

STEPHEN JOSEPH :
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HIS WORK AND IDEAS
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by

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R.D.W.

SUMMARY

Stephen Joseph died in Scarborough, at the age of 65, on 4 October, 1967. The Times obituary referred to him as "perhaps the most successful missionary to work in the theatre since the Second World War". This dissertation will record the development of his work, and examine the underlying ideas which led him to attempt to reform post-war theatre in this country.

The first Chapter will trace Stephen Joseph's own education, his early work in the theatre and his teaching at drama school. In 1955 he broke away from teaching to launch his double experiment of new plays in a new theatre form in both Scarborough and London. This was followed two years later by the setting up of a touring circuit and the eventual establishment of a permanent theatre in the round in the Potteries. These ventures overlapped in time, but for the sake of clarity of exposition Chapter II will devote a section to each.

He undertook these activities because he thought the post-war theatre needed reform. The two main needs, as he saw it, were for new playwrights and for new theatre forms. Chapter III discusses his work in developing new playwrights and Chapter IV examines the ideas that led him to advocate theatre in the round and other forms of open stage.

To support himself at various stages in his career, and perhaps, ultimately, to support his ideas about theatre, Stephen Joseph taught

drama in higher education. His methods, which differed little from the way he worked with young professionals in the theatre, are discussed in Chapter V.

A final Chapter will attempt to make an assessment of his contribution to theatre and to education.

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CHAPTER IEARLY STAGES

Theatre is always in a state of transition, but the rate of change is slow. This is particularly so with theatre buildings. During the first half of this century the theatres of Europe were dominated by the proscenium arch. The audience was separated from the action by a picture frame through which the playgoers looked at the actors.

Various attempts were made to challenge the monopoly of this form of presentation and to bring actors and audience together in one architectural volume. Early experiments include the productions of William Roel and the Elizabethan Stage Society, and the attempt of W. B. Yeats to establish 'an unpopular theatre' in some great dining-room or drawing-room. In the twenties Reinhardt experimented with a thrust stage at the Grosses Schauspielhaus in Berlin and, at Cambridge, Terence Gray removed the proscenium arch to give himself an open stage. After the war the number of experiments increased. One landmark was Tyrone Guthrie's production of The Three Estates on a platform stage in the Assembly Hall at Edinburgh in 1948. This led to Guthrie being invited to design theatres with thrust stages at Stratford, Ontario and at Minnesota.

One of the most interesting (certainly from a British point of view) pioneers is Stephen Joseph. From 1955 to 1967 he experimented with theatre in the round, the most extreme form of open stage. Far

from being separated from the audience by a proscenium arch, the actors are placed on an island stage in the middle of the audience.

His reasons for developing this form of theatre will be discussed later (Chapter IV) but it is worth noting here that they were intimately linked with his plans for the development and encouragement of new playwrights. In 1955 he launched the first professional season of theatre in the round in this country with a programme of four new plays by unknown authors. Alan Ayckbourn, artistic director of the permanent theatre in the round at Scarborough, where the first season was held, describes the venture as "one of the first experimental fringe companies".¹ It was certainly set up before the breakthrough for new playwrights at the Royal Court in 1956 and before Arts Council grants were available for experimental work.

Since Joseph's work sprang from a very personal vision, a brief account of his early life and experience in theatre should be helpful in understanding his work. Michael Stephen Joseph was born on 13 June 1921 into an upper middle-class family with strong literary and theatrical connections; he was the younger son of Michael Joseph, the publisher, and Hermione Gingold the actress. After preparatory school at Burstow in Surrey Joseph attended Clayesmore, a public school in Dorset, where his interest in theatre may have been encouraged. School records show that he played Mr. Blanquet in a production of John Drinkwater's Bird in Hand.²

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1. Interview at Scarborough 21.9.78.
 2. Letter from Headmaster 23.2.77.

By this time his father was divorced and married for the second time. His step-sister Shirley remembers Stephen as a helpful elder brother who could mend toys and explain how things worked but he was not, it seems, very happy at home.¹ He made clandestine trips across London by bicycle to visit his mother's side of the family. The discovery of these visits led to family rows which may have contributed to a change in Stephen's educational plans. He left his public school at the age of 16, after only a term or two in the sixth form, and went as a very young student to the Central School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art at the Royal Albert Hall. Miss Gwynneth Thurburn, a former principal of the school, says he distinguished himself for his initiative and ideas rather than his skill as an actor. He completed the two year course in the summer of 1939 and received a first-class certificate with a B+ for diction.²

Joseph appears to have found some theatre work as soon as he left drama school. An information sheet he prepared for lecturing agencies during his visit to America in 1952 states that "before war broke out in 1939 he had gained some experience in broadcasting, television and stage management".³ He also told his friend David Campton that he "walked on" in a production of Eugene O'Neill's Marco Millions. I can find no details of these activities and it is possible that some of them overlapped his last year as a student. According to one correspondent Joseph used an assumed name when seeking work because of anti-semitism in the theatre.⁴

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1. Interview at Sudbury 5.1.77.
 2. Letter from Gwynneth Thurburn 23.2.77.
 3. Scarborough papers.
 4. Letter from Terry Lane 20.4.78.

In September 1939 the war started and interrupted Joseph's theatrical career. The London theatres closed at the outbreak of hostilities and Stephen did some teaching in two private schools in Bristol. The only mention I can find of theatrical activity is a headmaster's reference praising "a very successful production of Twelfth Night" in the Christmas term of 1940.¹ The following year Stephen volunteered for the Royal Navy as an ordinary seaman, and after a year on the lower deck he was commissioned into the R.N.V.R. He was twice decorated for bravery. On the first occasion he jumped overboard into a wintry sea off Scotland to save a puppy, the ship's mascot from drowning. The second award was the Distinguished Service Cross gained by sinking the enemy while serving as a gunnery officer on a destroyer in the Mediterranean.² Both acts illustrate aspects of his character which possibly contributed to his success as a theatre pioneer in later years. He was never afraid to face the most rigorous physical circumstances in winter touring, and his application and mechanical aptitude in mastering range-finding equipment was devoted to designing and installing technical equipment in theatres.

In January 1946 Joseph secured early release from the Navy because of the national shortage of teachers, and he taught at Heatherdown preparatory school at Ascot for two terms before going up to Cambridge. He read English at Jesus College, following the shortened two year degree course that was available to ex-service students. There is

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1. Headmaster's reference 9.1.46. Scarborough paper.
 2. Letter from Ministry of Defence 21.2.78.

little evidence that he devoted a great deal of time to the study of literature but he plunged into a wide range of theatrical activity including acting, producing, stage design and writing plays and revue material.

One of his contemporaries at Cambridge, Richard Baker, the TV newscaster and music critic, remembers Stephen playing Lennox in Macbeth with the Marlowe Society "in a rather grand statuesque manner" and performing a leading role in The Dioclesian in a "heavy" style which bordered on parody.¹ This highly theatrical approach seems to have been a permanent feature of his acting and his step-sister Shirley was scolded for laughing at his ponderous performance as "a Chinaman with a pigtail" in a university production of Gorki's The Lower Depths.

His interest in scenic design is shown in an article, 'Outlook for Decor', commenting on the sets for a number of Cambridge productions. he was concerned, as he was all his life, both with artistic achievement and the economic use of limited resources. The dramatic societies were having difficulties with their limited stock of scenery in the post-war period when raw materials were very scarce. Stephen advocated the imaginative use of junk materials,

An approach to this is made with very amusing results by Richard Ashton for What Happened in the Bedroom at the A.D.C. Nurseries for which the stage itself was draped with an enormous web made of rope.²

What Happened in the Bedroom was one of Stephen's own early attempts at writing for the stage and demonstrates the love of theatricality already

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1. Letter from Richard Baker 22.11.77.
 2. Cambridge Writing, Easter Term 1948, 30-35.

noted in reference to his acting.¹ The action of the play takes place at the rehearsal of a lost scene from Macbeth. The missing scene takes place in Duncan's bedroom and replaces the Porter scene which is an interpolation by Massinger. It reveals that Duncan was murdered by Donalbain with assistance from Malcolm and shows that Macbeth is innocent. The piece, which is farcical in tone, opens in darkness with the actors falling over the scenery. The lights have failed and the rehearsal is punctuated with similar disasters. It should play well enough to an audience who know Shakespeare's play and can pick up the esoteric jokes.

But Stephen's most successful contribution to the dramatic life of the University and to his own development as a man of the theatre was his work as producer of two of the Footlights revues. As well as directing, Stephen's enthusiasm spilled over into designing scenery and lighting, making properties, devising publicity stunts and writing lyrics. He was also very good at communicating his own enthusiasm and getting the best out of his company. A letter from Peter Tranchell who was responsible for much of the music, gives an insight into Stephen's method of working:

Our collaboration for the Footlights Revues of 1947 and 1948 was an extremely happy one. Stephen was not a quarreller or a bully. I recall no scenes, no hysterics, no noses put out of joint. His rooms were the venue for innumerable get-togethers (and mugs of tea) during which ideas were discussed and tried over. There might be three or four of us, but sometimes nearer a dozen. It was very jolly and there was a sense of co-operation. Stephen was a past master of encouragement.²

1. What Happened in the Bedroom, Manchester papers.
 (See Appendix II for a note on unpublished material, e.g. Manchester papers.)
 2. Letter from Peter Tranchell 24.11.77.

Many of those features, the friendliness, the informality, the cups of tea and above all the encouragement to people to develop their own ideas became part of his pattern of work as a director.

The 1947 revue was the first to be staged after the war and seems to have been a slightly hurried affair with last minute efforts to meet the Footlights Dramatic Club tradition that everything performed, both words and music, should be written by members of the society. But the 1948 edition, La Vie Cambridgienne reached a very high standard indeed. A local critic found,

enough wit and intelligence to float a whole squadron of costlier and sloppier London revues.¹

W. A. Darlington of The Daily Telegraph singled out Stephen for "a special word of praise" both as writer and producer and the News Chronicle critic remarked,

Every time I was interested enough to look at my programme I seemed to see the name Stephen Joseph and I now find that this young man produced the whole show, wrote the best sketches and designed some of the scenery.¹

Excerpts from the revue were recorded by the B.B.C. on the Light programme and in July some material from the revue was televised from Alexandra Palace.

By the time the programme was televised Stephen had come down from University with a lower second degree and a file of press-cuttings on his theatrical activities. But good notices of student productions, even in the national press are no guarantee of employment in the theatre.

1. From photocopies provided by Cambridge A.D.C.

Stephen Joseph started, or re-started, his career in the professional theatre with a series of short engagements including work as an assistant scene painter and as a stage manager. Fortunately there were two slightly longer seasons in repertory when Stephen was able to clarify his views and find his feet as a director.

In November 1948 Stephen joined the Lowestoft Repertory Company as producer. He was lucky in his colleagues who included Tom Lingwood, the designer, and John Neville, as yet an unknown young actor. It was weekly repertory, which meant rehearsing a new play every week, but the three were enthusiastic, hard-working and talented. J. C. Trewin writes in his biography of John Neville

Together Joseph and Neville discussed various productions. Neville saw that the more he worked the better he did it. Work breeds work, there is usually time to fit something into a scheme, though the Lowestoft schedule tried to make it as awkward as possible.¹

The choice of plays was quite adventurous for a seaside rep. in winter and included London Wall by John Van Druten, Eden End by J. B. Priestley, an original Christmas revue partly written by Stephen Joseph, Ronald Duncan's translation of Cocteau's play The Eagle has Two Heads and Power Without Glory by Michael Clayton Hutton.²

The last mentioned production, Power Without Glory, seems to have excited the company and exasperated the public. Stephen decided to ignore the restrictions imposed by the proscenium arch and instead of the actors coming down centre stage and playing their big speeches out

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1. J. C. Trewin, John Neville, 1961, p.26.
 2. Other plays in the season were an adaptation of Jane Eyre, The Magic Cupboard by Percy Walsh and Is Life Worth Living? by L. Robinson. Programme details from Lowestoft Journal 1948/49. No reviews.

front, the players faced each other and used a close intimate style of playing which related to the realistic set and the naturalistic lighting. The result was the biggest batch of letters in the history of the Lowestoft theatre, all complaining.

It was while he was smarting from this response that Stephen saw his first production of theatre in the round. He watched a performance given by a touring amateur company under the direction of Jack Mitchley, the Norfolk County Drama Adviser.¹ Presentation in the round, with the audience seated on all four sides of the acting area seemed to provide an exciting new set of answers to the technical problems with which Joseph was battling. He wrote,

... when I saw this production of A Phoenix Too Frequent in the round I was delighted at the simplicity of the lighting and staging, and the natural and easy way the actors set about their tasks. Clearly many tiresome conventions might be abandoned and new ones seized to advantage. I enjoyed the performance immensely and returned to the repertory theatre with a bee beginning to buzz at the back of my mind.²

It was to be some years before Stephen could experiment with this form of staging and he continued to work in the conventional theatre. His second stint of repertory was at Frinton in the following summer (1949). While he was at Cambridge Stephen had met an actor named Oscar Quitak, a founder of the Under Thirty Theatre Group. The aim of the group was to encourage young talent and part of the policy was to try out new plays in West End theatres on Sunday evenings. The group

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1. Letter from Jack Mitchley, now Essex County Drama Adviser 9.3.77.
 2. Draft article in Stephen's handwriting. Manchester papers.

also decided to run a summer season to give its members work and Quitak asked Joseph who had acquired a wide range of theatre skills to join the company.

I asked Stephen to be art director, which meant he made and painted all the sets, he also directed three of the plays, acted in two of them (not very well) and was business manager - he and I got the highest paid salaries of the company, together with the other six members - we all received £8 a week.¹

It was a tiny stage and a tiny budget and Stephen used great ingenuity in designing sets which disguised the cramped conditions. The Stage for 25 August, 1949, in a review of Shaw's Candida records that

production and scenery (which is particularly effective) are by Stephen Joseph.²

His role of business manager gave Stephen experience which was invaluable when he came to budgeting and planning for his own summer seasons. The company at Frinton rented a house for the season. For one glorious week the volunteer cook was Hermione Gingold, and, according to Quitak, she arranged for special deliveries of food daily from Fortnum's of Piccadilly. When the young company finished the season £22 "in the black" they really felt they had arrived. Stephen, however, was ready to try something new.

A few weeks after the season finished Joseph started teaching at the Central School of Speech and Drama in London. It was just ten years since he had completed his own training there in 1939.

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1. Letter from Oscar Quitak 19.1.77.
 2. The Stage 25.8.49. A sketch of Stephen Joseph's set at Frinton for An Inspector Calls by J. B. Priestley appears in his book Scene Painting and Design (1969).

The leading drama schools in London have always offered teaching opportunities to the actor who is between engagements or playing in a long run which leaves him free in the day. Such teaching provides a useful link between the drama schools and the theatre, giving the students experience of professional standards and providing the actor with a useful supplement to his income. Teaching at a drama school can also give an actor or director breathing space and time to think in what direction he wants to go next.

