatic art and theatrical performances in England. Protestantism forced everyone from the sovereign to the meanest amateur actor to reconsider his attitudes to a type of recreation born of Roman Catholic doctrine and in the Latin tongue. Attacks on Saint plays and Mystery Cycles, coupled with use of Moralities and Interludes as vehicles for Reformation propaganda, led inexorably to censorship of both acted and printed drama and to ever stricter control by the central government at Westminster of actors, and their places of performance. By 1543 Parliament was legislating about religious plays. The next fifty years saw the outright suppression of them and the establishment of a formal Licensing Commission to deal with secular plays. Actors and places of performance were placed under similar restrictions starting with Poor Law legislation and culminating in the issue by James I on his accession of special Patents authorising companies maintained by him and members of his family, *and no others*, to perform plays privately at Court and in certain public playhouses named in the Patents and *in no others*.

The cumulative effect of all this legislation was to kill virtually all amateur dramatic activity both in London and in the Provinces, and to translate professional acting into a royal monopoly. In this way, although the Tudor and Stuart legislators did not foresee the consequence, the way was prepared for the closure of theatres by the Act of Parliament in 1642 and the destruction of most of them during or following the Civil War. "They that would have no King, would have no play!" as Sir William D'Avenant observed after the Restoration of the monarchy and the reopening of the playhouses.

When the attack on the religious stage started in the reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI, it was the amateurs who felt its effects most sharply since they lost their

festival days, their management committees, their authors and in many cases their plays. These losses, however, provided those actors seeking to attain professional status, with new opportunities which they exploited swiftly. New plays were sought from choirmasters, schoolmasters and university graduates seeking a career as men of letters. These men brought with them a fund of new source material from romance literature and that of classical antiquity. The actors themselves refined it in directions that their experience told them to be essential if the attention of their audiences was to be retained — broad humour and sensationalism — very much as editors of the more popular daily newspapers continue to do today to maintain and, if possible, to increase their circulation.

New plays, however, were worthless without having first secured both the right to perform them publicly and places in which to perform them. This the theatre's enemies (which, on the accession of Elizabeth I, included a strange alliance of Protestant exiles newly returned from Calvin's Geneva and the princes of commerce in the larger English cities) knew well; together they succeeded in translating the Vice "Covetousness" into a Virtue and called it "Gainful employment". Since, in their view, the theatre not only distracted labourers from honest toil and sermons, but both extolled crime, ridicule and profanity and encouraged idleness and vice, it was to be resisted by harassment whenever and wherever possible: the readiest means to this end lay in denying actors places in which to perform and in arresting them as vagabonds if caught without either the liveries and letters of credit of the masters whose servants they claimed to be or the Revels Office licence to present the plays in their repertoire. As this harassment increased, so the actors found it more necessary to rely upon their noble patrons, and thus ultimately on the Court, for support and protection.

The first company to receive this support in its full measure was that led by James Burbage in the service of the Earl of Leicester. In 1574 the Company was granted a Patent by

Elizabeth I to perform publicly in London on weekdays. Two years later, in 1576, Burbage leased some land in a dissolved Priory in Shoreditch, borrowed money from his brother-in-law and built an open-air auditorium on it which he called The Theater. In the same year the master of the Chapel Royal, Richard Farrant, acquired a lease of rooms within the dissolved monastery of Blackfriars near St Paul's Cathedral and converted them into an indoor auditorium. The adult professionals and the choir-boy actors thus established playhouses simultaneously. It was for Farrant's playhouse with its discreet and wealthy clientele of private patrons that John Lyly wrote his elegant and witty plays. Burbage's example in Middlesex was copied by Henry Laneman on adjacent ground called The Curtain in 1577. Both of these playhouses thus became available to licensed companies in search of a home and willing to hire them: it was in these playhouses that the plays of Thomas Kyd and Christopher Marlowe were first seen by London audiences. Built of wood on lines resembling the circular bear-and-bull-baiting arenas of Southwark on the South Bank of the Thames in Surrey, these playhouses secured high enough dividends on the initial capital investment to attract other imitators. A playhouse was established at Newington Butts in Surrey followed by another nearer to the river called The Rose. The latter was started in 1587, extensively remodelled in 1591/92 and altered again in 1595. That year work started on yet another playhouse on the South Bank, The Swan. Philip Henslowe was the owner of The Rose and Francis Langley the owner of The Swan: both were business men and financial speculators, not actors or playwrights.

