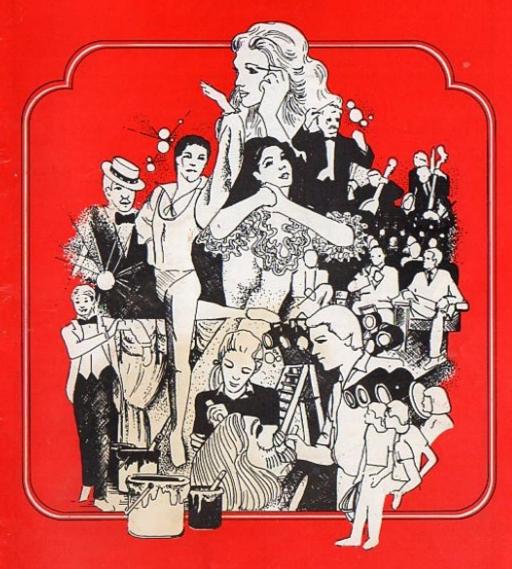
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by Peter David

Have you ever tried watching an audience watching a play?

I did, once, in the 516-seat auditorium of the Salisbury Playhouse. It was a strange experience. Just for a second I glanced back from my front-row seat, and was confronted by what seemed like 515 pairs of giant cats' eyes gleaming out of the darkness. What I saw was, of course, the effect of 515 pairs of spectacles reflecting the brightly-lit stage, the 516th being my own. But it was a surprisingly vivid impression, and one that set me thinking.

The almost universal manifestation of spectacles, though not conclusive, was at least indicative that the audience was mature. And it made me wonder whether theatre audiences, like so many church congregations, might one day become the sole preserve of a very few hardened, elderly hangers-on.

You may feel that to be unlikely; but it is evident in many theatres that audiences lean, at least figuratively, towards the middle years. And without an influx of younger faces as insurance, the emphasis is bound to become more pronounced. That this should be must be clear: why it should be is less so. But some of the reasons, I believe, have much to do with ourselves, the present mature theatregoing public.

The thing we can perhaps do least about is the price of the seats themselves. West End theatre seats are expensive: a family of four can now expect to pay something approaching £80 for top price seats at a musical, compared with about £8 just fifteen years ago. Add on only a small amount for travel and food, and the enterprise becomes prohibitive. The result all too often is that only the parents go or, more likely, nobody goes.

There is genuine concern amongst those at the Society of West End Theatre that not enough young people do get beyond the box office. This has been reflected in the introduction of student standby tickets whereby students turning up at the door just before a performance can obtain unsold seats at greatly reduced rates; and the scheme has more recently been extended to include sixth-formers. In addition there is the work of the Youth and Music Organisation whose warcry, Tomorrow's Andience Today, seems signally enlightened. For over thirty years it has striven successfully to give schoolchildren and others access to West End Culture at vast savings, and nowadays includes musicals on its list.

But finally, the commercial theatre is responsible to its backers, and thereby carries the obligation to see that most of its tickets are sold at an economical price.

Luckily, of course, that's only half the story. Provided that parents can remain steadfast against the bludgeoning persuasion of their offspring to take them to the latest blockbuster— 'But all my friends have seen it'— there are many alternatives. These are in the form of deals offered by hundreds of local professional theatre venues up and down the country, where concessions for children can often be most attractive. Salisbury Playhouse, to use the example given earlier, is, in fact, well aware of the importance of the juvenile theatregoer. It organises Playdays during which groups of school pupils are given a morning's worth of demonstrations about every aspect of theatrical presentation, followed by a performance of the current production, all for £2.50 a throw. And it's not the only theatre to offer this service; many others do the same.

So much for the theatres' own bids for the kids. What are we, the regulars, doing to help the situation? In my opinion, not enough.

It was Matilda's Aunt, in the cautionary verse by Hilaire Belloc, who refused to take her niece to see *The Second Mrs Tanquerung* as a punishment for telling lies, But how many parents, let alone aunts, would even consider taking their children to see such a piece today?