Stephen consulted Gwyneth Thurburn, Principal of Central School about a teaching post. She remembered him from his days as a student there and offered him a trial production with students. She thinks it was a scene from J. B. Priestley's Dangerous Corner. The scene was a success and Stephen was invited to join the staff to teach acting and to direct plays.

Joseph's teaching methods will be discussed in Chapter Five. As far as his own development was concerned he experimented as a producer with a wide range of styles and forms of presentation. He produced The Oresteia of Aeschylus with a highly stylised chorus whose movement patterns were copied from Greek vases.¹ Shakespeare he always presented very simply with a minimum of setting. His choice of plays at this time included Restoration tragedy, The Rival Queens, and German expressionism, Gas.² Strindberg's plays interested him and I saw a production of Lucky Peter's Travels performed on a constructivist setting of builders'

1. Letter from Alison Milne 15.3.79.

2. Letter from Jeffery Dench 18.1.79.

ladders and wooden planks. A theatrically effective forest scene was achieved by actors sitting on top of ladders, waving branches and singing like birds.

The stage of the practice theatre was built over the entrance of the Royal Albert Hall where the drama school was then housed. The rather oddly shaped curved auditorium was situated between the inner and outer walls of the building. It was a difficult theatre to use, except for the most conventional form of staging. Stephen attempted to increase its flexibility by building lighting towers of builders' scaffolding. He also carried out a series of Shakespeare productions on a small thrust stage 12 feet square. He set both the platform, and the audience which surrounded it equally on three sides, on the large main stage. Stephen offered more advice on movement to his actors than was usual to him and many of the two-handed scenes were played on what he called a "forced diagonal". One actor stood up-stage right while the other stood down-stage left, their bodies faced up and down stage but their heads were turned so that their eyes met. The idea was that every member of the audience had a fair share of fronts and backs. As a rehearsal technique it certainly helped the actors to break the proscenium arch habit of playing everything straight out front. In a talk on his work Stephen mentioned experimenting with theatre in the round at Central. None of the past students I have consulted can remember such a production and it is possible that he used it as a teaching method rather than in performance.¹

1. The writer was taught by Stephen Joseph at Central School 1950-51.

After two years at Central, Stephen asked for unpaid study leave to visit America for the academic year 1951-52. Gwynneth Thurburn, who had already decided that Stephen was not of a temperament to confine himself to one thing indefinitely, encouraged him in his plans and corresponded with him while he was away.¹ He had originally hoped to spend the year visiting theatres but to qualify for a grant he had to study for a higher degree. He registered for a Master of Fine Arts at Iowa University where he followed a very varied programme. As well as directing, he acted in several plays including the leading role of the lawyer in Terence Rattigan's The Winslow Boy, performed with at least a hint of the grand manner of his Cambridge days. The Daily Iowan reports

Stephen Joseph strode through the part of Sir Robert Morton with a mixture of callow cynicism and retrained sentiment.¹

He also followed some sort of course in scenic design and his papers at Manchester contain 16 large colour sketches of settings for plays ranging from Oedipus Rex to The Emperor Jones by Eugene O'Neill. The colours are bold, the drawings are clear and the designs look both attractive and practical.

But for his main area of study he chose play-writing and his thesis was a three-act play What Would Mildred Have Said. The Mildred of the title is dead but her husband and children base all their actions on her precepts. The family have a fairly dull time of it until they

1. The Daily Iowan 20.10.51.

discover accidentally that Mildred was not the paragon of virtue they believed and decide to follow their own desires. According to David Campton who has read the script the play does not seem to have been a masterpiece, but it was supported by an excellent production by the author and satisfied the Faculty requirements for his higher degree.¹

While he was in the U.S.A. Stephen made time to visit a number of theatres. He had seen theatre in the round in this country as a temporary fit-up, but in America he found purpose built theatres with central staging. He liked what he saw and it must have been at about this time he decided he wanted to try this form of presentation in England. After his return to teaching at Central in the autumn of 1952 he had long discussions with several of his colleagues about the advantages of theatre in the round over conventional theatre.² As well as the artistic benefits he advanced arguments on the grounds of economy. He compared the building and running costs of a conventional theatre with a fly tower and a full set of scenery with the simpler building and staging required in the round.

Stephen also brought back from America the idea that play-writing was a craft that could be taught. His powers of self-criticism told him he would never become a great author himself but he felt he knew how to help and encourage others. The year after he returned from America Stephen persuaded Central School to set up an evening course of

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1. Interview with David Campton 4.1.77. At Joseph's suggestion Campton adapted the thesis play for 1956 Scarborough season. New title Idol in the Sky.
 2. Letter from Lawrence Hayes 26.5.78.

lectures open to the public on 'The Art of the Playwright'. Most of the plays for the early seasons of theatre in the round derived from Stephen's evening classes and weekend schools on play-writing.

But this is to look ahead. For three years after his return from America, from 1952 to 1955, Stephen went back to teaching at Central School. His reputation at the school was high and a colleague remembers spontaneous cheering from the students to mark his return.¹ Shirley Jacobs, a former student, recalls him entering to take rehearsals, "large, eccentric and a little frightening". He had plenty of energy and enthusiasm and became involved in extra-curricular performances and tours by the students. In December 1952 he directed The Careless Husband by Colley Cibber at the N.U.S. Drama Festival at Leeds and the following summer he took a student company to Bucharest and to Warsaw playing Shem in a production of Noah and directing his own play The Key.²

But by this time Stephen was looking for a chance to try out some of his ideas in the professional theatre. He had found a new theatre form, economical and exciting in the emphasis it placed on actor-audience relationship. He had found some plays which he felt deserved to be tested in performance. He had taught groups of talented young students, many of whom would welcome the chance to work for him again.

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1. Letter from Lawrence Hayes 26.5.78.
 2. Letter from Shirley Jacobs 18.7.77.

Stephen was also profoundly dissatisfied with the state of the professional theatre. It is impossible to know exactly what plays he saw, but this is the period of the early fifties before the breakthrough of Osborne and the new wave of writers. The attempts of T. S. Eliot and Christopher Fry to bring verse back to the stage were grinding to a halt. Established playwrights, such as Coward with South Sea Bubble and Priestley with Mr. Kettle and Mrs. Moon, were surviving on reputation rather than on the merit of current offerings. The great box office successes were artless musicals such as Salad Days and The Boy Friend. When Stephen went to the theatre he found the plays irrelevant to the interests of the new young audience he wanted to attract to the theatre. He also found the theatres too large, and the performances he saw through the proscenium arch too remote. He comments on this dissatisfaction and his decision to experiment with central staging in a letter to Professor Armstrong of London University written four years later.

I came to theatre in the round by an indirect route. I trained before the war at the Central School of Speech and Drama, my main interests being in production and scenic design. Shortly after the war I began to criticise the conventional theatre, both as a member of the audience and as a producer in repertory. Firstly I found that seeing and hearing in the large London theatres was difficult, and that the impact of the performance was so dilute that I got more entertainment from the cinema than from the theatre. Secondly no matter how hard I worked in the theatre my productions failed to attract the audiences I wanted. Putting two and two together I began to feel that the theatre was physically too big, that the conventions of stage performance were perhaps unattractive to modern people and that plays were out of touch with the potential

audience (those who stay away). The last point struck me first - and I began to study playwriting. I spent a year at the State University of Iowa and 'majored' in drama taking my thesis in practical playwriting. I came back to England, began to give courses in the basic art of playwriting. These courses resulted in some plays I tried to get staged. The plays were not good. They were promising. You can guess I could find no one willing to stage them. So I decided to stage them myself. With no capital to start a management, this again seemed difficult until I recalled that one of my notes on the theatre in the round pointed out its economy. And then it was simply a question of finding a place and forming a company.¹

1. Letter from Stephen Joseph to Professor Armstrong, London University 20.5.59. Manchester papers.

CHAPTER IISETTING UP THEATRE IN THE ROUND

This Chapter will trace Stephen Joseph's attempts to establish theatres in the round in this country. Later Chapters will examine the theoretical basis for his work but many of his decisions were taken on practical grounds, such as what funds were available, what support was likely to be found locally and whether a suitable hall could be booked. It is at this pragmatic level that this Chapter will follow his progress.

(a) Scarborough

On 14 July, 1955, Stephen Joseph and a small company of professional actors opened a season of four new plays at Scarborough. A seaside town with six existing theatres providing live entertainment, including the well-established York Theatre company performing plays in the imposing Opera House, was not the obvious place for the experiment and the choice of Scarborough was something of an accident. Stephen had decided to set up a theatre in the round soon after his return from America in 1952, and certainly at least a year before the season took place, but finding a suitable hall was not as simple as he made it sound in the letter to Professor Armstrong quoted at the end of the last Chapter. After investigating many halls Joseph finally found premises through his teaching.

Stephen's obituary in The Times referred to him as a missionary and certainly he lost no opportunity to preach his gospel of new theatre forms and new plays.¹ He was a lively and amusing speaker and he was invited to lecture frequently at courses and conferences. If, as was often the case, his subject was play-writing this led easily to his advocacy of theatre in the round as an economic and exciting way of presenting new plays. He used to generate a great deal of enthusiasm in his audience who shared his disappointment at the difficulty of finding a suitable building.

At the end of a drama course at Wrea Head in the North Riding, John Wood, the organiser, took Stephen to see the Concert Room of the Library at Scarborough. It was a large room about 50 ft. by 40 ft. and 24 ft. high on the first floor of the building. "Why not stage your plays here?", Stephen was asked. Stephen looked at the room with a mixture of joy and panic. He said years afterwards that he felt his bluff had been called.² Here was a room which could be converted into a temporary theatre in the round. Backstage space was limited, lighting would be difficult and special scaffolding would have to be erected to raise the seating, but it was all possible and rather frightening. It is easy to dream, but not so easy to accept responsibility for putting your dreams into practice. Finance might still prove to be an insuperable barrier. Stephen enquired the rent: it was £10 a night. That of

1. The Times 6.10.67.

2. Interview with Stephen Joseph at Scarborough, Summer 1967.

course was impossible: it might be reduced. Finally after various consultations and discussions, including one with Ken Boden, business manager of the local amateurs, who offered to arrange voluntary help to run the front of house, Stephen booked the Concert Room for an eight-week season in 1955.¹

Stephen went back to London to raise some money and to form an educational trust to present new plays in the round. He recruited his board of directors from among his friends from Cambridge and persuaded most of them to invest £50 in the venture. These friends included an architect, Stephen Garrett, and an accountant D'Arcy Orders who gave their professional services: Joseph was charming and ruthless in capitalising on friendship for artistic ends. Stephen Garrett, now Deputy Director of the Paul Getty Museum, California, writes

Yes, I was up at Cambridge with him. I had little understanding of his thinking about the stage, but he used me (and I was delighted to be used) as an architect (unpaid) who would try to get on to paper the ideas he had about theatre design.²

Finding actors was a fairly simple matter. Seven of the ten members of the company had been his students during his five years at Central. They were eager to work with him again and prepared to come to Scarborough on a small salary to help with the experiment.

Stephen chose four plays from among the scripts which had been submitted to him in connection with his play-writing courses. The season opened with Circle of Love, a romantic tale by Eleanor D. Glaser,

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1. Stephen Joseph, Theatre in the Round, 1967, p.36.
 2. Letter from Stephen Garrett 7.11.77.

and Prentice Pillar, a costume drama by Ruth Dixon. Dragons are Dangerous was a modern comedy by David Campton and the fourth play was a verse drama under the name of Jurneman (Joar.) Winch, Turn Right at the Crossroads.¹

At the end of June the scaffolders moved into the Concert Room and the actors started rehearsing the first two plays. One actress had to be replaced because of illness but everything went pretty well to plan. Stephen inspired confidence and had the ability to enthuse his actors. One of them writes

I was happier than I have ever been - sun, sea,
a secure environment, a marvellous exciting job,
everything to make me work well, complete confidence They were excellent actors and I
made great friends.²

On Thursday 14 July 1955 the season opened with high hopes but business in the opening weeks was very poor. The experiment attracted a number of visitors from far afield and the local amateurs who were helping front of house took a great interest in the season, but the response from the general public was disappointing. One matinee was watched by only four people and even in mid-season the tiny square auditorium seating 248 people was seldom more than half full. There were plenty of holiday-makers in Scarborough but there were also six other live theatres, three cinemas, a concert hall and miles of walks and amusement arcades. It was only when it rained that the attendance figures rose above the danger level at which the season would have to be curtailed.³

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1. Publicity material for 1955 season. Campton papers. Plan of Library Theatre in Appendix I.
 2. Letter from Shirley Jacobs 18.7.77.
 3. Interview with David Campton 4.1.77.

The press was not particularly helpful. The national journals virtually ignored the experiment and the local papers provided headlines for the arrival of Hermione Gingold to see a performance but the plays themselves only received brief notices and the experimental form of staging no discussion at all.

The lack of interest from the press and the public was a great disappointment and the season ran at a loss. Nevertheless Stephen decided to extend his work in two ways. First the company would try a series of Sunday night performances in the round in London, commencing with two of the summer season's new plays. The Sunday Club is the subject of a later section of this Chapter. Second the company would return to Scarborough for another season of new plays the following summer.

Stephen believed in persevering with his playwrights and three of the same writers were represented in 1956. David Campton revised Stephen's thesis play which was presented under the new title Idol in the Sky, Jurneman Winch adapted Wuthering Heights and Eleanor Claser contributed a one-act play which was paired with a commedia dell'arte play written and directed by Clifford Williams, who subsequently produced for the R.S.C. To complete the programme the company presented Father Matthew by Aubrey Colin, a play about colour in South Africa.¹

The second season again lost money and Stephen was determined that the third year must show a profit or he would cease operations at

1. Programmes from Campton papers.

Scarborough. Several of his friends, including Jordan Lawrence, the director, had told him that he was heading for disaster by riding two horses at once: new plays and a new theatre form. Stephen decided to include two plays by established authors in the season, Arthur Miller's The Glass Menagerie and J. B. Priestley's An Inspector Calls. The Priestley play was an immediate success with the Scarborough audience and the 'House Full' board went out and stayed out for The Glass Menagerie and the two new plays which completed the season.¹

Stephen did not stay in Scarborough to see his success. After the second night of the season he went back to London to drive lorries for the Victoria Wine Company, leaving his newly appointed manager to act in two plays, direct a third, pay the wages, balance the box-office accounts, arrange publicity and to organise a series of matinées at a neighbouring holiday camp. Joseph claimed that the company could not afford his salary but this withdrawal at the moment of achievement occurs several times in his career.²

The Scarborough season, with the aid of small grants from the Arts Council (£400 in 1957) was now financially secure. Stephen continued as director for the next eight years even though he left much of the day-to-day work of running the company and producing plays to his staff. Stephen had ideas about every aspect of running a theatre.

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1. The writer was manager for the 1957 season.
 2. The outstanding example is his decision to take up a teaching appointment at Manchester in the month he opened the Victoria Theatre in Stoke-on-Trent.