It is impossible to establish with certainty where Shakespeare's earliest plays were performed, but The Theater and The Rose are the most likely playhouses of those then built. Harassment of actors grew in intensity throughout the 1590's culminating in 1597 with the forcible closure of all the playhouses on instructions from the Privy Council. The

immediate cause of this draconian measure was the performance at The Swan of a play by Ben Jonson and Thomas Nashe called *The Isle of Dogs*.

By that time Shakespeare, James Burbage and his sons Richard and Cuthbert had secured as their patron Lord Hunsdon, Elizabeth I's last Lord Chamberlain. Henslowe and his son-in-law the actor Edward Alleyn, enjoyed the patronage of Lord Howard, Earl of Nottingham and the Lord High Admiral of England. It is to these men, and ultimately to the Queen herself, that posterity is indebted for the re-opening of all playhouses except The Swan in the autumn of 1597, and for the great repertoire of plays that followed in its wake. At this time however the Burbage Company found itself in acute financial trouble. Their lease of the ground on which The Theater stood expired and proved not to be renewable. They had invested their profits in purchasing rooms in the Blackfriars, but were forbidden to use them. They resolved these problems by pulling down The Theater and carrying its timbers across the Thames for use in a new playhouse which they called The Globe and which they opened in the winter of 1598/99. More or less simultaneously the Earl of Derby's Players secured a lease of a former large inn or coaching hotel in Whitechapel called The Boar's Head and converted this into a playhouse. This was an example which Henslowe chose to follow when replacing The Rose with The Fortune near Clerkenwell in Middlesex in 1600. A year later the Burbages succeeded in leasing their remodelled rooms in the Blackfriars to a company of boy actors to rival those already playing in the choir school at St Pauls. Superficially, at least, Elizabeth I and her Privy Council had successfully saved the theatre from defeat at the hands of its opponents, but the price they had paid for this victory was a heavy one both in the severe reduction of the number of licensed companies and the stiff controls now placed on the subject-matter of play-scripts and the places and conditions of public performances. The whole acting profession must have

awaited James I's appearance in London with acute anxiety wondering how much longer they could hope to earn a reliable living from play production either in their London playhouses or in the town-halls of provincial cities.

The answer that they got was ambiguous, pleasing to some and bringing despair to others.

The Burbage / Shakespeare Company was taken into the King's Household, the Admiral's into Prince Henry's, the former being licensed to play publicly at the first Globe and the latter at the first Fortune: The Boar's Head Company was given to the Queen and transferred to The Curtain: all other companies were dissolved or banished from London apart from the St Paul's and Blackfriars boys who were licensed to stay under the new names of the Children of the Queen's and the King's Revels respectively. With only minor modifications the theatre survived until 1642 in these terms of reference. In 1605 / 06 the Queen's Company acquired a new playhouse, The Red Bull, in Clerkenwell: both Prince Charles and Princess Elizabeth acquired Companies of their own on coming of age, and a new multipurpose bear-baiting arena cum theatre, The Hope, was built on Bankside to accommodate them in 1614. The Burbage Company recovered the Blackfriars to their own use in 1609 and a second private indoor theatre was provided in a converted Cockpit in Drury Lane, more usually known as The Phoenix, in 1617. The first Globe was destroyed by fire in 1613 and rebuilt a year later: the same fate overtook the first Fortune in 1621 / 22.

The major innovation however of the Jacobean era was not in the public or the private theatres but at Court where the choreographic spectacles of the Tudor era known as Disguisings or Masques were transformed by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones into elaborate and costly entertainments of an Italianate and operatic character. For twenty-five years Jones experimented with changeable scenery behind a fixed proscenium arch. Machinery, music and

artificial lighting all played a part in these transformation scenes: costs soared. Charles I, despite his financial difficulties, encouraged the further development of these spectacles and added two more theatres to the London scene — a private theatre in Salisbury Court off Fleet Street, and the Cockpit-in-Court in the Palace of Whitehall in 1630 / 31.