Admittedly there is a small but growing number of plays which most parents would still consider to be inappropriate fare for impressionable minds, usually on account of 'adult' content. But at a time when many children spend upwards of thirty hours a week watching dubious television programmes, a good production of almost any stage play worth the name can prove a remarkable revelation in terms of acceptability.

Over the years it has been my lot to arrange quite a number of theatre trips for young people. And almost every time the accompanying adults have been both surprised and delighted by their reaction, because it has reminded them of what it's like to be confronted by a new, or at least, unusual experience. After all, how would you feel, after a lifetime's viewing, to have your television screen extended to maybe thirty foot square, given a third dimension, and that indefinable quality of 'atmosphere' added?

Not that it happens every time. Very occasionally the magic doesn't work for a child; but those occasions I have found to be rare indeed. Much more typical is the inspiring sight, for example, of an 11-year-old with special educational needs sitting absolutely rapt through a cracking production of Miller's *The Cracible*. He may not have understood much of the language, but he understood the drama all right.

Yes, it's a gamble. And it's necessary to exercise great discretion over the choice of play. And I'm not suggesting that anyone should bully a child into seeing a play he doesn't want to see. But there is so much good drama to choose from at so many local venues these days that it would be extremely sad if it were not shared with a younger generation. For within my own experience I am astonished again and again at what a child is capable of getting out of a visit to the theatre.

There is one name that is quite likely to elicit a groan from many who are currently passing through our educational system: Shakespeare. That may be a crying shame, but it's true — unless they are already acquainted with him through the spoken rather than the written word. If the last time you took a child to the theatre was to a pantomime, think again. Might he not equally gain something of value from Shakespeare, or Sheridan, or Shaw? Not everybody likes pantomime, and children have preferences as much as adults.

It was to the playwright Charles Reade that have been attributed the lines: 'Sow an act and you reap a habit. Sow a habit and you reap a character. Sow a character and you reap a destiny'. It might be translated in more immediate terms today: Take a child to the theatre, and you may be giving him not only an evening's unreckoned entertainment, but also a lifetime's unrivalled fulfilment.

That, surely, is worth giving. And you may find your own theatregoing is enriched, too.

Programme by Stilwell Darby & Co. Ltd.

1987 45

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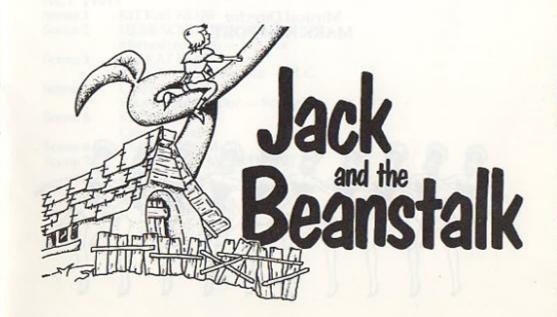
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Bob Dixon writes ...

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CABARET

Musical Director MARK NEWPORT



MUSICAL SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE

KIT KAT KLUB Scene 1

Wilkommen - M.C. & Chorus

A RAILWAY COMPARTMENT Scene 2

Scene 3 CLIFF'S ROOM

So What - Fraulen Schneider

Scene 4 & 5 KIT KAT KLUB

Don't Tell Mama - Sally & Kit Kat Girls Telephone Dane - Kit Kat Girls & Customers

CLÍFF'S ROOM Scene 6

Perfectly Marvellous - Sally & Cliff

KIT KAT KLUB Scene 7

Two Ladies - M.C. & Two Ladies

FRAULEIN SCHNEIDER'S LIVING ROOM Scene 8 It Couldn't Please Me More - Schneider & Schultz.

