

## Railway closures worry Theatres

1965 : The British Railways Board intends to slash the railway network in half following the recommendations of the Beeching Report. Over 2,000 railway stations will close in the next few years. Theatres up and down the country are alarmed at these plans. Not only will they have a serious effect on the movement of scenery by railway - the traditional way of moving a touring company's set - but also an unknown effect on the ability of the general public to travel to theatres.

## Launch of "Go to the Theatre" Campaign

1966 : Theatre organisations have launched a "Go to the Theatre" campaign following a serious decline in theatre attendances over the past few years. Added pressure on theatre finances has come from the recently introduced Selective Employment Tax. One of the areas under investigation is the setting up of a national computerised mailing-list of all theatregoers in the country

## "U" and "Non U" Theatre Ratings?

1965 : As part of the ongoing debate about Theatre Censorship and the powers of the Lord Chamberlain, the Arts Council has proposed that plays be licensed in the same categories as films. For example, "U" for plays which are universally suitable, and "A" for adult plays. In general, theatre managers oppose this "preposterous" idea, and are urging the complete abolition of the Censor.

## Jack Hylton dies

1965 : Jack Hylton has died at the age of 72. He was most closely associated with the Crazy Gang shows which started before the war, and have been a permanent feature of the London Entertainment scene - especially at the Victoria Palace - ever since.

## Guildford honour for French actress

1965 : A new theatre in Guildford, Surrey, has been named after the late French actress, Yvonne Arnaud, a long time resident of the town.

# Talks underway on a "Casting Agreement" to reduce Equity unemployment levels

1966 : The actors' union, Equity, and the Theatrical Management Association have started exploratory discussions on ways in which they can regulate the number of newcomers joining the acting profession each year. According to Gerald Croasdell, the Equity Secretary, "Any such moves must clearly not hold back the development of talent, and must allow managers freedom to choose their own casts. The discussion must not be viewed as an attempt at a 'closed shop', but must be seen as a serious attempt to reduce the massive unemployment which exists in the Equity membership".

Membership of Equity is now approaching 30,000. This is two and a half times the number of performers at the beginning of the century, an era when there was no cinema and no television. A recent Equity survey revealed that at any given time approximately 80% of its membership was unemployed. Since the Second World War there has been a great increase in the number of drama schools and more and more people are seeking to enter the profession each year. "Clearly, something must be done" said the Equity Secretary.

## T.S.Eliot -theatre poet Somerset Maugham dies, 90

1965 : T.S. Eliot, the American born poet who became a British citizen, has died at the age of 76. His plays "Murder in the Cathedral", "The Family Reunion", "The Cocktail Party", "The Confidential Clerk" and "The Elder Statesman" were written between 1935 and 1954, and were said at the time, to herald a new age of poetic drama for British Theatre. Although this did not materialise, they were fascinating pieces of theatre and a part of his literary achievements which have marked him out as the greatest of 20th Century poets and an all time literary giant.

1965 : W. Somerset Maugham has died at the age of 90. In 1908 he had four plays running simultaneously in London's West End, and his works have been frequently revived ever since. He was a master of many literary fields: novels such as "Of Human Bondage", "The Moon and Sixpence" and "Cakes and Ale", his short stories and his essays - and he wrote more than 30 plays. Noel Coward's new play, "A Song at Twilight", is said to portray Maugham as an old, embittered homosexual writer. Fears of a libel suit have been eased with the death of Maugham.

# Lionel Bart's "Twang" is a spectacular flop

1965: It was the most expensive musical ever staged in London's West End. Its pedigree was impeccable: music by Lionel Bart, whose "Oliver", "Blitz" and "Maggie May" have been big hits; designed by Oliver Messell, possibly the best English stage designer of our times; choreographed by Paddy Stone, the brilliant young dance director; directed by Joan Littlewood, the legendary "Theatre Workshop" creator who is said by some to have revitalised British Theatre and to be a brilliant innovator.

However, Lionel Bart demanded his name be taken off the posters since Joan Littlewood had ruined his show; Joan Littlewood walked out; the Birmingham opening was cancelled; Joan Littlewood returned. The Manchester opening was a disaster. Joan Littlewood blamed everyone else; everyone else blamed Joan. She walked out again. She returned. Then she was fired by Bernard Delfont, and the American Burt Shevelove was rushed in to try and save the show. It was a hopeless task. (It also co-incided with the day that "Oliver" became the longest running musical in the world!)

The show opened at the Shaftesbury Theatre to the worst notices anyone could ever recall. It is said to be the biggest theatrical disaster of modern times. The reputations of Bart and Littlewood are in tatters, and the only praise anyone has heard has been for Barbara Windsor, said to be the only decent thing in the show.



Barbara Windsor, James Booth and Bernard Bresslaw in "Twang"