

Westward Ho!

*an exhibition of ships, the sea, and other waters
in theatre and popular entertainment*

*June 3-21 1996
Monday - Friday 9.30-5.30*

The Vandyck Gallery, 21 Park Row, Bristol

An exhibition from the University of Bristol Theatre Collection

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Admission Free

Press Release... Press Release... Press Release... Press Release...

UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL THEATRE COLLECTION EXHIBITION

Following in the wake of Bristol's Festival of the Sea, the Theatre Collection's annual summer exhibition (its 17th) this year concentrates on ships, the sea and other forms of water in theatre and popular entertainment.

Prints, posters, music covers, photographs, original stage designs and other material illustrate the varied use of water in entertainment, from the lavish festivals designed for the Sun King Louis XIV, to nineteenth century nautical melodramas and other plays, from Shakespeare to Edward Bond, in which water has a role.

The exhibition, called ***WESTWARD HO!***, can be seen at the Vandyck Gallery, 21 Park Row, Bristol, from June 3rd to June 21st, 9.30 a.m.-5.30 p.m., Monday to Friday. Admission is free.

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Westward Ho!

For centuries water in all its forms has contributed to a wide variety of pleasure and entertainment. The ancient Egyptian drama known as *The Triumph of Horus* was performed on and around the sacred lake within the temple precincts of Edfu, and the Romans built special arenas that could be flooded to accommodate the aquatic entertainment known as the *Naumachia*, which depicted spectacular simulations of sea-battles.

Water occasionally appeared in the passion plays of the late middle ages but reached its apogee as a medium for theatrical effect and spectacle during the Renaissance. Some of the most elaborate water shows were those of the Medici court in Florence from 1589 to 1689. Sumptuous ships and fantastic allegorical boats were built for festivals, triumph entries, funerals, royal or princely visits and other celebrations, or for no special reason other than to entertain the court and the populace.

In England aquatic entertainment devised for the Elizabethan court was less opulent than that of the Medicis but at least two have been recorded. In 1575 the Earl of Leicester entertained Queen Elizabeth with an entertainment called 'Princely Pleasures', part of which took place on the waters at Kenilworth, and the Earl of Hertford had a lake excavated at Elvetham for another water-show in 1591. The same year saw the first London Lord Mayor's Show on the Thames which paved the way for many subsequent river pageants and even had a floating stage.

Water was not a feature of Elizabethan or Jacobean theatre, but following the Restoration, the re-opening of existing theatres and the building of many more, its use on stage became popular and the early 18th century saw the development of Aquatic Drama in the shape of lavish representations of nautical battles, storms at sea and shipwrecks.

One theatre was built specifically for water entertainment as early as 1703 when William Winstanley, an inventor and retired mercer who had designed the first lighthouse on the Eddystone rocks in 1696, opened "Winstanley's Water Theatre" on a site behind St James's Park, London. Six months after it opened Winstanley was swept away in a storm that destroyed his lighthouse and thereafter the theatre, with all its complicated battery of vats, pulleys and pumps, was managed by his widow until its closure in 1713.

In 1794 the rebuilt Drury Lane Theatre (the third) was provided with a stage that contained a tank large enough for a boat to be rowed in it. The water was supplied from tanks in the theatre's attics and doubled as a fire precaution. It did not prevent the theatre from burning down in 1809, however.

In 1683 one Thomas Sadler discovered a medicinal spring in his garden and established there a pleasure-garden which eventually became a fashionable theatre towards the end of the 18th century under the management of the former actor, Tom King. In 1804, when the craze for aquatic drama began, Charles Dibdin, actor, dramatist and ballad writer, took over the theatre, installed a large tank on stage filled with water from the New River and renamed it the Aquatic Theatre. It opened with *The Siege of Gibraltar*, which included a spectacular naval bombardment, but soon reverted to its former name.

The enormous enthusiasm for aquatic drama during the first half of the 19th century reflected the patriotism of the British in an era which saw a series of wars, the nation's pride in the rapid growth of the Royal Navy and the sea-faring trade that made London the busiest port in the world by 1811. The sailor hero became personified as "Jolly Jack Tar", a descendant of the sailor characters in the novels of Smollett, who, incidentally, wrote one of the first nautical dramas, *The Reprisal, or, The Tars of Old England*.