KIT KAT CLUB Scene 9

Tomorrow Belongs to Me - Kit Kat Girls, Waiters & Customers

CLIFF'S ROOM Scene 10

Why Should I Wake Up? - Cliff

KIT KAT CLUB Scene 11

Sitting Pretty — M.C. & Kit Kat Girls FRAULEIN SCHNEIDER'S LIVING ROOM Scene 12

Married - Schneider & Schultz

HER SCHULTZ'S FRUIT SHOP Scene 13

Meeskite - Schultz

Tomorrow Belongs to Me - Kost, Waiters & Customers

ACT TWO

Scene 6

Scene 1 KIT KAT KLUB

HERR SCHULTZ'S FRUIT SHOP Scene 2 Married (reprise) - Schultz

KIT KAT KLUB Scene 3

If You Could See Her Now - M.C.

Scene 4 CLIFF'S ROOM

What Would You Do? - Schneider

KIT KAT KLUB Scene 5

Cabaret - Sally CLIFF'S ROOM

RAILWAY COMPARTMENT Scene 7

FINALE

CAST (in order of appearance)

| | PAUL CODY |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| M.C. | PAUL CODY |
| Clifford Bradshaw | MARK BORDELL |
| Ernst Ludwig | GRAHAM TURNBULL |
| Customs Officer | RICHARD BODEK |
| Fraulein Schneider | CHRISTINE ANSON |
| Fraulein Kost | ELSPETH LINDSEY |
| Herr Schultz | GEOFF KNIGHT |
| Sally Bowles | CATHERINE GOLDING |
| Teléphone Girl | JULIA HARRIS |
| Kit Kat Girls | JACKIE BLIGH |
| | SUE COLLINGS |
| | GRETA JENKINS |
| | SALLY PEARSON |
| | KATY SEELEY |
| Max | JAMES INWOOD |
| Sailors | DAVID OGDEN |
| | COLIN HOATH |
| | GAVIN BLIGH |
| Two Ladies | SALLY PEARSON |
| | IULIA HARRIS |
| Gorilla | SALLY PEARSON |
| - Committee | |

Waiters, Guests:

Gavin Bligh, Richard Bodek, Mike Gilbert, Leslie Gershman, Colin Hoath, Marjorie Hanson, Doreen Magee, David Ogden, Diane Padley, Pauline Rawe, Barbara Robertson, Janet Sinfield, Chris Tero, Howard Wright.

Cabaret

Berlin 1929/30, the period of prosperity after the First World War. People felt for the first time that austerity was a thing of the past and they let themselves go. This joie de vivre was somewhat negative. All sorts of vulgar entertainments sprang up, sexual perversions were in vogue and Germany lived out its 'permissive' period with no real leaders - an ideal breeding ground for the Nazi party. The Kit Kat Klub was rife with sleazy decadence and frivolity, a bizarre MC and a beautiful English girl, Sally Bowles, leading the cabaret. The story is recounted by Clifford Bradshaw, an American author.

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Producer and Choreographer Gail Ashwell Musical Director Mark Newport Iane Beament Rehearsal Pianist Frank Bundle Stage Manager Keith Storey Lighting

Set Members of the Society

Catherine Golding and Sally Pascoe Wardrobe

Gillian Bransby and Jill Rout Properties

Evelyn Wilkinson Prompt House Manager/Ticket Secretary Basil Gathergood

E.L.O.D.S. & Westcliffe Costume Hire Costumes

lames Inwood

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PAST PRODUCTIONS

1973 Oklahoma, The Mikado. 1953 Trial by Jury. 1954 HMS Pinafore. 1974 The Pyjama Game. Salad Days. 1975 Fiddler on the Roof. The Gondoliers. Iolanthe, Patience, How to Succeed in Business Without

Really Trying.

1976 Music Hall, Iolanthe. 1977 Flappers and Flannels.

1978 Oh! What a Lovely War.

1980 Music Hall, Cabaret.

1979 Free as Air. The Arcadians.

1981 Carousel, Call Me Madam.

1985 The Sorcerer, Oklahoma.

1986 The Mikado.

1987 Finjan's Rainbow.

Sweet Charity. The Card. 1983 Memories. The Gondoliers.

Oh! What a Lovely War.

States Alive. Fiddler on the Roof.

Maid of the Mountains.

Orpheus in the Underworld.

The Mikado.