Throughout this period the City of London replied to the ostentatious pageantry of Court Masques with that of their own annual processional Show in Honour of each new Lord Mayor with texts provided by Munday, Dekker, Middleton, Webster and Heywood but the noticeable abatement of Guildhall's harring of actors and playwrights was deceptive. In the provinces Mayors learnt that they could force actors to quit their cities by paying them "not to play," and in London the outbreak of the Civil War provided the excuse to close all playhouses.

Throughout the period 1642-1660 occasional clandestine performances were given in these old playhouses, and some continuity with the past was provided when Charles II returned as King in the companies which he and his brother James, Duke of York, assembled under Thomas Killigrew and Sir William D'Avenant, both of whom had been concerned in varying ways with masques, plays and theatrical management under Charles I. Helped by Inigo Jones's pupil, John Webb (who had inherited all Jones's drawings), they set out to establish public theatres in London that incorporated changeable scenery and to substitute a pictorial illusionistic stage for the poetic and emblematic one of pre-war days.

● *Glynn Wickham, 1973*

(Opposite)
George Coppin, an Englishman who has been called the "Father of the Australian Theatre", brought many famous actors and actresses to Australia, including the Shakespeareans, Charles Kean and his wife, Ellen Tree, in 1863. After gaining experience on the London stage with Kean and the Kembles, he came to Australia in 1843 and was active in Sydney. Hobart and Adelaide before settling finally in Melbourne with his own company at The Queen's Theatre Royal.

By courtesy of the Mitchell Library.



MR. G. COPPIN, SINGING "VILKINS AND HIS DINAH."

THE ENGLISH THEATRE

LATER HISTORY

by
G. R. Rowell

That the same architect should have designed two out of the three theatres built during the Restoration is at once a tribute to Sir Christopher Wren and a measure of the minority interest which drama commanded in these years. Jacobean London could support some half-dozen playhouses, several with a capacity of at least 2000. The two Theatres Royal which Wren designed, Drury Lane (occupying only a portion of the present site) and Dorset Gardens, cannot have held more than 1000 spectators, very probably they held much fewer. Even these modest dimensions proved too large, and from 1682 to 1695 the two patent companies united; the Duke's Men left Dorset Gardens and joined the King's Men at Drury Lane.

But what the Restoration playhouse lacked in scale, it gained in style. Preserving something of the rectangular shape imposed by the adaptation of the tennis court in Commonwealth days, Wren also paid homage to his celebrated predecessor, Inigo Jones, and the Italian inspiration of the staging of the Court masques. Dorset Gardens in particular reflected the Renaissance enthusiasm for Roman theatre design, boasting an architectural *frons scenae* and elaborate stage-pictures within it. Perhaps Wren came to regret that grandiose framework; at any rate when he designed Drury Lane three years later he put forward a more flexible plan; the proscenium included doors and balconies which were important acting areas, and the orchestra was moved to the pit, probably for the first time in British theatre history.

The principle of changeable scenery, moving in "grooves" set in the stage and above it (inherited from the masque) was established as the basis of British stage setting for a century and half, but Wren also acknowledged the importance of the Elizabethan "platform" stage. In his Drury

Lane the apron projected 15 feet into the auditorium, and since all lighting was by candles, the best lit acting area was the apron, which benefited from the chandeliers in the auditorium. Restoration players and playwrights therefore regarded the apron stage as their point of focus; the painted scenery within the proscenium arch was a background, dimly lit and lightly sketched. The scenic area might be effectively used for "discoveries", tableaux, processional exits and entrances, but the proscenium doors (not limited in the beginning to one each side) were the arteries of dramatic circulation.

The minority interest which the Restoration stage commanded also defined the character of its drama. The revulsion against the theatre engendered during the Civil War narrowed the range and exaggerated the tone of the playwrights who assumed Shakespeare's and Jonson's mantles. Restoration tragedy was inflated, extravagant, posturing; Restoration comedy was inbred, contemporary, erotic. The sophistication of the Restoration audience largely dictated these attributes, but the appearance of the professional actress supplied them. The voluptuousness of Elizabeth Barry, the first "tragedy queen" of the British stage, sustained the feverish notes of Dryden and Otway. The sex appeal of Nell Gwyn and Anne Bracegirdle allowed Wycherley and Congreve to enslave their public. Restoration playwrights were members of the club; Dryden married into the Howard family, Wycherley wed a Countess, Buckingham and Etherege were statesmen first and dramatists second. The Restoration theatre was a small world.