During the last half of the 19th century aquatic drama, or at least dramas built around Britain's victorious sea-battles from the Armada to the Battle of Trafalgar, became less popular, but several theatres retained their tanks for nautical and domestic melodrama.

The Standard Theatre in Shoreditch, East London, was built in 1835 and then rebuilt three times. In 1851 it became one of the largest theatres in the world, with a seating capacity of an astonishing 5,000, and of course a water tank. In 1867 it came under the management of John Douglass whose son, Richard, became one of the foremost scenic artists in England between 1870 and 1910 and as well as providing settings for other theatres designed all of the settings required at his father's theatre. From 1879 he

developed naturalistic staging techniques that would equal those of Bruce "Sensation" Smith at Drury Lane.

The Princess's Theatre in Oxford Street, London (built in 1880 and demolished in 1931), was another major theatre with a water tank which was in use as late as 1896 when Bernard Shaw went to see Dion Boucicault's *The Colleen Bawn*. In his review he wrote: *'I have lived to see The Colleen Bawn with real water in it; and perhaps shall live to see it some day with real Irishmen in it, though I doubt if that will heighten its popularity much. The real water lacks the translucent cleanliness of the original article... but the spectacle of the two performers taking a call before the curtain, sopping wet, and bowing with a miserable enjoyment of the applause, is one which I will remember with a chuckle whilst life remains.'*

During the theatre-building boom between the 1880s and 1912 few theatres felt the need of a water tank and most of them that existed were dismantled. It was not quite the end of theatrical hydraulics, however. In 1899 Edward Moss, founder of the Moss Empire Music Hall Circuit, carried out his lifelong ambition to provide London with a theatre that combined a circus with elaborate stage spectacle.

This was the London Hippodrome at the corner of Cranbourn Street and Charing Cross Road, and it was designed by Britain's foremost theatre architect, Frank Matcham. The circus arena in front of the stage could be flooded with water within minutes. In an aquatic show called *The Zyder Zee* Lupino Lane almost drowned during one performance when he was caught in the huge torrent of water which swept into the arena when the villain opened the flood-gates. The initial enthusiasm for water spectacle gradually dwindled and the arena was dismantled in 1909 and replaced by conventional stalls.

As the London Hippodrome became Moss's London flagship the London Coliseum, also designed by Matcham, became that of his former partner, Oswald Stoll, when it opened in 1904.

The Coliseum did not have a tank, but when Stoll built the Bristol Hippodrome (Matcham again, and his final major project) in 1912 the huge stage incorporated a proportionately large tank which could contain 100,000 gallons of water. The tank was provided with a floor in four sections stretching the full length of the tank. Each section could be independently raised or lowered for a variety of effects.

When the Bristol Hippodrome opened on 16 December 1912, the variety programme's outstanding attraction was a short melodrama called *The Sands o' Dee* (previously seen at the London Hippodrome). It was described as an 'Amazing water spectacle in which enormous waves break across the seashore and horses dive into 100,000 gallons of water to the rescue of Mary, the Heroine.' It caused a sensation but the tank was subsequently little used. It made a brief reappearance in the 1940s with *Hold Your Breath*, an entertainment archly described as an "Aqua-Revuette". It brought together such disparate items as an underwater stripper and the Australian Air Aces in a 'drama of the war below sea level'. A few years later the tank was dismantled.

Like music hall, aquatic drama is now a thing of the past. Along with other forms of theatrical spectacle relished by audiences in the 18th and 19th centuries its fate was sealed in about 1912 when the cinema demonstrated that it could do it much better.

1. Britannia

Sheet music cover. First of a series on National Melodies for the Pianoforte by Albert Dufaure.

Chromolithograph, c.1885

2. Festivals and Fêtes (1)

17th century festival in Amsterdam. An allegorical theatre to the left. To the right of the stage a kneeling figure represents the city, receiving from the hands of the Emperor Maximilian a crown. Spectators watch from surrounding buildings and river bank, while others approach by boat, including the figures of Neptune and Mercury.

Print of an original engraving in the National Library, Vienna

3. The Life of a Sailor

Sheet music cover depicting scenes in the life of a sailor. Composed and arranged for the Pianoforte by Charles W. Glover.