He enjoyed designing publicity material and supervising front of house arrangements. Programmes were given away free and plays were performed without interval. After the performance excellent refreshments were served in a large exhibition room and he encouraged members of the company to join the audience to discuss the plays. He furnished the exhibition room with a series of displays showing experimental work in the theatre. Ironically one of his minor innovations led to the national publicity he had sought earlier. After the stage management had twice put on the wrong side of the record he decided to dispense with the national anthem. This received wide coverage in the press and the threat of pickets from the League of Empire Loyalists. In later years he never forgot the thin houses of the early seasons and he would always provide speakers for courses and holiday organisations in the hope of attracting audiences. It was one of his maxims that you needed as many people bringing in an audience as you had acting on the stage. In his final years he employed students to act as theatre hosts and party organisers.

The length of the season was expanded from eight to fourteen or fifteen weeks and the number of productions each year rose to seven or eight, about half of them new plays. Stephen also tried to improve the physical conditions of his temporary theatre and in this he was less successful. After a great deal of negotiation with the Library Committee he was allowed to install a lighting grid and a glass panel

for the stage manager to watch the action. But the real problems arose in the backstage and service areas which were shared with the public library. Actors' ways are not library ways and what is a reasonable amount of noise or mud for one purpose is intolerable for another. There was also an acute shortage of storage, kitchen and lavatory accommodation. For eleven years the coffee cups were taken home to be washed and the queues outside the lavatories were embarrassing and delayed the start of performances. The accumulation of these irritations began to depress Stephen and in 1965 he issued an ultimatum to the Library Committee, that unless certain improvements, which he felt had been promised, were carried out the company would not return the following year but would seek other premises. Nothing was done, and despite the search for alternative accommodation that had gone on for seven years no alternative hall was found. Stephen decided to close the theatre. A sense of progress was essential to his work and he felt that he had achieved all he could do in Scarborough. As far as he was concerned the 1965 season which included new plays by Alan Ayckbourn, David Campton, Alan Plater and Mike Stott would be his last.

Fortunately, I think, his work was continued by other hands. In 1966 Ken Boden, who in addition to being the voluntary Front of House Manager for the theatre, was local secretary of the British Drama League, organised an amateur season in the round; and in the following year the

writer was invited to run a professional season by the Scarborough Theatre Trust. Further seasons were arranged and in 1970 Alan Ayckbourn became permanent director.

(b) Sunday Club

The obvious place for an experimental theatre group to present new plays in a new theatre shape is London. As soon as the Scarborough season of 1955 was started, Stephen completed arrangements for the establishment of a Sunday Club in London, and on 25 August The Stage carried an announcement that a new play, Turn Right at the Crossroads would be presented at the Mahatma Gandhi Hall, Fitzroy Square on Sunday 11 September. It would be the first of a series of performances of new plays and classics to be given in the round.

There was of course a tradition of single performances of new or experimental work stretching back to the activities of William Poel and such performances as You Never Can Tell given by the Stage Society in 1899. At least one such group was still active and there is a reference to a performance by the Repertory Players at the Strand Theatre in The Stage for 15 December 1955. Such groups often presented new plays, but they did them in established theatres and usually with a nucleus of well-known actors.¹

Stephen's venture faced two disadvantages. The first two performances were to be given by his talented but young and relatively inexperienced company from Scarborough. They would have to play a variety

1. Such experimental work has largely been taken over by lunch-time theatres.

of parts, some of which were well outside the range for which a London casting director would think them suitable. And secondly, as no existing theatre could give Joseph the actor-audience relationship he wanted, he had the additional handicap of performing in a hall not usually associated with theatrical events and not likely to be known to his potential audience. Indeed the most suitable hall he found after a long search was the Mahatma Gandhi hall in the basement of the Indian Y.M.C.A., a hostel for Indians working and studying in London. The hall provided very limited dressing and storage space but had a pleasant atmosphere. Stephen Joseph noted,

The hall had been well designed in a modern and lively style, asymmetrical, it had a useful balcony round one and a half sides which provided a lighting gallery as well as a good seating row. It made a very pleasant theatre in the round.¹

The Studio Theatre Club opened on Sunday 11 September 1955 with a performance of Turn Right at the Crossroads by Jurneman Winch.²

The play had closed the season at Scarborough two days earlier and indeed this appears to have been one of the factors influencing its choice to open the Club in London. It meant that no time need be spent in rehearsal to 'bring back' the play and that costumes and stage properties were at the top of the baskets.

The performance did not attract a great deal of enthusiasm from the press or from the public. The critic for The Stage in Scarborough had noted that Jurneman Winch was "a playwright to watch" but his London

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1. Stephen Joseph, Theatre in the Round, 1967, p.42.
 2. Programmes in Campton papers.

colleague was unimpressed by the whole venture.

To write a modern morality play in verse and then to present it in the round with a perfectly adequate stage is doubly to tempt Providence. It seems to me inevitable that a charge of pre-¹tentiousness will be levelled at such a venture.

A second new play from the summer season, David Campton's comedy Dragons are Dangerous was the second Sunday Club performance. It received a friendly response from a fairly small audience and very little attention from the press or from literary agents. Stephen was disappointed. All the papers and agents claimed to be looking for new talent and he thought that new plays by unknown authors would be an immediate attraction. The climate for new work probably changed the following year when John Osborne's Look Back in Anger demonstrated that there was money to be made from new writers.

Minos Volanakis, a young Greek director who had met Stephen at the Central School of Speech and Drama suggested that little known plays by an author known mainly by reputation this country might attract both the critics and sufficient members of the public to balance the slender budget of a production. Stephen agreed and Volonakis produced three one-act plays by Pirandello, The Fool, Bellavita and The Man with a Flower in his Mouth. The cast was a strong one, including Alfred Burke, Derek Hart, Anthony Jacobs and Ralph Wossek and the venture attracted a better response. The Times

1. The Stage 15.9.55.

of 22 November reported

Presentation "in the round" with an audience seated on all sides of the stage suits Pirandello, in so far as intimacy reinforces the pleasure of hearing dialogue as good as his.¹

This is the first review I have found which comments on the form of presentation. Earlier critics of the company had confined themselves to discussing the plays and commenting on the actors in a way that would have been equally appropriate to a proscenium production. It is also an example of the "special case" approach, which Stephen repudiated, that the round is only suitable for a limited range of authors and styles of writing. Nevertheless it was a favourable review and the interest aroused by the production led to the programme being repeated in January. This time Bernard Levin saw it:

The most extraordinary thing about this experiment was its lack of extraordinariness. Two minutes after it had begun one could hardly recall having been in an ordinary theatre and there was no feeling of strangeness and discomfort.²

The success of the Pirandello plays with the paying public, as well as with the critics, led to the presentation of several programmes of short plays by established but little performed writers during the first season of the Sunday Club. These included plays by Giradoux, Tardieu, Lorca, Henry James and William Saroyan.³ Both actors and directors gave their services but there were inevitable publicity and production costs and the hire of the hall, which had to be met from

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1. The Times 22.11.55.
 2. Truth 27.1.56.
 3. Programmes in Campton papers.

box-office receipts. Although plays by established authors did marginally better than work by new writers the Sunday shows were running at a small loss and this could not continue indefinitely.

In June 1956 operations in London ceased while Stephen took a company to Scarborough to present his second season of new plays there. He used one of these, the adaptation of Wuthering Heights by Jurneman Winch, to open the winter programme of Sunday performances at the Mahatma Gandhi hall. This was followed, a month later, by The Last of the Summer Wine by Robert Bolt, a year before The Flowering Cherry established his reputation as a playwright in November 1957. The aim of the Sunday Club was to present a performance on the first Sunday in each month. In fact twelve productions were given in the winter of 1956-57 and seven or eight of them were new plays. The programme for 25 November 1956 states,

We have a number of new plays we want to produce - playwriting is a very difficult business, and, in our opinion is best learned in co-operation with the theatre. The shortage of good plays is perhaps due to the fact that there are not enough organisations prepared to stage the work of promising young authors.¹

The plays were presented but the losses continued. Stephen became more and more concerned with establishing a permanent theatre for his work where he could build a regular audience. This had always been one of the aims of the London venture and as early as the fifth production

1. Campton papers.

the programme noted that "our solicitors ... and architects are examining the premises at Fulham Broadway". Attempts to raise money to rent this, and other similar property, came to nothing.¹

Stephen decided to make one further attempt to establish a theatre in the round in London. In the Autumn of 1957 instead of making a series of Sunday bookings he hired the Mahatma Gandhi hall for a straight fortnight. He obtained an occasional stage play licence for the period which meant that tickets could be sold to the general public as well as to Club members. He brought the Scarborough acting company and the two new plays from the summer season to London. Honey in the Stone by Ruth Dixon and The Ornamental Hermit by Catherine Prynne both played for a full week and the season received some attention from the national press. The Times was sympathetic, Tynan in The Observer was less so. He referred to Honey in the Stone as

... turgidly written and turgidly acted (theatre in the round) was a good way of producing plays cheaply, but it is not a good way of producing plays.²

A few literary agents came and Athené Seyler, a leading lady in search of a vehicle, studied the part of the eccentric heroine in The Ornamental Hermit from the balcony but nothing came of it.

Another leading lady, Margaret Rawlings, was tempted by the title role in Racine's Phèdre. Her presence assisted in recruiting a strong cast and the production had two very successful Sunday performances and was later revived for a short tour.

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1. Campton papers.
 2. The Observer 15.7.57.

But the Sunday Club was virtually at an end. The experiment had run for two years, achieving a modest success, but there had been little critical interest and no transfer of the new plays to larger theatres. Nor was there prospect of finding financial backing or premises in London.

Stephen made a final attempt at presenting a new play in the round in London. In December he booked the Mahatma Gandhi hall again for another fortnight to present The Lunatic View by David Campton, the most promising of his new playwrights. The work consists of four linked one-act plays, and although they received critical approval after they had been published, this was not in time to attract audiences to the original production. The season lost money and this was Stephen's last production in London. As he said to David Campton, he did not see why profits from the summer season at Scarborough should be used to subsidise theatre in London.

(c) Touring

Stephen Joseph saw touring as a stepping stone to a permanent theatre in the round in a town, large enough to support an economically run permanent repertory company, and small enough for his experiment to make an impact on the press and public. London had proved too large and the winter population of Scarborough did not appear to be large enough to support sustained activity. Obvious targets were the new towns like Harlow and Hemel Hempstead which were still being built, and

older cities such as Leicester which had lost their professional theatres in the first onslaught of television. Many of these places had committees and small groups of people campaigning for live theatre. In some towns, such as Leicester where Stephen knew the secretary of the local theatre committee, there were personal contacts; other towns, including Newcastle-under-Lyme which became the most successful touring date, were suggested by the Arts Council. The logical approach was to establish a regular touring circuit in a group of towns reasonably close to each other, and to build up audiences until one or more places offered encouragement to set up a more permanent theatre. Most of the visits were made in the Midlands but occasionally, because of the unavailability of a suitable hall, or to avoid a clash of dates with another touring group, theatre in the round made long journeys to accept invitations to perform in places as far away as Southampton and Dartington Hall in Devon.

There were three important technical problems to be solved before touring could start; raised seating, lighting, and transport. Theatre in the round does not require conventional scenery, but if the company is to play to a larger audience than can be accommodated in two rows of seats (about eighty people), it is essential that the third and subsequent rows should be raised by at least a foot for each additional row. For the first three years at Scarborough this was done by a York scaffolding firm. They were competent and careful, but it was a slow job to tier the floor of the Concert Room of the Library. It took at

least a week and often bit into precious rehearsal time at the beginning of the summer season. Such an operation would be impossible on the grounds of time and cost when the company was on tour and had to 'get in' to a hall on one day to open the next.

Stephen devised and supervised the construction of a set of folding rostra, complete with steps and back-rails to make a portable auditorium. He was brilliant at this kind of detailed planning. Most halls have irregularities, such as radiators or small permanent platforms. Stephen would design and build, with his own hands, special pieces that fitted over or round these projections. Once he had seen a hall, and drawn or copied plans, he could go back to his workshop at Scarborough to make these special pieces, and to draw up working plans from which six people could set up the whole auditorium in six hours.

Lighting proved more of a problem. Central staging requires that actors should be lit from all four directions. Any lighting fittings in halls the company visited would be at one end only, in front of the permanent stage which Stephen would ignore or use for seating the audience. He designed a metal frame 40 ft. by 30 ft. and 10 ft. high to erect around the acting area to carry the stage lighting. After examining various materials he ordered lengths of piping and connecting pieces from a firm which specialised in equipping milking parlours. The materials were delivered direct to a hall at the start of the first tour

and the company and volunteer helpers set to work with 'Allen Keys' and the structure rose to a height of 10 ft. and the first lanterns were hung from it. The edifice was not very stable and various attempts to secure it with cross members and stays attached to the window frames of the hall made little difference. The danger of the frame collapsing on actors and audience was obvious and everybody stopped work and looked at Stephen. He was kneeling on the floor sketching on pieces of paper. He stood up and looked at us.¹ "It will have to come down", he said, "and I want these six towers built with the pieces". The towers were a kind of pyramid with short arms to carry the lanterns. These were arranged round the sides of the hall in the pattern of the 'six' on a dice and were used in this fashion throughout four years of touring. The portable lighting board with a 'patch panel' for flexibility which Stephen designed and built worked perfectly. Its only drawback was its weight, it was easily the heaviest piece of equipment on the tour.

There remained the problem of transporting the equipment. At that time (1957) there were regular auctions of commercial vehicles in Putney. Stephen sent his manager to the auction and after several unsuccessful bids he bought an ex-B.R.S. three ton green van for £35. A new battery and a can of petrol and it was ready to drive. When the van proved satisfactory, a second vehicle, a red lorry, also ex-B.R.S. was purchased for £50 from the same source. Stephen adapted both

1. The writer was present on this tour which opened at Hemel Hempstead 15.9.58.

vehicles; he built a 'Luton' front over the cab of the van to increase storage space, and a metal frame on the back of the lorry to retain tall piles of rostrum bases.

The green lorry and some of the equipment had its first real test in a move from London to Scarborough. On Saturday 7 December 1957, the company finished a fortnight's run of David Campton's The Lunatic View in the Mahatma Gandhi hall. Most of the lighting equipment, and the one and two foot levels of rostra had been used. The performance finished at 10 p.m., with the help of volunteers from the audience the van was loaded by a little after midnight, and the company started the long slow drive to Scarborough. When they arrived at mid-day on Sunday the local amateurs had already arranged the taller rostra in the Exhibition Room in the Library which was being used for the winter season. Before the company slept that night the auditorium was complete and the lighting rigged. On Monday 9 December the company opened their first winter programme at Scarborough with J. B. Priestley's I Have Been Here Before. The operation had taken less than 48 hours and although there were no more moves that winter, the feasibility of touring was established.