Inevitably it produced its own reaction. The tone of the later Stuart monarchs was less permissive than the King and Duke who had given their patronage to the two patent companies. Under William, Mary and Anne the



Nell Gwyn, a leading actress of the Restoration stage and mistress of King Charles II, by whom she had two sons, Charles Beaulerk, created Duke of St. Albans, and James, who are shown with their mother in this engraving by R. Thompson after a painting by Sir Peter Leely.

(Victoria and Albert Museum)

British theatre suffered and overcame a furious assault from those puritanical forces which had been condemned to silence by the collapse of the Commonwealth. Perhaps the onslaught of the eccentric clergyman, Jeremy Collier, rudely as it shook the foundations of the stage, did have a cauterising and ultimately healthy effect. Out of the struggle emerged the comedies of Vanbrugh, broader and more vigorous in approach, and of Farquhar, at once more humorous and more humane. The Georgian audience grew steadily less of a coterie. Its working-class element gradually extracted the privilege of a half-time, half-price system, since working hours were long, and though the afternoon performances of the Restoration had disappeared, a 6.30 curtain was too early for butchers and bakers. The Georgian bill of fare therefore offered several courses; the main dish, whether tragedy or comedy, would be flanked by farces, music, singing, dancing, acrobats.

For the Georgian theatre was altogether more diverse than its Restoration forbear. The buildings themselves multiplied: Vanbrugh, as vigorous an architect as writer, designed the building in the Haymarket which, after early vicissitudes, was to become the centre of London's opera for more than a century, and opposite arose "the little theatre in the Hay", at first an unauthorised "anti-establishment" undertaking, later with the grant of a "summer patent" the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, the home of some of the finest of British theatrical endeavour. Even more significant was the opening in 1732 of the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden, a few yards round the corner from Drury Lane, for with the building of Covent Garden, Charles II's two patents found their resting-places.

Covent Garden was built by John Rich out of the profits of *The Beggar's Opera* by John Gay, first staged four years earlier and successful enough to have made "Gay rich and Rich gay". Its popularity reflected a variety of new strands in the theatrical pattern. Opera, especially Handel's, was paid the compliment of satire; politics had entered the

theatre, whipped on by the young Henry Fielding at such a pace that within ten years the government evoked the Licensing Act to banish political comment from the stage. The accepted categories of drama: tragedy, comedy, farce — were stretched to include "mixed media", of which John Rich, no actor but an inspired clown, was an enthusiastic champion. Clowning was of ancient origin; Rich took some of the *commedia dell'arte* figures from the Italian theatre and evolved the earliest form of English pantomime.

The Georgian period was a time of theatre-for-all, and the actor-for-all proved to be David Garrick, short, mercurial, free from the artificialities with which acting had become encumbered, perhaps the only British actor before Laurence Olivier to be equally brilliant in tragedy and comedy. Garrick ruled Drury Lane for thirty years, and when he retired the theatrical public was astonished to learn that a young playwright was to be his successor. But the playwright, being Irish, made up in courage what he lacked in discretion, and Richard Brinsley Sheridan wrote *The School for Scandal* to keep his house from going "dark". He also offered a second chance to the tragedienne who had "failed" in Garrick's last season, and Sarah Siddons repaid him by achieving an impact in tragedy no British actress has equalled before or since.

Mrs Siddons was fortunate to have returned to Drury Lane in 1782, for the sands were running out for Wren's theatre, and indeed for the Georgian theatre as a whole. The public and public taste veered away from traditional fare. The gathering forces of the Industrial Revolution recruited new spectators, factory-workers in search of the simplest forms of diversion as a brief respite from their sweated labour. Entertainment was to be found outside the theatre — in pleasure-gardens like Mr Sadler's once remedial Wells, in circuses and fairgrounds — and this taste spread to the theatres themselves. Drury Lane and Covent Garden bulged at the seams as the new masses crowded in; finally the old buildings were condemned and replaced by vast new amphitheatres, seating upwards of 3000.