Chromolithograph, c.1890 *Lent by Mr P.P. Small*

4. The Last Chance (George R. Sims)

Poster. Adelphi Theatre, London, 1885

A mammoth production of five acts totalling sixteen scenes, nine of which in the last three acts were designed and painted by Bruce Smith. He was known as "Sensation Smith" for his spectacular stage effects, notably at Drury Lane, which included shipwrecks, earthquakes and train crashes.

5. The Sea (Edward Bond)

Royal Court Theatre, London, 1973

Costume design by Deidre Clancy for Coral Brown as Mrs Rafi.

Ink and wash

6. The Wind in the Willows (Alan Bennett)

Poster. Old Vic Theatre, London, 1996

7. Festivals and Fêtes (2)

Théâtre de Verdure

On 7 May, 1764 a colossal festival took place for the court of Louis XIV, the Sun King, consisting of races, ballets and fireworks. This print shows the water festival of the third day. The huge pond contains two paravents fronting a stage, with three allegorical boats in the foreground.

From an engraving by Izrael Silvestre in the National Library, Vienna

**8. Jack Sheppard: The Convict Ship
Black-Eyed Susan, or, Pirates Ashore**

Young Will Watch, The Smuggler King

Three covers of cheaply printed adventure stories for boys, from the Eric Jones-Evans collection. Eric was an authority on Victorian melodrama and crime, and a prolific playwright in the 1930s and 40s. He scoured books such as these for material he could adapt for stage and radio plays.

9. Victoria Theatre, 1847

Poster advertising ***Ruth, or, The Lass That Loves a Sailor; Wizard of the Wave, or, The Ship of the Avenger*** and other entertainments.

10. Sadler's Wells Theatre

South west view showing the adjacent New River which supplied water for the theatre's stage tank.

Coloured engraving from a drawing by R.C. Andrews, 1792

11. *Ben My Chree* (Hall Caine and Wilson Barrett, based on Caine's novel, *The Deemster*)

Poster. Princess's Theatre, London, 17 May, 1888

This popular melodrama is set on the Isle of Man where Dan, the Hero (Wilson Barrett), and his cousin Mona are in love. Her blackguard brother Ewan accuses Dan of dishonouring his sister and a fight with knives ensues, in which Dan kills Ewan. The *Ben My Chree* is the name of a fishing-boat, the crew of which secretly bury Ewan's body at sea to protect Dan. Unfortunately the body is washed up by the tide, Dan confesses and his future looks bleak. Mona's is worse.

This standardised poster, on which touring companies could attach a sticker giving details of the various theatres they visited, was printed around 1912, which testifies to the play's enduring popularity.

12. Festivals and Fêtes (3)

One of the allegorical ships in the Giuochi Festival in Venice, 1685. This festival ship portrays Diana the Huntress at the stern and her quarry at the prow, beautifully dressed oarsmen between them.

From an engraving by Giulio Parigi in the National Library, Vienna

13. Map of 16th century London, showing the Thames, bear garden and theatres on the South Bank

The first London Lord Mayor's Show on the Thames took place in 1591. Since then it has been the scene of countless festivals and regattas. Perhaps the most famous were the two trips made by King George I in the Royal Barge and with a fleet of smaller vessels. The first was on 22 August, 1715 when he sailed from Limehouse to Whitehall and back; the second was on 17 July, 1717, from Whitehall to Chelsea and back. It was for these two river trips that George Frederick Handel composed his celebrated **Water Music**.

14. *Peter Grimes* (Benjamin Britten)

Sadler's Wells Opera Company, Sadler's Wells Theatre, 23 April, 1963

Alan Tagg designed the scenery and costumes for this production directed by Basil

Coleman. It was later produced by BBC Television in black and white and Alan produced a number of character portraits and scenes, of which this is one, as a visual background to the orchestral interludes in Britten's opera.

15-16. *David Copperfield* (adapted by Louis N. Parker from the novel by Dickens)

Her Majesty's Theatre, London, 1913

15. Act 1 Scene 3 and Act 2 Scene 3: Peggotty's Boat House, Yarmouth

16. Act 3 Scene 1: Gravesend. The hold of an emigrant ship bound for Australia. Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Mr Micawber.

