

## VENUE AND FRONT OF HOUSE

Choosing a venue for your production is as important as choosing the play itself. Your group may have its own venue with its own well rehearsed systems. If you have been doing shows in the same venue for many years now might be the time for a change. either in the way you use that venue or in the venue itself. Like every-thing else in administration - budgeting. financial control. marketing - you must be specific in the way you choose and present your venue and organize its house management. If you have your own venue you can not only improve the ways in which serves the public but also adapt it to that it more closely matches the particular play you are presenting.

If you do not have a venue you can start from scratch to find the site that comes closest to your ideal venue. You will have to make a judgement about the advantages and disadvantages it is bound to have. Broadly. if it offers all the facilities you would like. it will probably be too expensive. If it is inexpensive, it will in some ways be inadequate. Set out here are the most Important criteria to consider when finding a venue. You will also have your own based on the specific requirements of your production.

### CONVENTIONAL VENUES

Theatres. art centres and concert halls — buildings designed for public purposes and managed either professionally or non-professionally — are usually available for use by various groups. These venues have obvious attractions in that they have:

- trained experienced staff (from whom you can learn) to help you
- sophisticated lighting, sound and stage equipment
- a marketing operation that you can slot into and its own audience, of whatever size
- a high public profile.

On the other hand, the resident staff will do some of the work you might like to do for yourself. The organization, depending on its size, may not be as receptive to your ideas or as flexible as you would like it to be. Also you will, of course, be paying for all the services it offers, directly or indirectly.

### UNCONVENTIONAL VENUES

Conventional theatre venues may not be available to you for a number of reasons: too large or too expensive, not available when you want them; or non-existent in your area. You may have to look elsewhere and in effect create your own theatre. You may choose to do this instead of using an available one. Either way, once you have decided to look at other performance spaces, you need to think about both the problems and the opportunities.

You can perform in virtually any space that can contain a stage and an audience area: halls, dining halls. the open air. You will almost certainly be hiring the venue so think carefully before deciding.

## **THE PROBLEMS**

### **Licence**

You will need to licence the space as a theatre, albeit on a temporary basis. You will need a licence if you charge admission in any way — that is by selling tickets, selling programmes for admission or asking for a compulsory 'donation'. Find out where your local licencing authority is and discuss your ideas with their representatives. You might find that there are large costs (to do, for example, with emergency lighting) that you had not anticipated. Alternatively, they might suggest solutions to problems that you thought were insoluble.

### **Staging and audience**

The director and designer will concern themselves with the staging and the various kinds that are possible in unconventional spaces. You will be more concerned with the audience area although the two things are closely related particularly in respect of sightlines which in unconventional spaces can be a serious problem.

You may find that the pressure to increase stage size diminishes your seating capacity, and you must ensure that you have the ability to make the income that is necessary. If there is any disagreement on this issue, think positively about it and encourage the director and designer to do so also. There are many different ways of arranging the stage/audience relationship, and in an unconventional venue there will be more scope to be imaginative and flexible. In-the-round creates a surprisingly large seating capacity in an apparently small space, and some plays might lend themselves to promenade performances.

### **Position**

Is there adequate access, including that for the disabled? Is there car-parking nearby?

Examine all these potential problems before you start negotiating terms for the use of the venue because the cost of solving them could affect your ability to mount the project, and will certainly affect how much you are prepared to pay for the hire.

Be realistic about the problems, but also be, and encourage your director and designer to be, positive and creative. There are some venues that will adapt easily to theatre use, but some that won't. If, for example, you are in an old and attractive building, you might lose many of the benefits of using it if you try to obliterate its original features. In other words, look for opportunities in the building which you can use to advantage.

## **THE OPPORTUNITIES**

### **Matching production to venue**

An unconventional venue can give an extra dimension to the play by providing the perfect setting — for example, *As You Like It* in the open air, or *Midsummer Night's Dream* as a promenade, open-air production.

### **Creative freedom**

The space may lend itself to imaginative use and creative lighting, plus the opportunity for impressive design effects with very little set.

### **Public interest**

An unusual project in an unusual venue will stimulate press coverage, and consequently public interest and ticket sales.

### **Sponsorship**

The project is more likely to attract sponsorship because of its unusual nature the heightened public awareness.