They were no longer playhouses, they were pleasuredomes, gaudily decorated, increasingly equipped (as machinery evolved and gas lit the stage) to dazzle the eye, and increasingly debarrd from satisfying the mind or ear. An occasional genius might pierce the confusion: Edmund Kean, 5'4" but irresistible in his prime; William Charles Macready, sensitive, studious quarrelsome — but in general the initiative passed from the patent theatres to the dozens of "minor" houses springing up, first in the suburbs, then in the heart of London itself, until finally in 1843 the patents were abolished and all theatres placed on an equal footing.

It was perhaps appropriate that the Industrial Revolution should have produced an era of dramatic spectacle rather than dramatic literature. The technicians ruled the stage through their control of stage machinery; the old flats in grooves gave place to cloths flown in and out, and elaborate "set" scenes. The playwright was merely another technician, a carpenter constructing "effective situations" rather than a creative force. The two tubs and a real pump for which Mr Crummles commissioned a play from Nicholas Nickleby are entirely representative of the tasks which confronted the early Victorian playwright. The successful, like Charles Reade and Dion Boucicault, responded with stories of action and suspense, including at least one "sensation scene" in which the resources of the theatre were deployed to simulate ship-wrecks, train-crashes, houses on fire, and kindred marvels. A parallel movement to the spectacular was the historically authentic, strongly represented in the Shakespearean productions of Macready, Samuel Phelps, and particularly Charles Kean, Edmund's scholarly son, who applied antiquarian principles to his work at the Princess's Theatre in the 1850s, though he could never persuade his wife and leading lady to remove her petticoats in the cause of archaeology.

The Victorian theatre was essentially entertainment for the many, but in the second half of the period the public began to

diversify, and sufficient playgoers of some discrimination returned to justify the building of smaller theatres in which intimate effects and refined acting could be seen to advantage. Some of these buildings survive today (although frequently under threat of destruction!); the Criterion in Piccadilly Circus and the Vaudeville in the Strand both date from the early 1870s, but a long since demolished house, the old Prince of Wales's, off the Tottenham Court Road, set the tone for the "cup and saucer comedies" which Tom Robertson wrote and the Bancroft company performed with taste and finesse.

The emergence of an audience for "genteel" comedy in miniature playhouses was aided by a parallel movement: the growth of the music hall catering for broader theatrical tastes. The early part of the century had seen "song and supper rooms" operating in the heart of London, and entertainment offered at taverns and pleasure gardens in the suburbs. From the 1850s, however, these tended to be replaced by buildings specifically designed for musical entertainment, often on the site of an earlier tavern, with liquid refreshment as an essential part of their bill of fare. The Canterbury, in Lambeth, was one of the first; the Oxford (in Oxford Street), the Royal Holborn and the Middlesex (in Drury Lane) amongst the most famous. The music hall created its own favourites who also conquered the theatrical public by appearing in pantomime. At the turn of the century performers like Dan Leno and Marie Lloyd were more widely known than most "legitimate" actors. Because they catered for essentially popular audiences, the halls suffered more severely than the theatre from the impact of the cinema in the 1920s.

The change in the taste of the playgoing public, noticeable from the 1860s onwards, was not limited to miniaturists like Robertson. An actor of extraordinary, if eccentric, power and total dedication, Henry Irving, turned the Lyceum into an early National Theatre with his compelling performances of Shakespeare and melodrama (often Shakespeare as melodrama), and for two decades ruled

unchallenged as the leader of the theatrical profession, an achievement officially recognised by the conferment of the first theatrical knighthood on him in 1895. A related achievement was the creation of the Savoy Operas by W. S. Gilbert, Arthur Sullivan, and D'Oyly Carte, for the musical stage had plumbed depths of notoriety in the first half of the century, and the unsullied reputation of the newly built Savoy Theatre, offering matinee performances which ladies could safely attend unescorted, was a milestone in British theatrical history. The Savoy partners did more than restore the theatre's good name; they produced a repertory of comic operas which continue to give pleasure throughout the English-speaking world, not least in Australia.