Photographs

17. *Robinson Crusoe* (Pantomime)

Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 1895

Design for a transformation scene by Robert Caney.

Watercolour

18. *Humanity, or, A Passage in the Life of Grace Darling* (Hugh Marston & Leonard Rae)

Standard Theatre, London, 10 April, 1882

This melodrama was built around Britain's most famous heroine of the main. It did in fact include a spectacular scene depicting her rowing to the rescue of shipwrecked souls, but thereafter drama and historical accuracy parted company. The modest lighthouse-keeper's daughter turns out to be of aristocratic lineage and an heiress. The complicated plot came to a thrilling finale when the two villains after her fortune grapple with each other, smashing windows and furniture, and using any available blunt instrument, ending up on the landing of a staircase which spectacularly collapses, killing them both.

This scene was so popular that it became a music hall turn.

Wood engraving

19. *Glamorous Night* (Ivor Novello)

Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, 2 May, 1935

Act 1 Scene 11: The sinking of the liner The Silver Star

Photograph from the Play Pictorial

20. *The Admirable Crichton* (J.M. Barrie)

Duke of York Theatre, London, 4 November, 1902

H.B. Irving as Crichton contemplates the situation by the Camp Fire in Act 2.

From a painting by Charles Buchel

21-24. *Drake* (Louis N. Parker)

Her Majesty's Theatre, London, 3 September, 1912

21. Act 3 Scene 2: The deck of the *Revenge*

22. Act 1 Scene 2: The Path across the Isthmus of Darien

23. Curtain depicting the battle of the Armada

24. Act 1 Scene 3: The quay at Plymouth

Photographs

25. **'Jarge's Trip to Bristol'**

A Countryman's Journey to Bristol to witness the launching of "The Great Britain" in 1843 by H.R.H. Prince Consort.

Third edition of a 'Humorous Poem' sold as a handbill

26. ***Married To a Mermaid***

As sung by Arthur Lloyd, singer of 'swell' songs.

Chromolithograph, c.1875

27. ***The Merchant of Venice*** (William Shakespeare)

Shakespeare Memorial Theatre, Stratford upon Avon, 1956
Set design by Alan Tagg for 'Venice, a public place'.

Watercolour

28. ***The Tempest*** (William Shakespeare)

Princess's Theatre, London, 1 July, 1857
Final scene in the production staged by Charles Kean.

Wood engraving

29. ***A Day By the Sea*** (N.C. Hunter)

Haymarket Theatre, London, 25 November, 1953
Cartoon by "Emmwood" (John Musgrave Wood) of Ralph Richardson, Irene Worth, John Gielgud, Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson in the beach scene.

Ink and wash

30. ***2,000 Leagues Under the Sea***

Still from Georges Méliès' 1903 film, one of the first underwater fantasies of the cinema.

31. **James W. Wallack** (1818-1873)

"Mr Wallack as Khuleborn, Monarch of the *Deep Blue Sea*."

Coloured print with fabric and tinsel

32. ***Mutiny on the Bounty***

Still of the 1935 MGM production, directed by Frank Lloyd.

33. ***The Midshipman*** (Ian Hay and Stephen King-Hall)

"A Naval Manoeuvre in Three Acts"
Shaftesbury Theatre, London, 10 August, 1931

Cover of the Play Pictorial

34. *The Tempest* (William Shakespeare)

Her Majesty's Theatre, London, 1904
Costume design by Percy Anderson for Miranda.

Watercolour and wash

35. *Rough Crossing* (Tom Stoppard)

Royal National Theatre, Lyttleton Auditorium, 30 October, 1984

Cover of the original programme and notes from another programme for the same production.

36-38. Toy Theatre, or, Juvenile Drama

Scenery and characters for toy theatres evolved from the single sheet of paper of four, and later six, actors that were published around 1811. They became so popular that printers began to publish sheets depicting the whole cast of characters in a popular drama or comedy. Later they added sheets of scenery in monochrome, for home colouring, or sheets already coloured at the shop. These became known as penny-plain or tuppence-coloured. The next step was a toy theatre in which to stage the plays.

It soon became a thriving industry between 1811 and 1840 with some fifty publishers engaged in it. The earlier prints were remarkable for the accuracy with which scenery of popular plays were copied and in the portrayal of the real-life actors, their costumes and gestures.