At the end of the following Summer Season the company took to the road for six weeks. The first week was spent at Hemel Hempstead, where the dressing room at a matinée was shared with a baby clinic. This was followed by four weeks at Leicester where the size of the audience

increased very slowly, and a final week at Harlow where for a single performance the company moved out of the hall they were using, lock, stock and barrel, to give a show in a works canteen. The tour was adjudged a promising start and after a short winter season at Scarborough the company visited Birmingham, Newcastle-under-Lyme and Leicester, playing for four weeks in each.

The plays presented on tour were usually those that had been performed in Scarborough in the previous season there. The company normally carried four plays, of which two would be new works. In a four-week season each play was performed for a week and the last play in one town opened the bill in the next. This made rehearsal easier and reduced hire charges on wigs and costumes. As business at the box-office usually increased steadily over the four weeks, whichever play was performed first, this practice ended arguments about which was the best play to start with.

Touring remained a major activity of the company right up to the opening of a permanent theatre in the round in 1962. Several of the towns visited such as Leicester, Harlow and Southampton, eventually had new theatres of their own, but that was years later, and in proscenium form. From Stephen's point of view the most successful touring date was Newcastle-under-Lyme.

(d) The Potteries

Early in 1962 Stephen Joseph came very close to success with plans for a permanent new theatre in the round. The company was on its fourth

visit to the Municipal Hall of Newcastle-under-Lyme and the season was extended from four to eight weeks. The four plays, Hamlet, A Doll's House, and new works by David Campton and Joan Macalpine, were each performed for a fortnight. On previous tours no play had run for longer than a week, making it very difficult to add to the company's repertoire while on tour. But if each play could run for a fortnight there was just time to rehearse a new play and the company could provide the regular change of programme needed for a permanent theatre.

The ambitious programme was a success. The longer run of each play did not reduce the nightly attendance figures and the Mayor and Council attended a civic performance. Newcastle-under-Lyme had a civic pride and an identity distinct from its larger neighbour Stoke-on-Trent. Charles Lister, the Borough Treasurer, had been a patient advocate of a civic theatre for many years and, at the end of the season, a proposal to build a theatre in the round gained a majority in the Council chamber. A site was found in a small public park about five minutes walk from the centre of the town. Stephen Garrett, an architect who had helped Stephen before, designed a small theatre complex to include a circular theatre in the round seating four hundred people.¹ The cost at this time was estimated at £60,000, about a fifth of the cost of a conventional theatre. But the joy of Stephen and the company was short-lived. The country was suffering a financial crisis

1. See plans in Appendix I.

and the scheme collapsed because of the refusal of the Ministry of Housing to grant loan sanction to the local authority to build the theatre.¹ The scheme had only been passed by a narrow majority. The delay gave more cautious members of the Council a chance to change their minds, and the scheme was dropped.

There was still a chance to utilise the support for the company that had been built up in the area. Even if loan sanction for the new theatre had been granted it would have taken two years to build and equip, and the company was already looking for temporary premises in the area. This search was intensified and Peter Cheeseman, the company manager, remembers inspecting eighteen different halls.² The short list of properties included a grocery warehouse which had been built as an organ factory, but this was really too small, and a disused chapel in Tunstall, which was rejected on the advice of the surveyor. Finally Joseph and Cheeseman decided on the Victoria cinema which stood on the main road between Newcastle-under-Lyme and Stoke-on-Trent, a few hundred yards outside the boundary of the smaller town where the new theatre had been planned. The Victoria had been built as a cinema before the war, and more recently converted into a night-club which had been closed by the police. It was in a working class area where theatre patrons were not likely to be numerous and there was no off-street parking and little storage space. However, it was

1. Stephen Joseph, Theatre in the Round, 1967, p.106.
2. Interview with Peter Cheeseman 17.11.78.

empty and it was available and at worst it could be cleared out and serve as a shell within which the touring rostra could be set up for a winter season.

In the event much more was done to the building than that.¹ Stephen's enthusiasm seldom failed to attract financial help. Margaret Rawlings and Bill Elmhirst, who had both acted with the company, gave donations, Granada TV offered surplus seating from their cinemas, and the Gulbenkian Foundation paid for decoration in the foyer. The company went to Scarborough for the 1962 summer season while the contractor moved in. It was a scramble to get the work completed in time and none of the company had much sleep during the last week of preparation.

The Victoria Theatre opened on 9 October 1962 with a performance of The Birds and the Wellwishers, a new play by William Norfolk which had had its first production at Scarborough during the summer. The play was directed by Peter Cheeseman, who was to be in charge of the Victoria Theatre.

Not for the first time, at the moment of success, Stephen Joseph stepped aside. He handed over the running of the permanent theatre in the round he had designed, to his manager, and accepted a Fellowship in Drama at Manchester University. When questioned by a friend he said he needed the money. This may have been true but it is hardly likely to be the only reason. He was certainly very tired after seven years' involvement in the day to day running of theatre in the round and needed

1. See plans in Appendix I.

a rest from the daily load and frustrations of administration. The decision to leave is certainly in accord with his teaching philosophy that people learn by being given responsibility and with his own dislike of permanent commitments.

Stephen put only two constraints on his manager, Peter Cheeseman, Stephen was to see scripts of all new plays and to receive a monthly statement of accounts. The policy of presenting new plays and interesting revivals was continued. Established authors who were presented in the first year of operation included Anouilh, Beckett, Bolt, Pinter, Shaw and Strindberg. As far as new playwrights were concerned, William Norfolk, who wrote the opening play, and Alan Ayckbourn both had two works performed. Other new playwrights presented were David Campton and Alan Plater. Peter Terson submitted his first play, The Runaway. Both Joseph and Cheeseman were very impressed with the quality of writing but felt that its subject of homosexuality would prevent the script from receiving a stage play licence. They encouraged Terson, who subsequently became resident playwright to the company and provided them with a play a year.

Nevertheless when Ayckbourn left the company in 1964 to join the B.B.C. as a radio producer, there was a shortage of new plays. Cheeseman was used to advising individual playwrights and hit on the idea that the company should write their own documentary plays based on local materials.¹ The actors did the research and the writing, and the material was tested and collated in rehearsal. These documentaries which

1. Cheeseman thinks the idea owes something to his work as an amateur with Merseyside Unity Theatre. Interview 17.11.78.

included The Jolly Potters (1964), The Staffordshire Rebels (1965) and the story of a local railway, The Knotty (1966), achieved a national reputation.

Stephen remained very much on the side-lines at Stoke. He was enjoying his teaching at Manchester and now had a permanent lectureship. In the summer he ran the season at Scarborough. I think he would have liked to have been invited to produce the occasional play at the Victoria, but he never suggested it. Occasionally he picked up a detail on his visit to the theatre, a fused lamp in the foyer or a missing notice on a door.¹ Stephen was still Chairman of the Theatre Trust. The ultimate financial and artistic responsibility for the theatre was his, but the man the actors and public knew was Peter Cheeseman. If there was a row there was little doubt whose side they would take.

At Stoke the debts began to accumulate. Cheeseman's policy was a sensible one of providing good plays well presented and hoping that enough people would see the value of the work to keep it going by buying tickets or by giving grants. Stephen felt that expenditure was growing more quickly than revenue from the increasing size of audiences could justify. And he was no longer receiving the monthly statement of accounts.

Joseph decided to take action to put the Victoria Theatre to rights. He saw the theatre as his creation. The initial impulse for professional

1. In an interview on 17.11.78. Cheeseman told me that he arrived at the theatre one evening to find Joseph screwing a 'Pull' notice to an outside door by the light of a torch.

theatre in the round in this country was Stephen's and for ten years he had been responsible for its activities at Scarborough, in London and on tour, including the Potteries where he had brought his first company in 1959. He saw Peter Cheeseman as one of a series of managers, albeit the most successful, that he had encouraged and trained. Peter still needed help and advice to run the theatre and Stephen proposed that he should continue as Artistic Director but that the management should be shared with an Administrator and a Publicity Officer.

Peter Cheeseman saw the situation very differently.¹ It was his drive that had pushed Stephen into taking on the Victoria Theatre in the first place, since which time Cheeseman had devoted three years of his life to building a working theatre. And now the absentee landlord wanted to take away his livelihood or at least to reduce his status.

It was a nasty business while it lasted. The intransigence of the two men, in other circumstances their strength, led to a bitter conflict. Stephen had no intention of dismissing Cheeseman, but when the latter stood firm against the proposed changes there was no real alternative to terminating his contract. I think Cheeseman handled the affair more adroitly than Stephen because "the sacking" brought him a great deal of local sympathy which helped him later.

Stephen had been unwell for some months and was in no physical condition to throw up his job at Manchester and to take over the running of the theatre. He appointed instead Terry Lane who had worked with the company as Stage Director a few years earlier. Lane worked hard at a makeshift

1. Interview with Peter Cheeseman 17.11.78.

season but many of the audience stayed away because "their man" had been sacked, and it became obvious that when the renewal of grants came up that local bodies might not support Stephen's board of management.

The outcome might have lingered in doubt for some time if an exploratory hospital operation had not revealed that Stephen was suffering from the terminal cancer that ended his life fifteen months later. This sad news was not given to Stephen or to his immediate circle, but seems to have been leaked to various parties involved in the conflict and may well have affected the side they took in the dispute. With Stephen out of action there was only one person with the skill and experience to run the Victoria Theatre and that was Peter Cheeseman. The Arts Council is reputed to have changed its stance overnight. A new local board of directors was set up to run the theatre and their first act was to appoint Cheeseman as director. It was a Pyrrhic victory after a struggle which had brought bitterness and suffering, and hardship or embarrassment to many of both men's associates. And as in Galsworthy's Strife, the terms of settlement were close to those offered before the dispute flared up. Cheeseman remained in charge, but ironically the new board insisted on the budgetary controls which Stephen had demanded.

The result may have been in the best interests of the theatre, which is still flourishing under Peter Cheeseman twelve years after Stephen's death. Alan Ayckbourn, in an interview with an American scholar said,

I have always thought of Peter as the sticker and of Stephen as the bee that flits from flower to flower. If circumstances had been different and Stephen had been the sole man in charge of the opening at Stoke, that place would have closed eight months later, because Stephen always had such a terror of being trapped in one thing.¹

Joseph and Cheeseman were never reconciled and it is perhaps a pity that the latter did not find a way to bridge the gap when he knew that Stephen was dying. However, since Stephen's death Cheeseman has been very generous in acknowledging his work, writing in The Stage on 9 May 1968 he said

The Victoria is a direct product of the work and ideas of Stephen Joseph.²

The work has been outlined here and the ideas will be discussed in the next three Chapters.

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1. Interview between Alan Ayckbourn and Gillette Elvgren recorded in the latter's unpublished thesis, 'The Evolution of a Theatrical Style', Florida State University, 1972.
 2. The Stage 9.5.68.

CHAPTER IIIPLAYWRITING AND PLAYWRIGHTS

A major part of Stephen Joseph's contribution to the theatre derived from his interest in new plays. Theatre is a living art form that must respond to changing ideas and social conditions. Joseph wanted to see new plays staged, and the theatre repertoire, before and after the war, had become somewhat stereotyped.

There was little opportunity for young writers to learn their craft, particularly if it had to be learned 'on the side' as a part-time activity. Stephen Joseph's experience, especially in the U.S.A. at the University of Iowa, convinced him that playwriting could be taught and much of his energy went into this in the fifties. He believed that playwrights could learn a great deal by seeing their work rehearsed and staged, but contemporary conditions made this very difficult to achieve.

This Chapter will endeavour to show something of Stephen Joseph's working relationships with playwrights. It will concentrate on those would-be writers who have achieved some success and who have acknowledged his contribution to their work. Many of them seem to have realised that he knew a great deal about the working of theatre and what makes for success.

He also knew a lot about writing plays, although he acquired this knowledge mainly through the painful experience of failure, having tried

hard to write plays himself. This work is not of lasting importance but his efforts may give some idea of what he was looking for from new writers.

Stephen Joseph's own first attempts were made as a student in Cambridge and show from the start a marked interest in theatre as theatre. After playing Lennox for the Marlowe Society he wrote a skit about rehearsals for Macbeth called What Happened in the Bedroom. The play, which was produced by the Cambridge A.D.C., has some witty ideas but little else to recommend it.

More polished are a folder of sketches and lyrics written for the Footlights Revues which Stephen directed in 1947 and again in 1948. Among the best of the numbers is a trio, In Histrionic Circles which is marked as having been accepted for publication by Samuel French. It shows Stephen's ability to write a neat line.

I'm producing Ibsen
 And I'm playing Peer.
 I'm acting Hamlet, I'm cast as King Lear
 I'm the Ghost. I'm the Fool,
 And I'm playing Kent.

It finishes

We're in so many clubs we don't need to bother
 It amounts to just this, we all cast each other.¹

Again, as in the Macbeth skit, there is a strong concern with the nature of theatrical activity, here naturally expressed through farcical sketch and parody.

1. Manchester papers.

After going down from Cambridge, Stephen Joseph continued writing while earning his living in the theatre as scenic artist, stage manager, actor and producer. His literary efforts were clearly aimed at meeting the requirements of commercial producing managements, which were the only possible outlets at that time, they have small casts, single sets and obvious themes. Murder My Legacy is a five-handed psychological thriller and Abracadabra is a sophisticated comedy involving witchcraft, rather in the manner of John Van Druten's Bell, Book and Candle, but neither of these early plays was produced or published.¹

His most ambitious work appears to have been The Key, which, as Jeffrey Dench of the R.S.C., who appeared in it as a student, says, owed something to 'The Murder of Gonzago' in Hamlet. Once again there is a stress on theatricality in playing with the idea of a play within a play within a play. The action takes place in the auditorium of a theatre, on the forestage and on an inner stage. The 'Key' of the title appears in all three areas: it is lost by a member of the audience; used by the villain to lock his daughter in a cellar; and is the key to the treasure chest in the inner play in which the girl's lover appears. The various levels of reality impinge on each other and cause the theatre attendant to interrupt the performance with a long speech on the function of theatre as a key to life which ends:

... To comment on whatever men and women are puzzled by, and attempt an answer at the great problems of existence.²

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1. Both plays among Manchester papers.
 2. Stephen Joseph, The Key. Manchester papers.

Stephen produced the play with students from the Central School of Speech and Drama at a festival in Yugoslavia in 1953.¹ What the Yugoslavs made of the play, which was performed in English, is not recorded. Nor is there any evidence of the date the play was written. It cannot really be later than 1952, the year of his thesis play at Iowa University (discussed in Chapter I). It is about this time that there is a shift in his interests from writing plays himself to helping other people to write them.