What the 1880s lacked was an English drama, and the actor-managers of the next decade, Wyncham, Hare, Alexander, Tree, repaired this omission when they encouraged the native talents of Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones, and supremely if briefly, Oscar Wilde. The Society drama of the 1890s was literate, elegant, and entertaining not merely to the newly furnished stalls with their complement of white ties and jewelled throats, but to the loyal occupants of the gallery, descendants of the early Victorian pit. The late Victorian theatre stressed its physical and social partitions: the stage was now framed in gilt and the actors, brilliantly lit by electricity, were separated by the metaphorical "fourth wall" from the darkened auditorium, where the audience was allotted to stalls, dress circle, upper circle, or gallery, according to the station to which they were called. It was on this principle that such turn-of-the-century theatres as Her Majesty's, Wyncham's, and the New (now the Albery) were built.

Of course such opulent manifestations of theatrical success produced a reaction. In the 1880s a small but articulate group called insistently for drama to dig deeper and wider, and exemplified such spade-work in the plays of the little known but greatly suspect Ibsen. The creation in 1891 of the Independent Theatre, which grew into the State Society,

did not convert the theatrical public en masse to Ibsen, but it did bring out a native playwright who could serve the intellectual audience more acceptably. Most of Shaw's early plays were given Stage Society performances, but from 1904 to 1907 his work provided the mainstay of a major advance in the British theatre, the seasons at the Court Theatre under the direction of Granville Barker. The walls of Shaftesbury Avenue did not fall down at the blast of the Shavian trumpet — in fact theatres like the Globe and the Queen's continued to be built there at this time — but the "repertory theatre" now had both cause and champion, and in the years before 1914 found other homes at Manchester, Liverpool, and Birmingham, in a playhouse specially built by Barry Jackson.

In London's Waterloo Road a parallel movement gathered momentum. The Royal Victoria or "Old Vic" which had tactfully changed its name from the Coburg when Victoria's accession was signalled, had proved not at all the kind of playhouse to amuse its sovereign. Sinking in the 1860s to the murkiest depths of transpontine theatre, it was dredged up by the remarkable Emma Cons, refitted as the Royal Victoria Hall and Coffee Tavern, and with her even more remarkable niece Lilian Baylis to take the wheel, charted a course for utility opera and cut-price Shakespeare. What Shaw and Granville Barker achieved in Sloane Square, Cons and Baylis emulated in the New Cut: demonstrating that high-brow did not necessarily mean head-ache. The Old Vic's reward was to preserve under Ben Greet's direction the Shakespearean repertoire during the 1914-1918 War, when the old actor-managers had retired and the new theatrical shop-keepers offered mostly shoddy.

Though the restoration of peace brought the return of the actor-manager, with names like Seymour Hicks and Gerald du Maurier prominent on the bills, the princely hospitality of an Irving or Tree was no longer feasible. Shakespeare and the classical repertoire in particular proved economically and artistically daunting to the leaders of the



"Crowding the Pit", one of a series of caricatures entitled "Theatrical Pleasures" by Theodore Lane, 1821.

commercial theatre. Lilian Baylis's work in the Waterloo Road was carried on in the provinces by brave touring-managers, several of them pupils of Irving himself, like Martin-Harvey and Frank Benson, stalwart of the Stratford-on-Avon Festivals. But such itinerant preachers found pulpits increasingly hard to come by, as first the silent film and then the talkie claimed the playgoer's attention. The 1920s and 1930s were eras of cinema-building, not theatre-building, and even those theatres which opened in these years seemed to be built in the image of the local Odeon.

