

The Bradford Brush-Up

Alhambra gets £8.25m Refurbishment

The "Curtains!!!" Committee, which operated under the auspices of SAVE Britain's Heritage, recently researched all Britain's surviving pre-1914 theatres and music halls. They listed Bradford's Alhambra as a 'three-star' example - "a very fine theatre or music hall of the highest theatrical quality" - the best possible rating.

In fact, the theatre opened as a music hall, and isn't pre-1914 at all, having opened its

doors at Easter 1914 with a variety show. But one would agree whole-heartedly with the Curtains Committee that it should have been included in their research, because it was one of the very last theatres to be built in the Victorian/Edwardian grand theatre style. And to the present day it has retained its intimacy, despite having a large auditorium with 1500 seats in stalls, circle and upper circle.

The first controlling company's agreement was terminated after two years, and in 1916 owner Francis Laidler went into an agreement with Moss Empires to run the theatre which lasted for 42 years. Laidler died in 1955 and eventually in 1959 the building was offered for sale and subsequently purchased by the then Bradford Corporation. It was leased back to the manager of the day, Rowland Hill, who ran it in partnership with



A 'fish-eye' lens view of the Alhambra, Bradford, taken from directly under the proscenium arch, showing stage area (above) and the auditorium.

Herbett Shutt. Since 1974 the theatre has been directly administered by the Bradford Metropolitan Authority and used as the district's major venue for stage productions of all kinds including tours and one-night concerts.

The popularity of the venue helped persuade the local authority that as part of its huge spending on leisure facilities, the Alhambra should not be left out of the small grid of number one touring theatres in the UK capable of attracting the top shows.

A huge redevelopment programme was commenced in 1984, and completed in May this year. It has cost £8.25m, and has involved the creation of new front of house facilities including bars, the creation of a new large stage and fly tower, new dressing rooms and company accommodation, and the creation of an additional performance/rehearsal space.

The theatre is now able to accommodate every type of performing art, and is also able to cater for conferences and small exhibitions, as well as providing general public access to the front of house facilities. Audience facilities include large new bars and foyer areas, and the entrance to the theatre has been enlarged to provide easier access to the fully computerised box office.

The auditorium itself has been completely refurbished to enhance its fine Edwardian design and a new orchestra pit provided to accommodate up to 65 musicians. Considerable work has been done to improve the stage and backstage facilities. The stage itself has been completely rebuilt with a semi-sprung maple strip floor and the rake has been eliminated. The effective stage area has been almost doubled and now has



Sparkling new exterior of the Bradford Alhambra.

a depth of approximately 18 metres.

The fly tower has been enlarged and now has over 50 counterweight lines, greatly increasing the flexibility of production. The new scene dock and hydraulic lift enable flats and the bulkiest props to be taken directly from the scene dock to the stage.

New dressing rooms, with a mixture of sizes from individual stars to chorus areas, will now accommodate over 100 artistes. Overflow facilities can be made available in the new rehearsal area adjacent to the stage. Touring company offices have been included in the new dressing room area together with a new green room and bar, band room, war-

drobe, props store, workshops and staff accommodation.

Behind the stage the new rehearsal space is equal in size to the Alhambra's acting area. When this is not being used for rehearsals, it will be available for small-scale theatre productions, theatre workshops and exhibitions.

Technical manager at the Alhambra is 35 year old Roger Bushby-Sansom who was formerly technical manager with Northern Ballet Theatre for seven years, having toured with them worldwide and throughout the UK. "It took all the prestige of opening a new theatre with all its challenges to entice me away from the touring and the ballet I love,"



The refurbished theatre was re-opened on 27th May, 1986.

he told L+SI. "I am over the moon at the backstage facilities, and we should now be capable of taking anything people care to throw at us."

Appropriately, the re-opening production in late May was by Ballet Rambert and it included a world premiere in the programme. It was lit and staged by Bushby-Sansom. "According to the critics, it's the best dance stage anywhere in the country," he said.

Further praise for the venue came from Tommy Steele, whose new one-man show was premiered at the Alhambra in early July for a short season.