When Stephen Joseph returned from his study leave at Iowa to his teaching at Central School, he could claim no real success as a playwright. He had been trying to write plays for at least five years and must by this time have begun to realise his own limitations in this field. He was still convinced, however, that the British theatre needed new playwrights and he evidently believed he could help to meet that need. As Alan Ayckbourn, one of his most successful protégés, commented,

He was a rotten writer, but he knew so much about playwriting.²

He persuaded the college authorities to allow him to run an evening course, open to the public, on 'The Art of the Playwright'. The core of the course in the first two terms was the study of theories of dramatic criticism and their application to established plays, but he also offered to give tutorial help with students' own scripts. In addition to these

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1. Letter from Shirley Jacobs 18.7.77.
 2. Interview between Alan Ayckbourn and Gillette Elvgren, recorded in the latter's unpublished thesis, 'The Evolution of a Theatrical Style', Florida State University, 1972.

evening courses he also ran a number of one-day schools in playwriting at such places as Hendon Technical College and the British Drama League. Through this unusual teaching activity Joseph met a number of writers whose plays were worth performing, and whom he was sure would learn much from the experience of having their work performed and staged. But in those days, before the opening of the Royal Court under George Devine, and The Observer play competition, there was very little chance of such untried works being produced in a conventional theatre.¹ He was under no illusions about the quality of the plays: they were, as he told W. A. Armstrong, 'not good... but promising'. The playwrights had had their work criticised and discussed in seminars but they needed now to see the strengths and weaknesses of their work tested in performance.

Typically, having identified the need, Joseph set out to meet it. He formed a company called Studio Theatre Limited and in January 1955 issued a kind of manifesto:

The Studio Theatre will help playwrights by staging new plays of promise, experience is the greatest teacher, but there will always be a school for playwrights to supplement production.²

In July of that year he took a small professional company and four of these new plays of promise to Scarborough and presented them in the round. The plays were well received by rather sparse audiences and earned encouraging reviews in the local press. Stephen had hoped his experiment would make an impact on the British theatre but his main concern was to establish a kind of practical school for playwrights and the

1. The Observer new play competition 1956.
2. Manchester papers.

success of the venture can only be assessed by the subsequent careers of his pupils.

None of the four playwrights whose work Joseph produced at Scarborough that summer became a household name overnight, but they all wrote again both for theatre in the round and for production elsewhere. For some of them the opportunity to see their work performed probably came too late; they were well-established in other careers and play-writing was only a hobby. David Campton, however, the youngest of the four, did become a professional playwright and a brief glance at his career will illustrate the kind of opportunities Stephen sought to provide for writers.

Joseph and Campton met at a play-writing course at the British Drama League headquarters in January 1955.¹ Campton, who was employed as a clerk by the Leicestershire Gas Board, had already written a successful one-act comedy for an amateur festival and was starting to write full-length plays. He submitted one of these, Dragons Are Dangerous, to Joseph. The play was a modern comedy about a St. George figure who gets into trouble with his fashionable neighbours by giving shelter to some disreputable characters. The Stage thought the play made a 'promisingly bright start' and business at the box office was fair in a blazing hot summer.² At the end of the season the company gave the production a Sunday showing in London, but there was still no real interest in the play from agents or producers. Stephen's response to this was to encourage David to write another play for the following summer season,

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1. Interview with David Campton 4.1.77.
 2. The Stage 4.8.55.

and when this was a success at Scarborough he suggested to David that he give up his job and join the company as a playwright and occasional actor. Stephen also gave him the guarantee of production. Whatever David wrote that could be played by a cast of six to eight actors (the most the company could afford) would be staged.

In the autumn of 1957 David Campton accepted the invitation to join the company and wrote The Lunatic View, four linked one-act plays, for the winter season. They are early black comedies and Irving Wardle coined the phrase 'comedy of menace' to describe them. They deal in sardonic fashion with murder, revolution and the aftermath of nuclear explosion. The plays were different in style to Campton's earlier work and he is happy to acknowledge that some of the starting points for the plays came from Stephen.¹

A Smell of Burning shows a middle-class couple at breakfast waiting for the toast to cook and unaware of the revolution that is going on round them because it is not reported in The Times. At the end of the play the toast burns and the husband becomes dimly aware that the Alderman in the flat above has been hacked to death, the gasometer blown up and his wife hung from the kitchen window with her own clothes-line. The final words of the play are

There ought to be a warning bell.²

In Then the only survivors of a nuclear holocaust are a Professor of Mathematics and a beauty queen who were wearing brown paper bags as a

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1. e.g. Memento Mori, the opening play is based on one of Joseph's play-writing exercises.
 2. David Campton, The Lunatic View (1958) 1962, p.22.

defence against radiation. They fall in love but she will not remove her bag unless she is told to by someone in authority and he will not take the responsibility of telling her.

The plays were highly successful and for the next eight years David worked as a company dramatist providing light comedies and Gothic horror plays for the summer seasons at Scarborough, and black comedies for the winter tours of industrial towns. He wrote ten full-length plays, or their equivalent in one-acts, for the company in the eight years. In the same period he played parts in a range of plays from Shakespeare to Strindberg which must have given him a new perspective on play-writing and must have contributed enormously to his technical expertise as a writer. Even more important for the apprentice playwright was the money from royalties and above all the guarantee that his work would be staged with the opportunity to rewrite as necessary, even during rehearsal. When in 1966 Stephen abandoned the Scarborough season and was in dispute with his manager at the Victoria Theatre, Stoke-on-Trent, Campton virtually turned his back on the professional stage and looked to radio and television for an outlet to his work.¹

Stephen would happily have restricted his programme to new plays, but the supply of original work was inadequate and in any case new plays seldom attract good audiences unless they are acted by stars. To balance the budget he began to include, occasionally, plays by established dramatists. But Joseph did not abandon his aim of helping new writers; the Royal Court opened the year after he started his productions in Scarborough

1. In July 1979 he was writing a series for Schools Broadcasting, and his one-act play, Before Dawn, had recently been performed by five different companies in the Scottish Community Drama Festival. Interview 15.7.79.

and in 1957 he wrote to George Devine asking for new plays and inviting playwrights to attend tutorial sessions with Stephen's company.¹

Nothing came of the letter, but the Royal Court started Sunday night 'Performances without Décor' which may have owed something to Joseph's pioneering work.

Joseph's search for new dramatists went on and in the winter season 1958-59 he would seem to have found one of the kind he was looking for. Harold Pinter's The Birthday Party had been put on at the Lyric, Hammersmith in the summer of 1958 and had closed quickly after receiving a fairly disastrous press. It did not look like suitable material for the winter tour of the Midlands that Stephen was arranging but the script interested him and he decided that the company would present the play if Pinter would direct it. A second production, for a play that has failed once, is often more difficult for a writer to arrange than the original showing and Pinter has expressed his appreciation of Joseph's invitation to produce his own play at Birmingham.

I was very grateful to Stephen for giving me the opportunity and for his encouragement.²

Pinter felt that the failure of the play in London was caused by the lack of confidence in the text by the West End cast who had relied on their histrionic skills to amuse the audience, instead of trusting the script. Pinter was very much a 'man of the theatre', having already had considerable experience as an actor. He proved to be a meticulous producer and worked the inexperienced company very hard. He would never explain the 'meaning'

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1. Letter from Stephen Joseph to George Devine. Undated. Manchester papers.
 2. Letter from Harold Pinter 15.2.79.

of the play, but he knew exactly what he wanted and would spend hours creating the right mood for the delivery of lines and the timing of pauses.

Although The Birthday Party had failed at its first production, there had been some interest shown in its unusual quality after it had closed. As a consequence the audience at Pinter's Birmingham production was sprinkled with London theatre people such as George Devine and Ann Jellicoe, and it was certainly a step in the recognition of Pinter's talent.

James Saunders, who is now an established playwright, also received valuable help from Stephen Joseph early in his career. In 1959 the Scarborough theatre in the round company gave the first production of Saunders's Alas, Poor Fred and the following year the company gave a second showing to The Ark. Saunders has written to me about the revising he did on the text and his letter gives an idea of the working relationship that Joseph established with authors.

The idea of writing an extra scene was mine, and I don't know how seriously I meant it when I made the suggestion, but he immediately accepted it enthusiastically as a fact, and I did it. This meeting was, I think, at the London flat he had or used near the 'World's End'. The Play was rather short for a full-length play with interval but with the extra scene would have been long for Scarborough; presumably he did some cutting on it. As you know, he liked to cut by the chunk rather than in a niggling way: it went with the businesslike no nonsense way he treated his other theatre activities - or that was how he seemed to me. I was pretty young and green then, an amateur to his professional, but he gave no sense of that. The impression I got from him and Scarborough was of something at the same time casual and businesslike without any theatrical camp about it. An equivalent, now I think about it, might be an off-beat grand seigneur, very secure in his position and able to delegate, never having to push rank.¹

1. Letter from James Saunders 2.10.78.

Saunders was earning his living as a teacher at that time and could only attend rehearsals intermittently. No doubt if he had been free it is likely that Joseph would have invited him to join the company in some capacity and to work with him over a long period as did David Campton.

The experience of Campton, Pinter and Saunders all point to Joseph's central conviction that play-writing was a craft which had to be learnt in the theatre. David Campton has drawn my attention to a minor moment of theatrical history that could be said to epitomise Stephen Joseph's approach to the business of training playwrights; when he produced Hamlet at Newcastle-under-Lyme in 1962 he had six authors in the company. In order of appearance they were Richard Gill (Ghost), Alan Ayckbourn (King), Peter Cheeseman (Voltemand), Stephen Joseph (Cornelius), Peter King (Laertes) and David Campton (Polonius). One only wishes they could have had a seminar on dramaturgy with the author of the play.

Alan Ayckbourn, the best known of the writers to be associated with Stephen Joseph, joined the company to work as an assistant stage manager and to play small parts. He was a capable actor, and by 1959 he had progressed to leading roles, many of them in new plays, and after one performance, Stephen Joseph heard him complaining about the quality of the lines he had been speaking on the stage. The play was a comedy, but however the actor said the lines, the audience did not laugh. Stephen's response was to invite Ayckbourn to write a better script, and

to make the promise that the play would be staged with Ayckbourn in the leading role. The resulting play, The Square Cat, written under the pen name of Roland Allen, was directed at Scarborough by Stephen in the summer of 1959, with Ayckbourn playing the central character of a rock star with a dual personality. Joseph advised on the play in rehearsal, and a copy of the script in Manchester University Library carries additional dialogue in the margin in his handwriting. Ayckbourn found these lines impossible to use verbatim, but helpful in suggesting how the play might be developed.¹

The working relationship between Ayckbourn and Joseph continued over several years and Ayckbourn gained experience as a director as well as continuing to act and to write. His third play, Dad's Tale, was a highly co-operative effort with Joseph contributing the central idea, Campton preparing a scenario and Ayckbourn writing the dialogue. Ayckbourn found collaboration this close rather cramping and decided to write on his own, but he enjoyed the encouragement given by the company and the chance to see his work rehearsed and staged and the opportunity to take part in the production himself. His fifth play, Meet My Father, produced at Scarborough in 1965, was Stephen Joseph's last professional production. It was also the play, which, under the new title of Relatively Speaking, was to put Ayckbourn's name up in lights in the West End and to set him on the path to becoming England's most successful author of the 1970's.

1. Interview with Alan Ayckbourn 21.9.78.

Ayckbourn has never completely lost touch with theatre in the round and in 1970 he returned to Scarborough as artistic director. The discipline of writing a play for a particular theatre and company of actors, and for a fixed production date, seems to suit his way of working, and he tries out all his plays there before they go to the National Theatre or to the West End. He has paid generous tribute to the influence of Stephen Joseph in numerous interviews and in renaming the theatre in the round at Scarborough after his mentor.

From October 1962 until April 1967 Stephen Joseph was responsible for a second theatre in the round, although here he left the day-to-day running to his manager Peter Cheeseman. Reference has already been made (Chapter II) to the work of this theatre in encouraging new playwrights such as Peter Terson, and in pioneering the documentary play, researched, written and performed by the actors.

In the twelve years that Stephen Joseph was active in running theatres at Scarborough, in London, on tour and at Stoke he presented some fifty new plays by thirty inexperienced playwrights. Most of these new authors made no lasting impact in the theatre, as is only to be expected, but a few, like David Campton and Peter Terson have continued to practise their craft as successful professionals over a long period of years without becoming household names. Alan Ayckbourn, Harold Pinter and James Saunders, who all owe something to Joseph's help, have become extremely successful.

It is difficult to assess his contribution to these writers' achievement, any more than it is possible to measure his influence in pioneering resident playwrights, the promise of performance, group play-writing and authors working as actors in the company. The tributes to Joseph from playwrights which are included in this Chapter offer some evidence but his work has been overshadowed by George Devine and the Royal Court, which, although starting after Joseph, achieved much more impact.

Alan Ayckbourn has suggested that George Devine was the right man in the right place, and that Stephen Joseph was the right man in the wrong place (Scarborough), probably by choice.¹ What becomes clear, however, is Joseph's belief in theatre as a 'total activity' in which each part is dependent on the other parts: playwrights concerned with their scripts need to be involved with the actors who perform them and the buildings in which they are performed.

1. Interview with Alan Ayckbourn 21.9.78.

CHAPTER IV

NEW THEATRE FORMS

When Stephen Joseph left University in 1948 to work in theatre he found it dominated architecturally by the proscenium arch. The audience and the actors were in two separate rooms in the theatre and the audience watched the actors on the stage through a picture frame or hole in the wall. Many critics and theatre workers saw the proscenium arch as the apotheosis of theatre form for which man had been striving ever since the booth stage. Allardyce Nicoll writing A History of Late Nineteenth Century Drama states:

Architecturally, the playhouse of this time reached a form after which men had been groping for 200 years. That tendency which, beginning at the close of the seventeenth century, gradually cut away the old Restoration apron and the attendant stage doors now attained its culmination. The apron vanished entirely and the picture frame stage, apt for realistic and spectacular experiments, was established.¹

The proscenium stage was a splendid place to exhibit painted scenery and Stephen had professional skills as a scenic artist and as a designer.² He earned his living for a time by these skills but gradually he turned against the "enclosed stage" and the separation of actor and audience by the proscenium arch. His objections were aesthetic and economic and this Chapter will examine the rationale behind these views which supported his practical steps to provide an alternative form of theatre.

1. 1946, I, p.29.

2. In 1964 he published a book on Scene Painting and Design.

Nearly all of Stephen's writings on the theatre deal with the type of building in which an actor appears and the particular kind of relationship this entails with an audience. He was in favour of a close working relationship in which psychological interaction and creative response was possible.

It seems to me that the theatre's unique quality lies in the simultaneous presence of actors and audience; and from this follows the importance of spontaneous creation by the actors, the ephemeral¹ and unique give-and-take between actors and audience.

He saw the proscenium arch as putting a barrier between stage and auditorium and preventing this interaction. The audience became spectators looking at stage pictures and not participants involved in some subtle sense with the dramatic action. He argued that this form of theatre was the rather sterile culmination of a process which had started with the Renaissance Italian Court Theatre in the sixteenth century. Everything in the permanent setting on the stage was arranged in perspective for the benefit of the Duke sitting in the seat of state. Stephen once described to a national conference of art teachers how a successful sewage engineer called Leonardo da Vinci decided to go one better and to invent moving scenery.