**36. Top: Redington's Scenes in *Paul Clifford*
Bottom: Pollock's New Act Drop Scene of the City of London Theatre**

37. Two of Lloyd's scenes in *Black-Ey'd Susan*

**38. Top: Pollock's Scene in *Whittington and His Cat*
Bottom: Redington's Scene in *Timour the Tartar***

39. Fêtes and Festivals (4)

The great festival ship used for the entry into Antwerp of Archduke Ferdinand of Austria in 1641 with its elaborate decoration, delicate allegorical detail and miniature work.

The artist who produced this ship was Lucas Vandenstamm.

From an engraving in the National Library, Vienna

40. Sadler's Wells Theatre

The interior facing the auditorium and the stage flooded for an aquatic spectacle.

Coloured engraving by Pugin and Rowlandson, c.1815

41. *Twelfth Night* (William Shakespeare)

Old Vic Company, London, 1960-1961
The Illyrian shore: backcloth design by Alix Stone.

Watercolour

42. *On London's River*

Fantasia on English Airs for Piano Forte by Seymour Smith.

Chromolithograph, c.1890

43. *Twelfth Night* (William Shakespeare)

Old Vic Company, London, 1960-1961
Costume design for three sailors by Alix Stone.

Ink, pastel and watercolour

44. *The Critic, or, A Tragedy Rehearsed* (Richard Sheridan)

Old Vic Company at the New Theatre (now the Albery), London, 1945-1946
Mr Puff (Laurence Olivier) shows Mr Sneer and Mr Dangle the scenery for the battle scene during a rehearsal at Drury Lane of his tragedy, *The Spanish Armada*.

Photograph by John Vickers

45. *The Pirates of Penzance, or, The Lass that Loved a Sailor* (W.S. Gilbert & Arthur Sullivan)

The Opéra Comique, London, 25 May, 1878
Above: The Act 1 finale; Below: The 'paradox trio'

Wood engraving from The Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News, 1880 revival

46. *Beauty and the Beast* (Pantomime)

Theatre Royal, Bristol, 1843
Backcloth designed by George Gordon.

Watercolour

47. *The Chain of Events* (Slingsby Lawrence & Charles Mathews)

Lyceum Theatre, London, 12 April, 1852
The Shipwreck scene in this eight-act melodrama.

Wood engraving

48. Royal Opera, Covent Garden

Programme cover designed by Charles Buchel for a "Dramatic and Operatic Matinée in Aid of the *Titanic* Disaster Fund", Tuesday 14 May, 1912. Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree was the Organising Secretary and also appeared in a scene from *Richard II*. Other performers included George Alexander, Mrs Patrick Campbell, Clara Butt, Pavlova and Sarah Bernhardt.

49. James Gillray

Cartoon: "**Pacific Overtures - or - a Flight from St. Cloud - 'over the water to Charley' - new Dramatic Peace now Rehearsing.**"

Confrontation on stage between King George III and Napoleon, who presents his 'Terms for Peace' which include the dismantling of the King's Fleet.

Coloured engraving, 1806

50. *The Flying Dutchman, or, The Phantom Ship*

Playbill for the Theatre Royal, Bristol. Undated

51. *The Last of the Dandies* (Clyde Fitch)

Her Majesty's Theatre, London, 1901

Act 3 Scene 1: "A Backwater of the Thames."

Costume designs by Percy Anderson of Herbert Beerbohm Tree as Count D'Orsay and unidentified actor as Boatman in the boating scene.

Watercolour

52. *On a Slow Boat to China* (Frank Loesser)

Sheet music cover with illustration and inset photograph of the band leader, Geraldo.

53. *Sea!!!*

Queen's Theatre, Tottenham Street, near Fitzroy Square, London, 1833

Playbill advertising the "nautical melodrama founded on Chevalier Neukum's popular song *Sea!!!*"

54. *The Fountains of Rome* (Norman Newell & Matyas Seiber)

Sheet music cover with illustration and inset photograph of the singer, Edmund Hockridge.

55. *Storm at Sea*

Model theatre and model scenery designed and painted by 'Wilhelm' (John Charles Pitcher), c.1890

With the exception of No. 3 all items in this exhibition are from the University of Bristol Theatre Collection.

Christopher Robinson
Keeper