Lighting equipment was installed by Northern Light and control is by a Strand Gemini 150 way board. Sound was installed by Audix Limited and performance sound is based on a Soundcraft 400B desk patchable into 72 microphone lines, 8 full range proscenium loudspeakers and 46 relay loudspeakers. The communication system provides show relay and paging to five areas from a custom stage manager's desk and also paging from stage door and box office positions. The portable stage manager's desk also contains a ring intercom system, cue lights, show relay controls, effects controls and a telephone intercom.

The whole concept has been based on providing the highest level of facilities throughout the venue, and from chandeliers and wall fittings based on the original designs to enhance the character of the auditorium, through to special cornice fittings in the foyers and feature lighting to bars, nothing has been forgotten in a grand attempt to put Bradford's Alhambra firmly in the top flight of Britain's touring theatres.

Architects

Renton Howard Wood Levin
Partnership in consultation with Terence Whitwell, Bradford Metropolitan Council.

Consulting Engineers

Ove Arup and Partners.

Quantity Surveyors

Cleeds.

Management Contractors

Higgs and Hill Building Limited.

Theatre Consultants

Theatre Projects Limited.

Equipment:

Stage Lighting Equipment:

Lighting Board Strand Gemini 150 ways with infra-red designer's remote for use in stalls or on stage.

FOH Lighting Circuits 38.

Stage Lighting Circuits 112.

5 Internally wired Bars, 4 x 18 way, 1 x 12 way.

Lanterns: FOH total 40 Silhouette 15 1 kw.

Loose Equipment:

7 Silhouette 15 profiles

6 Harmony 15.28 profiles

20 Harmony 22.40 profiles

48 Harmony F fresnels 1kw

Cadenza fresnels 2kw

26 Iris 1 floods 1 kw

4 Circuit Groundrow

3 Follow Spots, Strand Solo

Ancillary Power: 200 TPN located on stage level, down stage right. 12 x 6 way, 20m multicore.

Sound Equipment:

Desk and Stage:

Soundcraft 400B desk with 20 into 2.

70 mic inputs around stage area including a 19 way stage box - all appearing on jack field in Control Room.

70 tie line sockets around stage area - all appearing on jack field in Control Room.

2 x B77 Revox reel-to-reel tape machines.

1 x Technics cassette machine.

1 x Technics disk player.

Amps:

Altec Lansing 1650B pre-set minus equalisers powered through Audix Mos-Fet MPA pre-amps.

Yamaha PZ2002 main amps drive pros left (2) - right (2) -



Control room showing Gemini lighting control board.



Sound control is based on a Soundcraft 400B desk.

cluster (2) - sub-bass L & R (1) plus 2 floating for foldback. All operating with Meyer limiters.

Speaker System:

All Meyer UPA1 (Pros L & R) (centre top cluster) with back-up reinforcement on digital delay under circle balcony.

Foldback: 2 x Yamaha Wedge S2115HZ; 2 x Yamaha S3115H (general work); 2 x E V Eliminator 10.

Microphones:

6 x Audio Technica ATM10R omni capacitor

4 x Audio Technica ATM41 cardioid moving coil

4 x Beyer MZ60N moving coil (1 u/s) cardioid

2 x RS 249/946 moving coil switched cardioid

1 x Unisound EM83D capacitor switched din socket

+1 x AKG CK8 rifle on show relay

8 x AKG C451EB cardioid capacitor

1 x AKG C451E cardioid capacitor

8 x AKG CK15 heads for above

2 x AKG CK5 rifle mics

4 x Audio Technica AT 815 rifle mics (battery only)

4 x Electrovoice RE18 cardioid moving coil

4 x Shure SM58LC cardioid moving coil

2 x TP DI100 D I Boxes

2 x AR 116/117 D I Boxes

Communications:

Headsets: 10 x DT108 headsets; 8 x Weblex box packs.

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Auditorium of Grieghallen in Bergen, Norway, during preparations for the 1986 Eurovision Song Contest—see feature this issue.

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