

6 SCENOGRAPHY

UNIT 1

LOOKING AT THE STAGE THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES



Video Activity 1: Empire of the Eye: The Magic of Illusion - Teatro Olimpico - Andrea Palladio

This fascinating video is about the set design by Vincenzo Scamozzi for Palladio's covered theater in Vicenza. This segment shows how perspective is used to create space that isn't really there.

Producer: Washington National Gallery of Art

Uploaded: 19/9/2008

License: YouTube standard



1

Watch the video at least twice. Then fill in the passage with the words given in the box while listening. Try not to rely just on YouTube subtitles which contain several mistakes, but trust your ears and knowledge!

amphitheatre • backstage • crafted • deep • gates • illusion • lamps
 • lights • masterpiece • palace • performance • performances •
 perspective (2) • player • scale • scenery • set • shadows • space • stage

Illusion becomes pure theatre in the Teatro Olimpico in Vicenza. Andrea Palladio's last work, this extraordinary theatre, is designed in the style of a Roman (1) with phenomenal effect. Palladio takes us back in time. We enter into a spectacular and very special (2) Built in the 16th century, Teatro Olimpico still operates today as a cultural centre and as a theatre dedicated to presenting dramatic and musical (3) Palladio created an imaginary world: the illusion of an outdoor theatre, hidden like a secret treasure in the (4) which houses and protects it. The proscenium is decorated with figures representing members of the academy which commission the creation of the theatre. A monument to the grandeur of ancient Rome, Teatro Olimpico celebrates the elegance of the classical tradition. But it is the (5)

MODULE 6

by Scamozzi that draws us in. His (6) streets provide us sense of space which really isn't there. Less than 30 feet (7) , the main street seems to stretch almost endlessly. The (8) was originally designed for the production of Sophocles' tragedy, *Oedipus Rex*, which opened the theatre. Seven entrances represent the seven (9) of ancient Thebes. Scamozzi carefully placed the vanishing point to create the sense of longer streets and expansive space. (10) from wood, oil-soaked rags, and stucco, the streets, sculpture and details of the buildings create an illusion enhanced by the science of (11) Suddenly, the (12) is wrong. Either the actor is twenty feet tall or the columns are only six feet high. The illusion is gone. It's me again, shrinking down to size and what a big difference it makes. While the (13) seems a world apart to the audience, from the actor's point of view, the audience is nearly sitting on stage. Everyone is a (14) in the performance. (*Actor speaking Italian*) The architecture, the perspective, the actors and the audience are all partners in the magic of the moment. Lighting is also a key player in creating the illusion. Although lit today with 20th century (15) , the entire theatre was originally lit by flames from glass and metal oil (16) The lamps were placed on hooks and small brackets throughout the scenery. Tucked away and hidden in slits and alcoves, simulating doors and windows, providing highlights and (17) , and the illusion of reality and depth. Sheets of tin were placed behind the lamps for protection, giving the flimsiness of construction; it is a wonder the theatre never burned down. Hundreds of lamps lit the theatre during (18) They spread into all parts of the theatre: on the proscenium, the colony and galleries surrounding the audience, and throughout the entire (19) area – like a box filled with fireflies, illuminating the night. How magical it must have been to see this (20) come to life, shimmering in the glow of flickering flames. In architectural and scenic triumph, Teatro Olimpico is a (21) of make believe.



Oedipus at Colonus by Sophocles Syracuse theatre.



2

This is an imaginary interview with an architect mentioned in Module 6, Unit 1. Fill in the gaps with the given words and try to guess his name and who his master was.

affect • Baroque • features • lighting (2) • master • reflected • Renaissance • society • talent

Q.: What about your social background?

A.: Both my (1) and I come from a modest family but I am a generation ahead on the social scale. My father was a carpenter turned surveyor and builder.

Q.: Was yours a very class-ridden (2)

A.: Yes, we both lived in a society where pedigree still counted more than sheer (3), but my father lavished on me all the educational advantages that neither he nor my master had enjoyed.

Q.: Did your formation (4) your architecture?

A.: Yes, my formation had a profound effect on my architecture and my book *The Idea of a Universal Architecture*.

Q.: Did your master overshadow you?

A.: Yes, I think so. The distinctive (5) of my own work tended to be misunderstood or overlooked because of him, I suppose.

Q.: Are you envious?

A.: No, I'm not envious, but without "The Seven Streets of Thebes", this gem of a (6) auditorium would now be difficult to imagine.

Q.: Why did you study (7) with an attention unparalleled among your contemporaries?

A.: Because I'm fascinated with (8) theatre and my preoccupation with lighting is one of the essential keys to understanding my entire "oeuvre," built and written.

Q.: How many types of light did you define?

A.: I defined half a dozen types of light – from above, direct or indirect, (9) and so on. And I successfully applied my research and insights to a variety of contexts – religious, civil and domestic.

Q.: And by doing so, you anticipated by several decades the use of dramatic lighting effects by (10) architects. Did you know that?

A.: No, I didn't. Thank you for telling me.



