

# Belfast Opera House damaged by IRA bomb

## Pronounced "Hume"

1992: William Douglas Home has died at the age of 80. A highly successful playwright, his works included "Now Barabbas", "The Chiltern Hundreds", "The Reluctant Debutante", "Lloyd George Knew My Father", "The Dame of Sark". and the filmscript, "The Colditz Story". He began as an actor, making his debut in 1937 with the Brighton Repertory Theatre. He was the son of the 13th Earl of Home, and brother of the former Prime Minister, Sir Alec Douglas Home.

## Many New Theatres

1992: Two major new theatres have opened this year, both intended to be venues for national touring productions. The New Victoria Theatre in Woking, situated in the heart of the Peacocks Town Centre Development area, has a seating capacity of 1300. The Swan Theatre, High Wycombe, seats just over 1000. Both theatres have been built by their local authorities and are expected to be self-financing. The West End has acquired two "new" theatres - a renovated Criterion Theatre and the Donmar Warehouse. Scotland gained a replacement for the old Traverse Theatre, when the new venue opened in July.

## Basildon closes

1992: The Towngate Theatre, Basildon, has closed - just four years after it opened. It is a victim of "rate-capping", which penalises local authorities who overspend their budgets. The newly elected Basildon Council say it is impossible to meet the theatre's losses and stay within the Government's spending limits.

## Brian - Lord Rix

1992: Sir Brian Rix, the former master of the Whitehall farce, who retired from theatre to devote himself to work for the mentally handicapped, has been made a Life Peer.

1992: The Grand Opera House, Belfast, was damaged by an IRA bomb which exploded outside an adjacent hotel. Although the explosion took place just before the opening of the 1991/92 pantomime, it was only in the early days of 1992 that inspectors were able to give a full report on the damage.

The theatre, owned by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland, had undergone a major refurbishment programme in recent years and was felt by many to be one of the most beautiful theatres in the United Kingdom. It has now suffered very extensive damage. Repair work is likely to take a year to complete, but the Northern Ireland Arts Council announced that re-building and repairs will begin immediately.

## Drama School students hit by grant cuts

1992: The Theatrical Management Association has called for an urgent meeting with the Secretary of State for National Heritage to discuss the problem of cuts in grants for students attending drama schools. Prior to 1940 no local authority grants were available for drama schools, but after the War the situation changed, and from then till the mid 1970s there was very little difficulty in a student obtaining a grant once he or she had been accepted by a recognised drama school. Since then things have changed considerably. One drama school reported that up to 50% of the students offered places had subsequently turned down the offer because many local authorities have introduced a policy of no grants at all for drama students.

These grants are "discretionary" and not obligatory, as is the case for University students. Many local authorities have been forced to discontinue drama school student grants because of Government pressure on their finances. The TMA sees this as a threat to the future standards of British theatre, and is calling for such grants to be on an equal par with academic courses.

## Death of the Comics The Legendary Marlene

1992: Over one weekend the deaths of both Frankie Howerd, 75, and Benny Hill, 67, were announced. They were two of the leading comedians of the age.

Benny Hill was primarily a television comedian and had enormous success with his television broadcasts in America. His early career had taken him round all the variety theatres in the UK, and he became one of the first of his generation to exploit the medium of television for light entertainment.

Frankie Howerd had similar television success following a long radio and variety career. He occasionally appeared in theatre, even in Shakespeare, and had especial success as the Roman slave, Pseudolus, in Stephen Sondheim's musical "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum". He developed this character into the slave, Lurcio, for a series of television comedies and films called "Up Pompeii".

1992: Starting with her legendary 1930 film "The Blue Angel", Marlene Dietrich was a great star. When her brilliant film career looked like it was ending, she became the greatest cabaret entertainer in the world, starting with entertaining US troops in World War II, and ending by filling the largest theatres all over the world for more than 20 years. She has died at the age of 91.



## Glyndebourne to get a new Opera house

1992: The Glyndebourne Festival Opera House has closed pending a major rebuilding. The private opera house, built by John Christie in the grounds of his Sussex estate, has been in operation since 1934. The building work is expected to take two years.