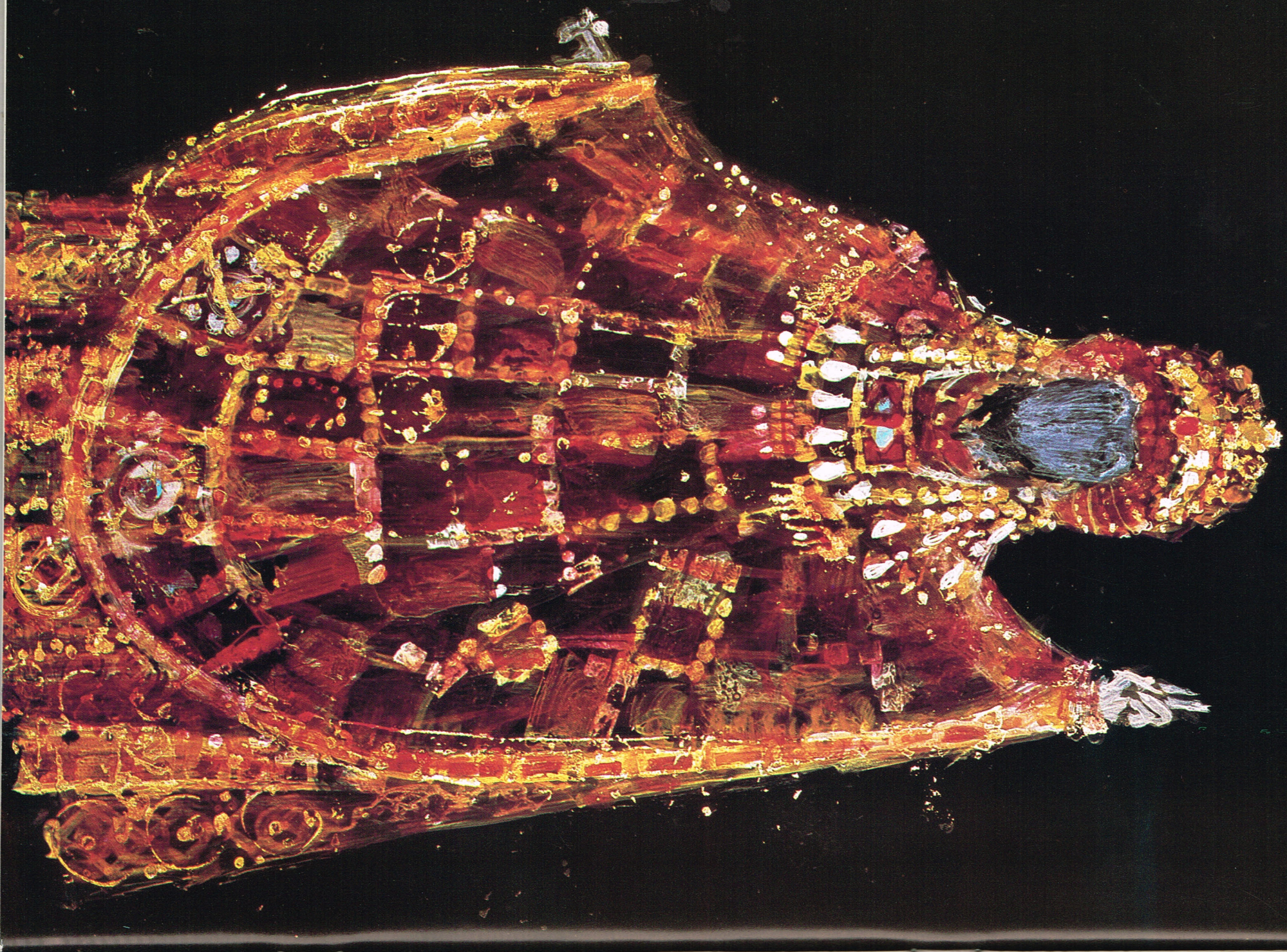
Out of the destruction of the Second World War came fresh hope and new resources. The principle of devoting taxpayer's and rate-payer's money to the theatre — resisted in Britain long after its acceptance on the Continent — first found expression in the Council for Encouragement of Music and the Arts, later to be the Arts Council. Even then its function was originally limited to mounting productions, not financing buildings. But demand creates supply; the dwindling of the provincial circuit forced local authorities to replace the old Empire or Hippodrome with the new Arts Centre, while in London the inability of commercial managements to mount the classical repertoire and their reluctance to risk experimental work persuaded successive governments to support such leading companies as the National Theatre (still working in Lilian Baylis's Old Vic), the Royal Shakespeare Company, now with a town-house, the Aldwych, as well as an Avonside address, the English Stage Company on Shaw's old battleground, the Court, Sloane Square, in ad-

dition to opera and ballet at Covent Garden and the Coliseum.