Yeoman of the Guard.

Trial by Jury. Pirates of Penzance.

The Gondoliers. Gypsy Baron.

1962 Iolanthe.

HMS Pinafore. 1963 Brigadoon. 1964

The Mikado.

La Belle Helene. Trial by Jury.

Ruddigore.

Lilac Time, Music Hall, Yeoman of the Guard. Music Hall.

1970 Merrie England. Me and My Girl.

1971 Orpheus in the Underworld. Gilbert & Sullivan Concert. Music Hall.

1972 Brigadoon, Gilbert & Sullivan Concert. The Boyfriend.



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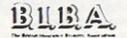
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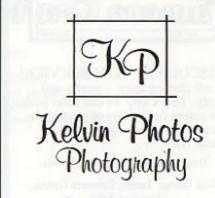
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"I DON'T WANT REALISM, I WANT MAGIC!" by Neil Monro-Davies

Let's play word association. I'll say the word 'theatre' and you tell me the first thing to come into your mind. I'll bet that nine times out of ten, the word conjures up the image of a large, red, plush, nineeenth-century theatre, dripping with gilded putti. For most people there is only one type of real theatre building; the kind that still dominates Shaftesbury Avenue and to a lesser extent, Broadway. Is this enthralment to the Victorian theatre building and all it entails one of the Victorian Values we should subscribe to? I think not.

It is not so much that we still expect our theatres to be swathed in crushed velvet and festooned with cherubs. You may well be reading this in one of the new purpose-built Arts Centres or in a nineteen thirties art-deco building. No, what I find distressing is that beneath the surface of the new there so often lurks the proseenium arch theatre and the pictorial stage. Our theatre has advanced since the days of Irving. There are new styles of acting, new types of drama and new visions of how to stage these forms; and yet, sometimes it seems as though very little has changed. It would be too sweeping to assert that it is primarily the physical limitations of the Victorian theatre which have retarded theatrical innovation. Nevertheless, theatre historians are fond of pointing out that, fads and fashions aside, theatre has not changed all that radically since the mid-nineteenth century. We have to face the fact that the type of space used largely determines the theatre which 'takes place' within it. The picture frame stage is not the last word in theatre. One might say that it is not written in stone that we should adhere to the proscenium arch, except for the fact that, in quite a literal sense, it is.

Before I be accused of rampant philistinism I ought to make it quite clear that I have nothing against Victorian buildings as such. Many of the theatres from that era are architectural gems, and certainly not carbuncles. It is, rather, the stranglehold they have on the theatrical imagination that disturbs me.

What plays are, in their essence, really suited to the proscenium stage? Precious few, from what we are pleased (and justified) in terming our great theatrical eras. Take Shakespeare. It required decades to sweep our stage clear of the legacy of Irving, with his cluttered and deadening realism. A replica of the Roman forum for Julius Caesar and real wildlife romping about in the woodland scenes of A Midsummer Night's Dream, forsooth! Such excesses amuse us now, as well they might. Yet shouldn't trapping the Bard within an equally inappropriate nineteenth-century proscenuim stage give us pause for thought?

It may be heresy to say so, but attending the main house productions at Stratford for the past few seasons I have felt more and more uneasy. The theatre seems on each occasion to have become more cavernous; the emotional and intellectual contact with the audience more tenuous. I hasten to add this is not wholly due to directorial concepts. The Bard himself (or rather, his good works) are beginning to seem lost on such a huge stage. What, in the end, do you fill the space with? 'Spectacle!' replies the ghost of Irving, and the RSC dutifully obliges. A great deal of Shakespearean staging and — not only at the RSC — tend towards the bombastic. We appear to have lost confidence in our ability to stage the plays successfully in large spaces, 'Shame', I hear the cry go up. 'Shakespeare demands large spaces!'. 'Nonsense!' I reply. Slowly and with faltering steps we are trying to discover a style appropriate to our own age, through which to bring the plays to life. An approach that doesn't demand spectacle and a playing style more appropriate to grand opera on the one hand, nor, on the other, minutely detailed realistic settings.