"I've studied this perspective lark long enough. I know I can put three dimensions on a two-dimensional wall. I can do colours marvellously and chiaroscuro and all the rest of it. But I cannot get movement. I have played at home" says Leonardo, as indeed he did, "with the camera obscura and abstracted perspective from it. Hell!" he says, "I want moving pictures." So he marks the surround of the plaster which he is to paint the framework, and knocks a hole into the next room. And in there he puts his pictures up in layers so they can be

1. 'Forms of Theatre for the Sixties'. Unpublished article. Manchester papers.

moved. "Hurrah!" he says, "We have moving pictures, send for the Doge!" ... All the workmen (who work in Leonardo's engineering department in the castle) are there on winches and ropes and at a word they all heave like mad. The scene changes and we have movement.

Moving pictures were invented. So they remained for a long time until Kodak invented the film and made it easier to make movies.¹

The history of the development of the theatre for the last four hundred years was really the story of improvements in machinery to manipulate scenery and the increased ingenuity of designers in exploiting these facilities to make moving pictures. As far as Joseph was concerned the main function of the picture-frame stage had now been taken over by the film industry. It was time to get back to the core of theatrical performance which involves two groups of people, one group performing a play for the other group to watch. And this would be more effective, in terms of interaction between the two groups, if actors and audience were in one room, and not two, as in the proscenium theatre.

This led him, logically, to some form of open stage. Although Stephen Joseph's name is closely linked to theatre in the round he was sympathetic to other forms of open staging. A note on policy included in the programme for David Campton's Four Minute Warning makes clear that he was against monopoly of any single form of theatre.² We had enough proscenium theatres, he did not want to see them pulled down, but we certainly needed to build more thrust and open end - stages as well as theatres in the round. As Ayckbourn remarked at an interview,

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1. National Society for Art Education Journal of Annual Conference, 1961.
 2. Winter Tour 1960-61. Programme in Campton papers.

in an age of film and TV, Stephen set out to find what theatre had to offer, and it was not spectacle.¹ For Joseph the key to exciting theatre was the relationship between actors and audience.

My own concerns are to reduce the physical distance between actors and audience, to put stage and auditorium in one architectural volume, and to ensure that everyone in the audience can see and hear the actors.²

He was interested in all forms of theatre that could do this both in the past and in the present. In 1960 he visited America on a grant to prepare an exhibition 'New Theatres in the U.S.A.' for a conference on theatre at York University which he helped to organise later the same year. He built up considerable expertise in theatre design and when Strand Electric wanted to publish a pamphlet to complement 'Stage Planning', which they published on the picture frame stage, they invited Joseph to write it. Planning for New Forms of Theatre gives advice on designing and equipping all forms of open stage. He describes seating and lighting arrangements and illustrates his points with clear diagrams.³ The existence of the pamphlet, published by the largest manufacturers of stage lighting in the country is a mark of the interest in alternative forms of staging by this date (1962).

In 1955 when Stephen set up his first experiment he chose theatre in the round, the most extreme form of open staging. He enjoyed upsetting people's conventional ideas and it certainly brought the actors near to the audience. In a table published in Theatre in the Round, he demonstrated

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1. Interview 21.4.78.
 2. Stephen Joseph, Theatre in the Round, 1967, p.137.
 3. Joseph expanded the pamphlet to a full length book, published posthumously in 1968, New Theatre Forms.

that at the Scarborough Theatre in the Round 100 per cent of the audience are in the first five rows, in the thrust stage at Chichester 19.3 per cent and at the Haymarket in London 8 per cent. He argued that it was difficult for an actor to make an impact on members of the audience seated at ninety feet and perhaps thirty rows from the stage. These figures make his point even if they play down the total size of the audience. He also thought it would be easier for the actors to make a complete switch from the 'linear' projection required for the proscenium stage when the voice and gesture are projected in one direction through the arch, to the 'organic' projection required in the round when actors face each other rather than facing the audience. In a pamphlet sold to audiences in the first season at Scarborough he argued three advantages to production in the round.

Firstly the acting can be entirely realistic. Next the problems that have faced producers since poor Antoine puzzled over the difficulty of deciding which wall to remove from his supposed room to let the audience see are solved in a new and simple way. Finally the difficulty of projection by the actor resolves itself into a question of sincerity and subtlety.¹

It is very doubtful if sincerity and subtlety are enough for the actor in any form of theatre, but Joseph was right when he argued that performance in the round provided a new stimulus for the actor. Stephen's ventures were of necessity launched with very little capital and he always argued that one of his main reasons for choosing theatre in the

1. 'Theatre in the Round', an 8 page pamphlet. RW papers.

round was economic. He felt that many towns that wanted theatre were suffering from the same financial constraints and that theatres in the round were cheaper to build and cheaper to run. They had no conventional scenery and so did not need an expensive fly-tower or elaborate workshops or the staff to man them. He was right about the capital costs of building new theatres but there are weaknesses in his argument when it comes to the running costs of theatre in the round, particularly with touring companies. It is easy and inexpensive to present plays in the round to small audiences of up to eighty people sitting in a double ring of chairs, but once you go beyond this to bigger audiences of three or four hundred, you need a large number of rostra, steps and hand-rails to raise the audience, and these are expensive to build and to transport. No scenery is required, but furniture and properties must be of the highest quality to stand close inspection from the audience during the performance and as they leave the auditorium, many of them across the acting arena. Lighting is more complex in the round and actors need to be lit from three or four directions as against two on the proscenium stage. Nevertheless, once the theatre is set up, production costs are low, and new plays can be tried out before the public without risk of a big loss.

Stephen opened his first theatre in the round in 1955. He quickly convinced himself that it was an exciting and economical way of presenting plays. He thought it could bring new writers and new audiences to the theatre, and hoped that other producers would try central staging for

themselves. When this did not happen he started a campaign in papers and magazines. If he could not convert by example he would try preaching. He looked for a suitable occasion and in 1957 there was a controversy in the press about the closure and demolition of the St. James Theatre in London. Public opinion was demanding that the theatre be preserved. Stephen argued that change was essential to a live institution and that if the developers had their way in demolishing St. James and building a tower block then we should insist on a theatre in the round being included in the basement.¹ He cited the example of the Teatro Sant Erasmo in Milan and pointed out that parking, cloakroom and restaurant facilities could be used by office-workers during the day and theatre-goers in the evenings. A theatre in the round, with no fly-tower and no space-consuming scenery workshops would fit neatly into the basement area. Over the years he made similar suggestions in the press on several occasions and in one case this led to his being threatened with legal action. A West End developer claimed to be including a conventional theatre in a tower block he was building. When Stephen found that the wing space of the new theatre, the Prince Charles, was only two feet six inches he denounced the enterprise as a cinema disguised as a theatre to deceive the planning authorities.² This led to solicitors' letters, but within a year or so of opening Stephen was proved right when the building became a cinema. He enjoyed newspaper controversy on subjects

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1. Letter from Stephen Joseph to The Guardian 20.7.57.
 2. Letter from Stephen Joseph to The Stage 4.1.62.
Also criticism of Prince Charles Theatre in A.B.T.T. Bulletin No.5, September 1962.

such as this, and if a correspondence he had initiated looked like ending, he would sometimes take a contrary line, writing under the assumed name of Heath Block.¹

Many of his contributions to newspapers and magazines were less contentious and draw attention to the need for new playwrights and the advantages of central staging. A typical article, published in The Stage for 8.8.57. under the title 'Chances Offered by Theatre in the Round', points out the opportunity for sincerity and concentration it gives to the actor and argues that the absence of scenery gives the playwright freedom in placing his action. He also argues, citing the critic W. A. Darlington as his authority, that a change in the material aspects of theatre usually precedes changes in the style of play-writing.

It is perhaps a pity that Joseph did not give more attention to theoretical questions of this kind. His book Theatre in the Round is more concerned with problems of acting, production and equipment than with the aesthetic or even philosophical implications of putting the actor in the centre of his audience. He does, however, refer briefly to these matters in the Chapter on 'Planning Notes' towards the end of the book. He thinks that an unraised stage is suitable for modern plays and modern acting.

The raised stage is ideal for Kings and Heroes, exalted characters, the protagonists of classical and romantic drama. But modern drama has many different protagonists. I suggest they are usually on the same level as the audience which

1. A letter from Heath Block attacking Stephen Joseph's position appeared in The Stage 1.2.62.

may properly look down on them. Now, secondly, recall that, on a central stage the actors are seen against a background of audience. They do not have the surroundings of illusion, of painted rooms, or colourful or atmospheric scenery. Instead, they are positively human beings, set against a background of human beings, and against this background each member of the audience will judge their actions.¹

There is some social comment here but I am not sure that he is saying very much more than that the theatre experience is sharpened when actors and audience are close to each other. He did not give a great deal of attention to such problems and probably felt that such discussions could wait until he had some experience of working in a purpose-built theatre in the round. He complained that judging central staging in temporary fit-ups was like judging the proscenium theatre by performances in the school gymnasium.²

No purpose-built theatre in the round was erected in this country during his life-time, and only one since.³ Nevertheless many of the ideas he advocated for the open stage have affected theatre building both before and after his death. Few new theatres are built with a proscenium arch and if they are it blends into the rest of the architecture and presents no aggressive and divisive picture frame. There is often a fore-stage of some sort linking the main stage with the auditorium.⁴ Most new theatres have an experimental second auditorium where all forms of staging can be carried out. Companies working in older theatres have acquired small workshop theatres; for instance the most exciting work at Stratford by the R.S.C. is done in 'The Other Place' which is always open stage and often theatre in the round.

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1. Theatre in the Round, 1967, p.121.
 2. Ibid., p.5.
 3. Royal Exchange at Manchester. Letter from P.R.O., 19.1.79, acknowledges possible Joseph influence.
 4. Even if it cannot be lit as appears to be the case at the Sherman, Cardiff.

Such changes are certainly not due to the influence of one man. We all build on each other's shoulders just as Stephen Joseph built on Jack Mitchley's. But Stephen was certainly one of the earliest and one of the most persistent voices calling for major changes in theatre buildings in the post-war period. Some of his contemporaries have been generous in their assessment of his influence: one theatre director, Peter Cheeseman, told me that the Sheffield Crucible would not have been built in its present shape without the impact of Stephen's work; and a drama adviser, Jack Mitchley, suggested that the National Theatre would not have the small Cottesloe Theatre without the example of Stephen's experimental activity. (Perhaps he ought to take some of the responsibility for the less successful open-stage Olivier but then he always said the National Theatre should be built in wood so that it would burn down every ten years and be re-built with fewer mistakes.) These assertions about his influence cannot be proved but I would suggest there is some truth in his remarks written shortly before his death while vainly planning another season:

During this period although no theatre in the round has been built, hardly a theatre has been planned in this country without reference to the central stage and other new forms of theatre.¹

1. Manchester papers.

CHAPTER VTEACHING DRAMA

At a weekend conference for amateur producers, a speaker berated the students for arriving late. "When I have something important to say I put it at the beginning of my lecture." She turned to her fellow speaker. "Don't you do that Mr. Joseph?" He gave a rather hunted look and answered, "I never know when I am going to say anything important."¹ Stephen never taught with authority. Whether he was working with students or with fellow professionals he never came into a lecture room or a rehearsal with a fixed body of knowledge or wisdom which he wanted to transmit to his students. The topic to be discussed or the play they were rehearsing had certain problems and he would help, but he expected students to find their own answers. If he had to impose a solution he felt he had failed.

Tony Jackson, now a lecturer at Manchester University, and formerly one of Stephen's students in the Drama Department, recalls a production of Marlowe's Edward II.² The date of production had been postponed and rehearsals had dragged on for weeks with Stephen as a more or less bored spectator. Jackson, who was playing the title role, felt that he for one needed much more help and firmer direction. One afternoon, when rehearsals had degenerated to almost aimless repetition, Stephen suddenly took the production "by the scruff of the neck", made some cuts, changed the entrances and drove the play along at a tremendous pace, overlapping the

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1. Letter from Pamela Edwards to Andrée Melly 26.3.78.
 2. Telephone interview 27.7.78.

end of one scene with the beginning of the next. He left the cast exhausted and exhilarated and they were surprised to hear later that when he had gone to the Senior Common Room for a cup of tea he had complained bitterly that the rehearsal was a failure because he could not get the students to think for themselves.

George Taylor, another former student and present member of the Drama staff at Manchester University, says that Stephen told him that one of his most successful productions was undertaken virtually without preparation.¹ A visiting director broke his leg on the first morning of rehearsal and Stephen took over without having read the play. He told the actors that they knew the script better than he did and asked them what furniture and entrances were needed; from this he went on to enquire about the motivation of character and climaxes.

One of his students at Central School writes:

He gave me immense freedom as an actress, even to finding one's own moves. Somehow he inspired confidence. He created an atmosphere in which people could combine creatively.²

Joseph's method was to set up a learning situation and to act as a kind of catalyst.

The ability to create such an atmosphere is a teaching skill of the highest order but it is very difficult to evaluate or to describe. Former colleagues and students respond eagerly when asked about Stephen's teaching, but then find it difficult to say what was important about his work and

1. Interview with George Taylor 25.5.78.
2. Letter from Shirley Jacobs 18.7.77.

end up with an anecdote about some such event as a trip to Battersea Fun Fair.¹ He was not the teacher to give you a new character analysis of the King of France in All's Well that Ends Well or an interpretation of Easter but he could help you to find your own way through the part or make it exciting to direct a play by Strindberg.

Stephen Joseph's first sustained spell of work in higher education was at the Central School of Speech and Drama from 1949 to 1955. He was appointed to teach acting and to take rehearsals.² His method was to create an atmosphere in which students could explore their parts until they found interpretations which drew on their own emotional and physical resources, related to the other performances and did justice to the play. He believed that there was more than one answer to an artistic problem and encouraged his actors to experiment far into rehearsal, finding, for instance, five different ways to say a single line.

Responsibility for characterisation and moves was pushed on to the actors and Joseph would sit watching the rehearsal, presiding over an "encouraged chaos" and waiting for something interesting to happen on the stage. If it did not, he would tell the company it was rather dull, possibly ask one or two questions about the scene and then invite the company to try again. Occasionally the student company reacted violently to his methods, and once, when I was present at rehearsal, I saw a student who had been told that her performance was rather dreary, howling her lines and gesticulating wildly. At the end of the scene she stood centre stage breathing heavily and waited for an explosion. Joseph looked up at

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1. Letter from Cicely Berry, voice coach to R.S.C., 9.2.78.
 2. The second period of teaching was at Manchester University 1962-66.

her in mild surprise and remarked that he did not know she could act. Her performance changed several times in rehearsal but the production had come to life. The proof of his work was in performance and however idiosyncratic his methods and however slight his apparent direction, his productions were never dull, and, at a time when students were often drilled in their parts like puppets, his actors always looked relaxed and convincing in their roles. Indeed some of the senior groups at Central began to demand Stephen as a director for their productions.