Video Activity 2: All the world's a stage

Walking tour guide to the Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, London.
 Producer: breakslondon.
 Uploaded: 9/12/2013
 License: YouTube standard



3

Watch the video while reading the subtitles (which are all correct). Then answer the following questions.

- a. What was the theatre called by the Church?
- b. What terms and pieces of information mentioned by the guide have you already read in Chapter B from Module 6?
- c. The guide makes several cultural references. Try to name two of them at least.

UNIT 2

THEATRE, PERFORMANCE AND TECHNOLOGY



Video Activity 1: Interview with a set designer

Interview with Lorna Heavey, set designer.
 Producer: Ideas Tap
 Uploaded: 07/10/2010
 Licence: YouTube standard



1 Decide if the following sentences about the interview with Lorna Heavey are true (T) or false (F), then correct the false ones.

- | | T | F |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| a. Lorna Heavey trained as a scenographer and has been working as a set designer since university. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| b. Both the director and the writer shouldn't be considered as the most important people to talk to in her job. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| c. Her job has to do more with technical skills than with creativity. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| d. Lights are not so essential for the set and to decide what the play will look like. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| e. She does not trust either the text or the director but just her own instinct. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| f. She was given advice by someone fitted to do so in the course of her career. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



2 Read the following text about Philip Prowse and fill in the gaps with the words in the box.

aesthetic • combinations • craft • debut • designer • drawings • interpreters • models • Oscar • performance • plays • production • theatricality • troupes • vocabulary

Philip Prowse (b. 1937) is a director who comes to his (1) from a design rather than a (2) background. Trained at London's Slade School of Art, Prowse worked briefly in the model rooms at Covent Garden before becoming stage (3) at the Watford Palace in 1967. Two years later, he moved on to the Glasgow Citizens Theatre. Over the past two decades, Prowse's (4) has come to dominate the Citizens, helping to make it unique among Britain's regional (5), both in its European outlook and in its sumptuous, exuberant (6) through the period Oscar Wilde has been a mainstay of the company's repertoire. In the 1970s, Prowse twice designed Havergal's staging of *The Importance of Being Earnest*, including a 1977 mounting of the play's four-act version. During the following decade, he both directed and designed his own productions of all three of Wilde's society

MODULE 6

(7) , *A Woman of No Importance* (1984), *An Ideal Husband* (1986), and *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1988), claiming to have found them "comedies" and left them "dramas". The accomplishment – regarded by critic Michael Coveney as "the glory of Prowse's work ... in the 1980s" – has led the *Guardian's* Michael Billington to credit Prowse with "completely revising our notion of how to play early (8) " (9 May, 1988). In 1991, Prowse made his Royal Shakespeare Company with a new (9) of *A Woman of No Importance*. Much indebted to his Citizens' (10), it played to full houses at the Barbican, before transferring to the Haymarket for an extended West End run. He did not do elaborate (11), or rarely made scale (12), but created around him a team of (13) who understood his visual (13), which used similar elements over and over again in different (15)



Video Activity 2: Svoboda's magic

Known for his innovative video, projection and lighting designs, Svoboda's interest in large scale reflections is evident in the 'Traviata of Mirrors' in which an enormous mirror is suspended above the stage. Director: Henning Brockhaus
Uploaded: 26/6/2008
Licence: YouTube standard



Josef Svoboda, *La Traviata*.



3 Watch this video-clip about Svoboda's stage version of *La Traviata* by Giuseppe Verdi, then answer the following questions.

- Have you ever seen *La Traviata*?
- What did immediately grab your attention at the very beginning of the video?
- Would you describe the scene as characterized by a strong presence of architectural elements? Justify your answer.



Josef Svoboda

“When I sit alone in a theatre and gaze into the dark space of its empty stage,” said Josef Svoboda, “I’m frequently seized by fear that this time I won’t manage to penetrate it.” The Czech-born Svoboda, who died aged 81, was one of the most influential stage designers – although he preferred the term “scenographer” – of the 20th century, and an artist in space and light who constantly reinvented the empty stage. With reflections, swiftly moving scenery and an adventurous use of film and projection, he opened classic texts and operas to astonishing multiple perspectives.

In the 1960s, Svoboda visited Britain and designed three plays for Laurence Olivier’s National Theatre, most successfully Chekhov’s *Three Sisters*. Olivier directed, and the designer (Olivier called him “Swobbie”) strung groups of silvery cords between stage and lighting grid, which were instantly transformed by light from inside to outside, from solid wall to shimmering space. “The play ran off like woven silk,” purred Olivier.

(Taken from *The Guardian*)



4 Write questions for the following answers about Josef Svoboda.

- a.
No, he didn’t. He preferred to be called a scenographer.
- b. ?
The signature elements of his ever-changing environments were reflections, swiftly moving scenery and an adventurous use of film and projection.
- c. ?
Yes, he was a pioneer: he opened classic texts and operas to astonishing multiple perspectives.
- d. ?
The nickname “Swobbie” is a pun played on the English word swab (clumsy person) and the scenographer’s surname.
- e. ?
Shimmering space means “shining with an unsteady light”.