Studio theatres are now seen as essential by almost every respectable repertory company, as well as by the major national ones. Originally, I assume they were added so that companies could do small-scale and intimate work which was unlikely to attact large audiences. They were, and are, a place for experiment; not only with new plays but the classics as well. If Shakespeare is beginning to pale on large conventional stages, does performing him in smaller, less conventional spaces help? Indeed, yes, Lack of financial resource encourages an austerity of staging, and the acting style tends towards a similar leanness. Could any other production of Macbeth manage to cast, as it were, its spell, so magically as the version staged by Trevor Nunn at the Other Place in Stratford and the Warehouse in London?

Seated at Stratford in a dark but with barely two hundred other people, the terrifying intimacy of the production drew us forcefully into the world of Macbeth. Our claustrophobia became a metaphor for Macbeth's sense of being 'cabinned, cribbed, confined'. We listened as though for the first time to the see-sawing rhythms of the verse, and this most difficult of plays seemed more translucent than ever before. We had approached the core of the play by the evening's end and that was an immense achievement.

It is this quality of concentration which makes studio Shakespeare, and other classic theatre, such a thrilling experience. Not all productions can, of course, attain such heights. But the potential is there. Critics claim that audiences are hungry for tragedy. Perhaps, but I think they are also longing to listen once more. If, indeed, the chance to do this were the only benefit of studio Shakespeare, it would be an invaluable one.

Freeing the theatre from its conventional spaces does not, of course, mean that small is always beautiful. The ideal late twentieth-century theatre space would be an area capable of rapid and fundamental transformation at the touch of a button. Flexible spaces, however, create formidable problems with which we are only beginning to come to terms. How do you design a play to be seen in the round? If you have a semi-circular auditorium, such as the Olivier Theatre, how do you design sets for nineteenth-century plays; Ibsen, for instance? Illusionistic setting will no longer do in such vast areas. Such difficulties are not easily surmounted.

Those stage pioneers of the early twentieth century, Edward Gordon Craig and Adolphe Appia, who with startling but clear vision set forth the new rules of theatrical design and, above all, its intimate link with stage lighting, are still waiting to have their theories fully tested. Even after all these years audiences still resist abstract settings for plays they fondly imagine are the province of 'realism'. Yet it is the inner voice of the great playwrights, Chekhov, Ibsen and Strindberg and others, which should speak to us from within their works, unencumbered by the trappings of realistic box sets. The plays of these men — in so many ways far ahead of their time — were conceived in an age that still demanded verisimilitude on stage. But they do not, therefore, when presented to a contemporary audience, have to be reserved in the amber of a previous generation's idea of what constituted 'stage realism',

When Gordon Craig produced his revolutionary Hamlet, it was in Russia, at the famed Moscow Arts Theatre, Too often in the past and even today, much of the impetus for theatrical change has come from abroad. A recent television documentary of the German director Peter Stein showed us glimpses of his startling concept for As You Like It. Performed in enormous open settings within his large Berlin theatre complex, the production made our timid ventures into 'promenade' productions seem very half-hearted.

In France, too, the work of Peter Brook (yet another exile) and Patrice Chéreau involves constant exploration of new ways for performing and presenting. Are we in Britain really so staid that we cannot support and encourage similar men within our theatre? There are some signs of hope even in the currently gloomy artistic climate. Thanks to the efforts of many people over (far too) many years, we now have a National Theatre. After some false starts and a period of some vagueness of direction, it is beginning to attract innovative directors such as Mike Alfreds and Robert David Macdonald, Such men have made a virtue of being out of the mainstream of British theatre, Alfreds with his touring group Shared Experience and Macdonald as the eminence grise of the Glasgow Citizens' Theatre. Let us hope they don't lose it now!

Such men are dangerous and all the better for it. Unconventional minds are needed to drag the theatrical establishment forward. The psychic and scenic legacy of the nineteenth century hangs upon our theatre like Queen Victoria's mourning. It is time to throw off our widow's weeds.

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