Joseph's duties at Central included teaching some theatre history, and here again his teaching method was provocative. Jeffery Dench, now of the R.S.C., remembers him as a devil's advocate in discussion:

I recall S.J. as a man who would "float" ideas - often outrageous on purpose to spark off discussion and argument, when he would sit back and watch and listen to our arguments - he, all the time knowing that the original statement was wrong.¹

Joseph's questioning approach extended to the curriculum at Central, and he advocated the introduction of a course on stage management to include lighting, sound, building scenery, making properties and running the show. There was the need for training in these skills both for stage managers, and for actors who would often have to help with these activities in their first jobs. As a matter of professional pride, Joseph had mastered these technical aspects of production and he was invited to set up a pilot course as an option for acting students.²

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1. Letter from Jeffery Dench, R.S.C., 18.1.79.
 2. Later stage management became a 'main' course in other hands.

When he returned to Central School after a sabbatical year at Iowa University he persuaded the College authorities to start play-writing courses but these were attended mainly by part-time external students. He also advocated the setting up of advanced courses and although a great deal was not achieved in this field, Joseph acted as tutor for groups of postgraduate and post experience students visiting this country to study British theatre. These students would be attached to regional companies for short periods, and then come back to Central to discuss their experience in seminars and to plan their future programme.

Stephen really did not stop teaching when he left Central in 1955 to set up his theatre in the round. First he took his rehearsal method and a number of his past students with him into the professional theatre. Second, he continued and developed his part-time lecturing activities to amateurs and to students, and went up and down the country advocating experimental staging and the encouragement of new authors. He continued to teach play-writing and bewailed the lack of University facilities for teaching this and other aspects of drama:

... there is a desperate need for departments of drama at our universities where beginning playwrights can learn something of their craft and see their first efforts performed.¹

If practical facilities for teaching play-writing in Universities were very limited, they were non-existent for what might be called the in-service training of theatre architects, designers and technicians.

1. Programme note for A Sense of Loss by J. W. James, 1958.

It was one of Stephen's educational tenets that a group of intelligent adults with access to a library could teach themselves about almost any subject that interested them, and in 1961 he was delighted to be invited to join a group of eminent theatre practitioners, including Fred Bentham, Sean Kenny, Peter Moro, Richard Rilbrow and Richard Southern in setting up the Association of British Theatre Technicians. The group called a meeting on 3 March 1961 at which Stephen was asked to talk about the possible aims of such an association. Among these he suggested the need,

To advocate efficient standards of planning,
building or re-building of theatres, and,
To stress the importance of suitable design
and proper installation of stage equipment.¹

The Association was formed with a flourish and held an international conference in London in June 1961 on 'Adaptable Theatres'. Thereafter the group held regular meetings to hear papers on recent developments and to see demonstrations of new lighting equipment. Stephen became editor of the A.B.T.T. Bulletin, an eight-page news sheet which kept members informed of technical advance and criticised poor design in new theatres. The editor did not receive the research material for which he hoped.

But publish or not, the very fact that research is being done, that groups of technicians are getting together to talk over their affairs, that is a clear indication the Association is serving a useful function.²

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1. Minutes of A.B.T.T. meeting 3 March 1961. Among those present at the first meeting was Peter Hall who launched an attack on rigid fire regulations.
 2. A.B.T.T. Bulletin, January 1964. The last that Stephen edited.

The A.B.T.T. was primarily concerned with theatre equipment and its efficient use. In 1964 Stephen formed an ad hoc committee to set up the Society of Theatre Consultants to advise on theatre architecture. This organisation was less concerned with professional education than with getting fees for its members. Stephen himself was retained as consultant on a number of theatre buildings including the drama studio at Lancaster University.

Joseph's interest in theatre architecture was a contributory factor to his appointment to his second spell of teaching drama, this time at Manchester University. Professor Hunt writes that the Drama Department was set up with a grant from Granada TV and one of the conditions was the establishment of a Fellowship to give a 'working practitioner' from the theatre a sabbatical year to teach and to study. The University was building a new theatre. Richard Southern was the consultant, but Hunt wanted to appoint a Fellow who could be on the spot to advise on day to day matters that arose in the building operation.¹

Stephen was appointed in time to help in organising a conference on 'The Actor and the Architect' in the autumn of 1962.² Speakers included Tyrone Guthrie, Richard Southern, and Christopher Stevens, the architect of the Chichester Festival Theatre, and plays were presented in various theatre forms including a production in the round by Stephen of Euripides' Bacchae. The Whitworth hall, where the play was performed, was not a particularly convenient building for dramatic presentation and, when the Drama Department acquired the German church on the University

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1. Letter from Professor Hugh Hunt 22.1.79.
 2. Stephen Joseph (ed.), The Actor and the Architect, 1964. Conference papers.

campus, Stephen planned its conversion into a drama studio.¹

At the end of his year as a Fellow, Stephen was appointed to a lectureship and began to question the syllabus for the drama degree which was largely made up of a list of plays to be studied. At a staff meeting, Peter Thomson, who had just been appointed for his knowledge of dramatic texts, was alarmed to hear Joseph say:

Anyone can read a play. We ought to be teaching them what they couldn't find out without us, and only that. Everything else we should be encouraging them to learn for themselves.²

Professor Hunt was sympathetic, but maintained that little change was possible in the syllabus until students came to the University with a much firmer background in English dramatic literature. Another problem was the assessment of practical work, but Stephen drew parallels with physics, chemistry, architecture and medicine, in which practical work was the backbone of the course.

Provided practical work is properly studied it can be tested by a written paper ... and it can be further tested by a practical examination.³

Joseph was aware of the epistemological problems in deciding what practical skills should be studied and the difficulty of providing the necessary studio and workshop facilities..

But the snag is 'properly studied' for you cannot adequately examine a subject unless there is an agreed syllabus and reasonable opportunities for practical study.⁴

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1. After his death the studio was named after him.
 2. Letter from Professor Peter Thomson 11.4.77.
 3. Notes on Practical Work, undated. Manchester papers.
 4. Ibid.

The undergraduate course remained largely text-based, but Joseph took classes in improvisation with first-year students. An account of one such class by John Heilpern in The Observer describes an exercise where Stephen sat in a chair and invited students to move him by argument, threat, or stratagem.

- Haven't you any manners? a girl student was saying.
- No! I want the chair.
- Well you can't have it.
- Come on you bastard, get up for a lady.
- You're no lady!¹

Everyone laughed, but the exercise was a serious one. Joseph explained that they were exploring the "I won't" situation which develops dramatically through opposition. The exercise is very close in essence to the situation he set his playwriting classes in which one person wanted another person's space. Professor Hunt writes that the classes were highly successful and Joseph got work out of the students that neither they nor his colleagues thought they were capable of, and that he had that rare skill among theatre practitioners of being able to ally academic work with practical work.²

If there were limitations to the amount of practical work that could be included in the undergraduate course, there were none in the Postgraduate Diploma in Drama which Stephen was asked to set up and run from 1963. A former colleague, Peter Thomson, describes the Diploma course as a year long image of his (Stephen's) idea of a university

1. The Observer Colour Supplement 6.1.66.
 2. Letter from Professor Hugh Hunt 8.3.78.

drama course.¹ The common class for students on the course was in play-writing, not only for potential authors but as a way of exploring dramaturgical theory and the nature of theatrical experience. The course started with improvisation and went on to a variety of written exercises: writing the scenario of a modern play that complied with Aristotle's requirements: dramatising a short story, or scripting a scene which had been explored through improvisation. Every Monday evening there were studio sessions when members of the course or interested undergraduates presented experimental or original work, "scripts written by students in the department, improvisations, and other forms of entertainment". These programmes provided the material for the Tuesday seminars which were a central feature of the course.²

In addition to this core course students chose at least one option from a list which included Acting, Design, Directing, and Trends in Contemporary Theatre. Stephen did much of the teaching, but there was little in the way of formal instruction, and for written work he invited students to write on whatever interested them. Most of the course work was done through projects devised by the students. As with teaching play-writing, he believed that students learned by trying things out. If he was asked for ready-made solutions his normal reply was to say he didn't know and to encourage the student to experiment for himself. He believed that students learned from taking responsibility and entrusted an American postgraduate student with the production of Boucicault's

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1. Letter from Professor Peter Thomson 11.4.77.
 2. Interview with David Gale 9.7.77.

The Shaughraun which was to open the new University theatre. Professor Hunt saw a late rehearsal and was disappointed with the standard achieved, and he appears to have told Joseph that this shop window for the work of the Department was more important than the educational development of one student. As with Edward II, Stephen rose reluctantly to the occasion, and gave a brilliant display of the autocratic director to achieve a highly creditable production.¹

Many of the Diploma students saw the course as a form of professional training for the theatre. Stephen knew that no piece of paper from a University could secure admission to a crowded profession, but he arranged for visits to studios and theatres and invited theatre people in to talk to his students so they would be aware of working conditions in theatre and TV. It is disappointing that Stephen did not make more use of his link with Stoke, but he took a number of students across to Scarborough to work with him in his final summer season of theatre in the round in 1965, and the following year the students ran a summer programme of plays in the University Theatre, but by that time Stephen was too ill to be heavily involved. He was, however, still keenly interested in the future of the Diploma course and wrote a memorandum to his colleagues suggesting that the syllabus should give more attention to the needs of future theatre administrators as the theatre was crying out for people with knowledge in this field.²

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1. Interview with George Taylor 25.5.78.
 2. Diploma in Drama: Progress Report, S.J., Jan. 1966. Manchester papers.

Joseph obviously enjoyed his teaching at Manchester and Professor Hunt feels that he had found his true vocation as a University lecturer,

working with young enthusiasts who (God help them!) hoped to pursue a career in the theatre.¹

He was certainly an inspiring teacher and his methods varied little whether he was working with University students or with young professionals. Whether solving a problem or rehearsing a play, he liked to set up a learning situation where people could experiment together until they found a solution.

I like the producer to encourage the actors as imaginative workmen, doing a job in which each must be sensitive to his own role and also to the roles of the other actors as well as, in performance, the audience. I like to think of rehearsal as practice time, when a number of possibilities can be allowed for, final choice being taken by the actors in the face of the audience. The final choice is the key to talent - this is the creative moment that the audience recognises as more exciting than anything in film or T.V. - and it should colour the entire presentation. Which makes the producer's job difficult.²

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1. Letter from Professor Hunt 8.3.78.
 2. Letter from Stephen Joseph to Peter Cheeseman. Undated. c.1960. Manchester papers.

CONCLUSION

About eighteen months before his death Stephen Joseph began to work towards a synthesis of some of his ideas about writing plays and performing them. Most existing dramatic theory was really dramaturgical theory concerned with play-writing and he wanted consideration to be given to the contribution of the actor. He set down some of his ideas in note form in seven pages of typescript under the title 'Prolegomena to a New Dramaturgical Theory'. It begins with the following summary:

Purely dramaturgical theory can only deal with separate and particular groups of material, each group, no matter how big, that gives rise to such a theory, does not embrace every sort of play. This is because the play is not, in the theatre, primary creative material but is secondary to the actor. A wholly adequate dramaturgical theory must rely to some extent, yet essentially, on histrionic considerations.¹

The notes are in three untitled sections; dealing with traditional dramatic theories; the nature of pre-literary drama; and the theatre experience.

Joseph felt that Brunetière gives the most convincing of modern theories and made his own translation of The Law of the Drama.² (He used the "I want" situation, "a will directed towards a goal, and conscious of the means he employs to achieve it", as a basis for play-writing and improvisation exercises.) Joseph found no real incompatibility between Brunetière and Aristotle but felt that neither of them gave any help with

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1. Manchester papers January 1965.
 2. F. Brunetière, The Law of the Drama, translated S. Joseph, p.6. Campton papers.

subsidiary figures in a play, nor were they any help with analysing a wide range of dramatists from Aristophanes to Brecht and the theatre of the absurd. He was already finding more questions than answers.

His second section is concerned with the origins of drama which he suggests may be found in sexual dance, imitation and sympathetic magic. (His bibliography includes Fraser's The Golden Bough, Cornford's The Origin of Attic Tragedy and Hunningher's The Origin of the Theatre.) His intention was apparently to try and identify in pre-literary drama some of the elements that were subsequently taken over by playwrights, but such information is, by its very nature, extremely difficult to obtain.

The final section, and potentially the most interesting, is very short and concerns the actor as the primary creator in the theatre. It reduces the playwright to the person who compiles the list of actions and dialogues for each play; it is his job to find the things that the actor can do best. Joseph notes that it is an important characteristic of drama that the actor and his audience share the experience of drama in one place and one time.¹

Stephen raises a number of interesting points in his *Prolegomena*, but he must have known as well as anyone that no one theory was likely to encompass them all. Possibly for this reason he does not appear to have expanded his notes, although he found time during his long final illness to write or complete two books.² These are practical in tone

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1. 'Prolegomena to a New Dramaturgical Theory', p.6.
 2. Theatre in the Round, 1967 and New Theatre Forms, 1968.

and although they reiterate such principles as the physically close actor-audience relationship in a single architectural volume, we certainly cannot claim that they or the notes offer a sustained and consistent theory of theatre.

Stephen Joseph's real achievement was as a practical man of the theatre with the energy and enthusiasm to make new ideas work. He came into the theatre after the war and found much that disappointed him. The essential bond between actor and audience was weakened by the large size of theatres and the proscenium arch (peephole theatre as he sometimes called it). He developed a form of staging where actors and audience were in the same architectural space and nobody was more than twenty-five feet from the stage. He established two theatres in the round which are still running twelve years after his death, by directors he himself trained, and he opened the eyes of many people to the possibilities of alternative forms of staging.

Stephen found plays in the theatre that seemed irrelevant to the time and he encouraged and developed a group of playwrights, including the most successful author in the British theatre today, by giving them work in the company and the "guarantee of performance" for their plays.

When he needed a change or a regular income he went and taught. He questioned everybody and everything and made people think and act for themselves. And this was really his way of working in the theatre too. His books are there for newcomers to the theatre to read, but his real influence is through the attitudes and activities of the people he trained and taught.