In the provinces the days of the private patron — Barry Jackson at Birmingham and Malvern, Miss Horniman at Manchester — have passed, but a combination of government funds (discreetly administered through the Arts Council) and local resources has produced exciting and ambitious projects, some in brand new homes like the Nottingham Playhouse, Sheffield's Crucible Theatre, or the new Birmingham Rep, some in old but restored theatres like the Liverpool Playhouse or Bristol's Theatre Royal, older even than the present Drury Lane, and now extended for the increased forces of the Bristol Old Vic.

Amongst theatre architects the conventional picture-frame stage has become discredited; platform stages, open stages, end-stages, arena stages, all are claimed to be the stage for today. The courage of these convictions has produced such pioneering projects as the Chichester Festival Theatre, and both the new National Theatre and the future home (in the City's Barbican) of the Royal Shakespeare Company will offer flexible staging in their main auditoria. Playgoers may wish to reserve judgment; after all if the staging of the play chiefly excites comment, it suggests some inadequacy in the writing, acting, or directing. But if the theatrical highlights of the past: Burbage's Hamlet, Garrick's Lear, Kean's Richard III, Irving's Shylock, Olivier's Othello — or such first nights as *The School for Scandal*, *The Importance of Being Earnest*, and *Saint Joan*, find their counterparts in the future, the standards of the British theatre should be safe.

• George Rowell, 1973



(Opposite)
Costume design by Desmond Digby for *The Rape of Lucretia*,
produced by The Australian Opera in 1971.
By courtesy of The Australian Opera.

AUSTRALIAN-BRITISH THEATRE EXHIBITION

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(*by courtesy of A.P.A. Leisure-Time International Ltd.*)

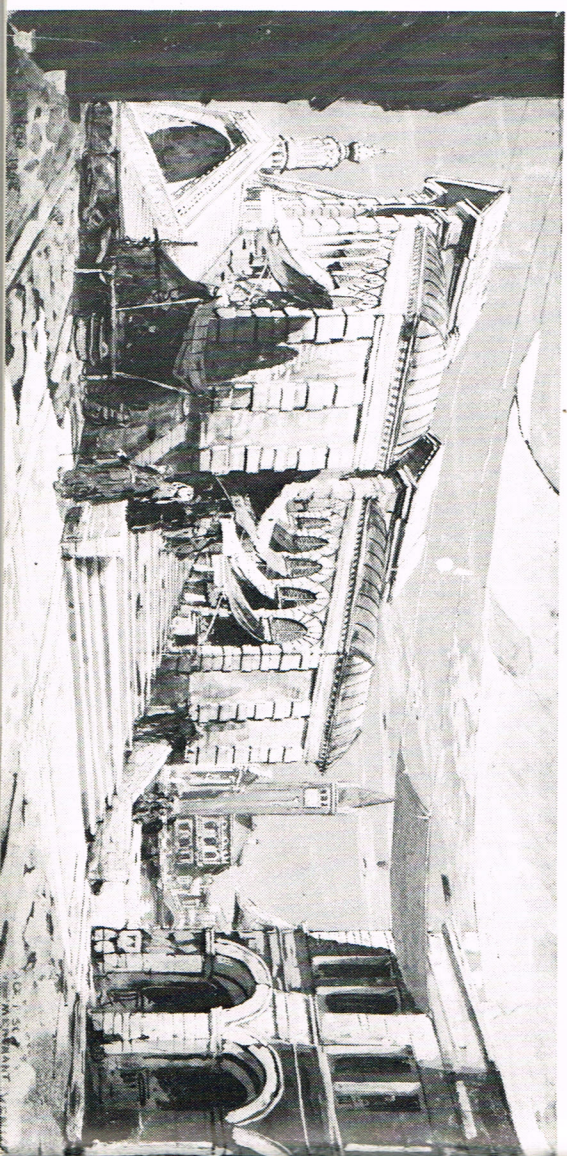
Sound Director: *John West (by courtesy of the A.B.C.)*



*Richard Brinsley Sheridan
(1751-1816) parliamentary
orator and dramatist, his best
known play being "The School
for Scandal."*

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*A design by Joseph Harker for
Sir Herbert Beerhohn Tree's
production of The Merchant
of Venice, at Her Majesty's
Theatre, Haymarket, in 1908.*



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