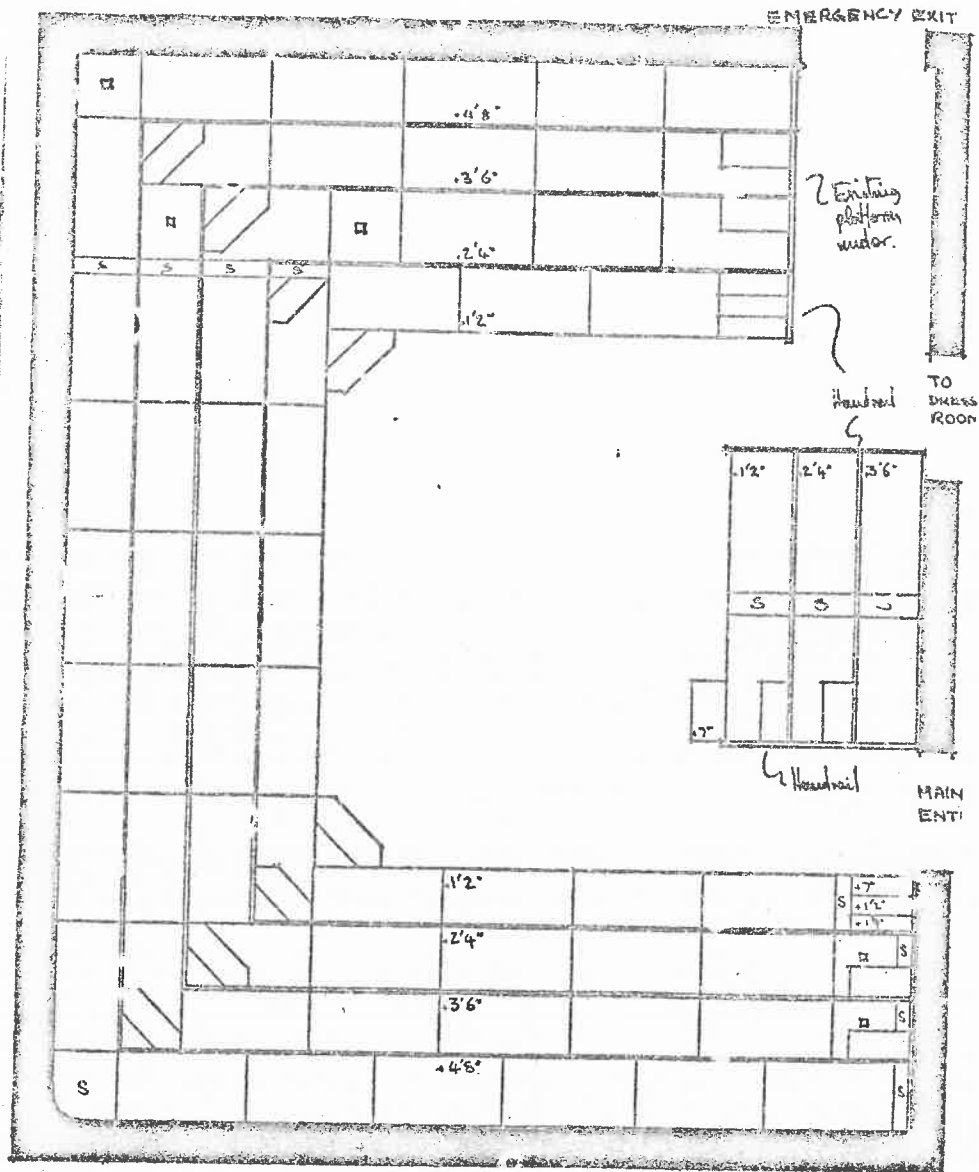
APPENDIX IILLUSTRATIONS

Note: Illustrations are taken from Theatre in the Round by Stephen Joseph, 1967.

Tiers of portable rostrums used to set up the Library Theatre,
Scarborough (p.98)

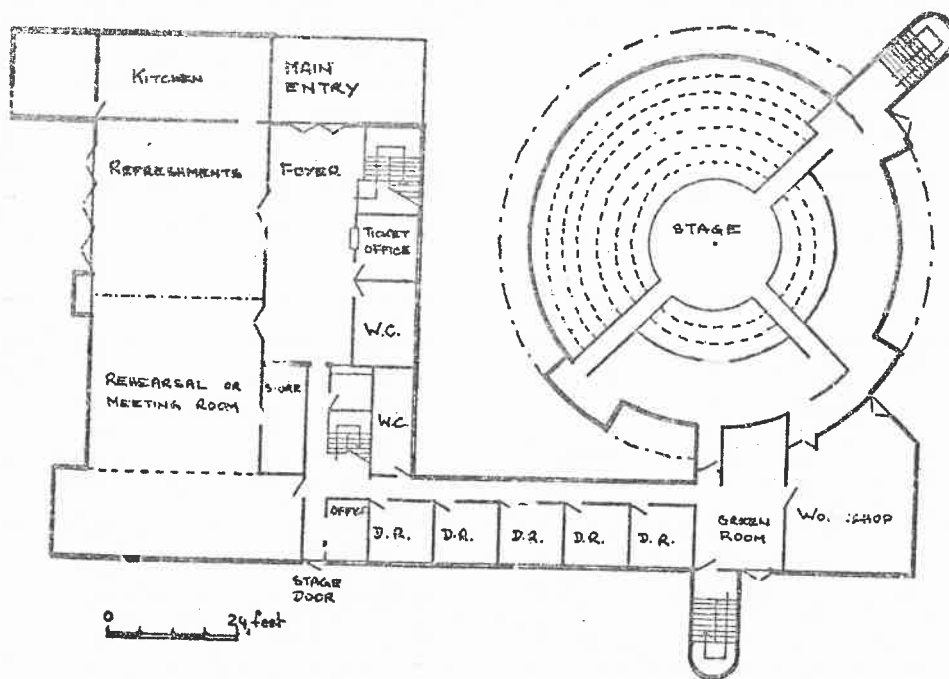
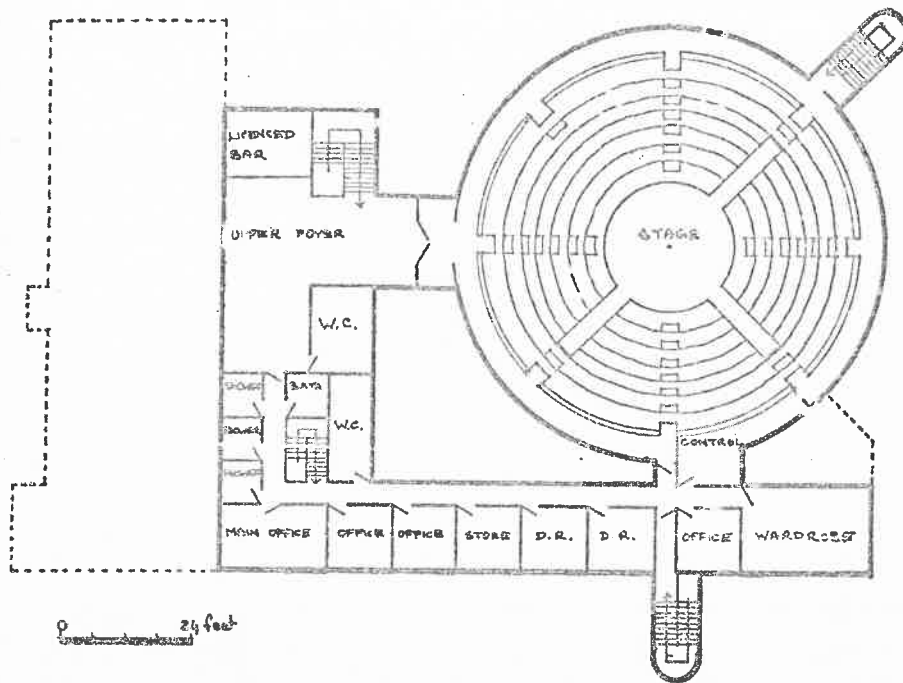
Stephen Garrett's designs for the proposed theatre at Newcastle-
under-Lyme (p.107)

The Victoria Theatre, a conversion designed by Stephen Joseph, from
an old cinema (p.69)

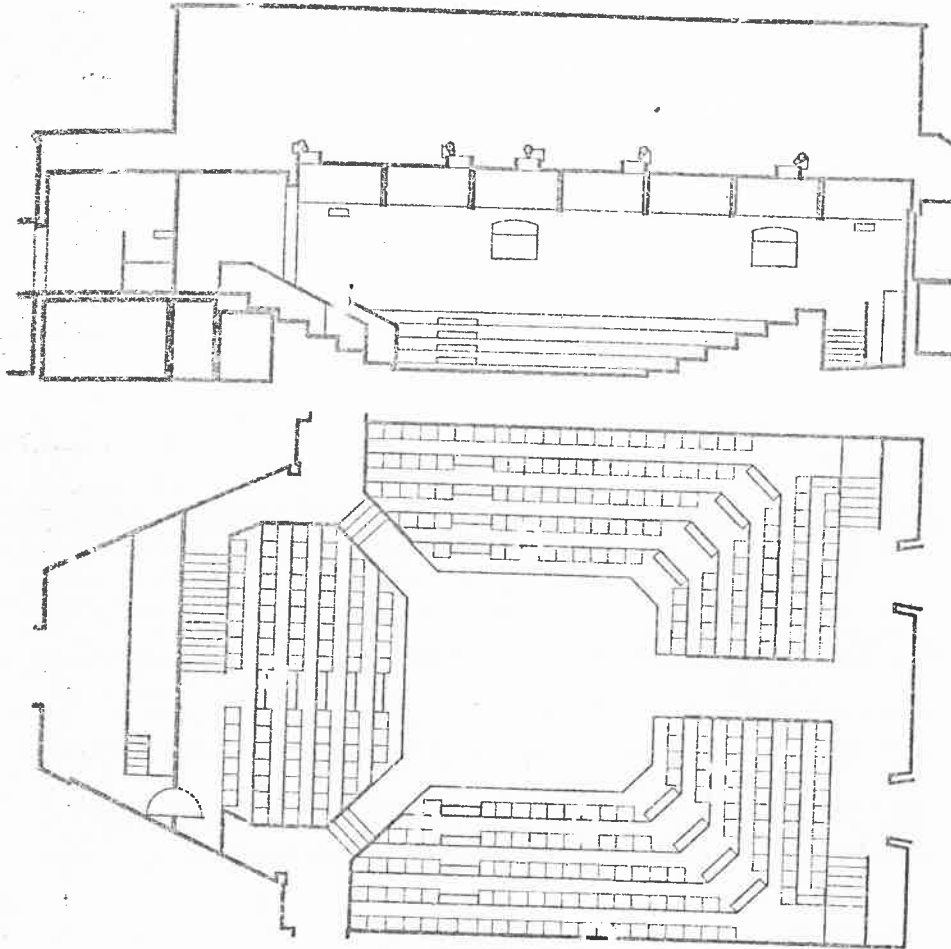


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33. Tiers of portable rostrums used to set up the Library Theatre, Scarborough. The hall presents several problems and a number of special pieces (marked S) have to be added to the standard units.



36. Stephen Garrett's designs for the proposed theatre at Newcastle-under-Lyme.



17. The Victoria Theatre is a conversion, designed by Stephen Joseph, from an old cinema.

APPENDIX II

NOTES ON BOOKS BY STEPHEN JOSEPH

During the last five years of his life Stephen Joseph wrote four books and a pamphlet and edited the reports of two conferences. Only one of the books deals mainly with theatre in the round and the other publications include a text-book on scene painting for the proscenium theatre and a child's history of the playhouse. The impulse to publish was probably linked to the hope of financial reward and to his appointment to a University post, as well as to the wish to disseminate more widely the ideas he had demonstrated in his practice and discussed in his teaching.

The nearest to a common theme in the books is the open stage, which covers the subject of the two conferences, his pamphlet and his book on new theatre forms, and his publication on central staging may be viewed as a particular example of the open stage.

Notes on individual books in order of publication:-

Adaptable Theatres, 1962.

A report of the proceedings of the third Biennial congress of the Association Internationale des Techniciens de Théâtre edited by Stephen Joseph. In an introductory address to the conference, which was held in London in 1961, Peter Hall spoke of the need for "a new kind of theatre" and of the contribution which an adaptable theatre could make

to experiment. Several speakers, including Stephen Joseph, who read a paper on his plans for a civic theatre in the round at Newcastle-under-Lyme, had already decided on some form of open stage.

Planning for New Forms of Theatre (1962) 1966

The Strand Electric and Engineering Company invited Stephen to write a companion booklet to their publication Stage Planning which dealt with the proscenium stage. Joseph describes the various forms of open stage and goes on to show how they may be lit by Strand equipment. He gives particular attention to theatre in the round as "the extreme form (of open stage) as far as the embrace of the audience is concerned".

Actor and Architect, 1964

This book contains the papers read at a theatre week at Manchester University in 1962, devoted to making audiences aware of alternatives to the proscenium arch form of theatre. One of the principal speakers was Tyrone Guthrie who described his plans for a thrust stage at Minneapolis. As editor Joseph contributed a preface where he argued that of the two important theatre developments in the 1950's, new playwrights had been welcomed, but that new theatre forms had received less attention than was their due.

The Story of the Playhouse in England, 1963

Written as a history of theatre for young people, the book contains sections on all the main periods from medieval to nineteenth-century melodrama. The prologue stresses that theatre design changes and a final Chapter, 'New Plays, New Playhouses', looks at open stages.

Scene Painting and Design, 1964

Apart from a brief historical outline leading up to the 'enclosed' or proscenium stage, this is a practical manual for the scenic artist that shows Joseph to be fully conversant with making scenery, designing and creating sets. Photographs of settings in small theatres include examples of Joseph's own work at Frinton.

Theatre in the Round, 1967

The first third of the book gives examples of theatre in the round in medieval England, in modern Europe and America, and, at greater length Stephen Joseph's activities in this country. The account of his own work is written rather in the style of a headmaster's report, with praise for a good performance here, an interesting script there, and an acknowledgment for a generous donation towards the cost of lighting. The present writer receives mention as a resourceful lorry driver.

Having demonstrated by example that theatre in the round works, the greater part of the book is devoted to a brilliant practical manual on every aspect of this form of theatre from designing or adapting a

building, to installing lighting and sound equipment, to acting and directing, to choosing the play and stage management.

New Theatre Forms, 1968

In many ways this book is an expanded version of Stephen Joseph's pamphlet for Strand Electric. It describes the three main forms of open stage: central, thrust, and end-stage and a number of possible variations including a corner stage and adaptable theatres. The final Chapter deals with the economic advantages of the open stage.

APPENDIX IIINOTES ON UNPUBLISHED MATERIALManchester Papers

After Stephen Joseph's death the papers from his rooms at Manchester and his home at Scarborough were taken to the University Library at Manchester by David Campton and Les Read of the Drama Department of Exeter University. These papers included unsorted correspondence and unpublished plays and articles by Joseph.

Scarborough Papers

Miscellaneous collections of correspondence held by Ken Roden, who organised the front-of-house arrangements throughout Stephen's work at Scarborough, and by Alan Ayckbourn who bought Joseph's house which still contained some of his papers.

Stoke-on-Trent Papers

Records of the Victoria Theatre, including material on the theatre dispute.

Campton Papers

David Campton who was Stephen's business associate and friend from 1955 to his death, has a complete set of programmes from 1955 to 1962, and copies of many documents given to him by Joseph.

Rodney Wood

The writer was one of Stephen Joseph's students at the Central School of Speech and Drama from 1950 to 1951, worked for him as manager from 1957 to 1959 and directed the summer season at Scarborough in 1967, the year of Joseph's death at his home there.

In addition to the study of the above papers, this dissertation incorporates material from 18 interviews and replies to 104 letters sent to Stephen's former students, colleagues and friends. Unless otherwise stated, all correspondence and interviews quoted are with the present writer.

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