

The other good thing about it is the variety of people on the Committee who are the jury; the mixture of consultants and technicians and theatre users, which a design team tends not to meet very often. When you think about the typical client body, they're often a Committee, it's often their first and only theatre commission, they are frequently unrepresented or under-represented by theatre practitioners, and invariably not represented by the full cross-section of administrators and directors and actors and designers and technicians. They probably have great experience only of being an audience. And also, what sort of briefs do we usually get? Well, they're often fairly superficial and they're frequently incomplete. And the budget may match the superficial and incomplete brief, but seldom matches the aspirations of the clients.

As a result there is a huge onus on the design team under those circumstances to find the balance between practical necessities and the aspirations of one's client. And the pure assessment by the Committee can be a very, very important step in achieving that balance. It can help to make those judgements, it can help an inexperienced client or less-experienced design team to appreciate the dilemmas that are involved, and it can help a client, as I say, to appreciate the design team's concerns.

The downsides have been alluded to a little bit by Peter Longman; the lack of answerability can lead to the freedom of the Committee being abused to a certain extent, sometimes, and subjective opinion can take over from objective judgement. People know that when you get two architects together they will never agree on whether a design is good or not. One of our theatres, the Wilde Theatre at Bracknell, which is designed – very cleverly I have to say – as diagonal to a grid, produced a comment from Rod Ham that he never thought that anything that was designed on the diagonal would ever work, and Peter Moro saying, "I think it's the only way to do it." And when you look at their backgrounds you can understand that they're both coming from completely different directions, as they say. Actually both those comments were pretty unnecessary and quite irrelevant, really, to whether the theatre works or not in all respects.

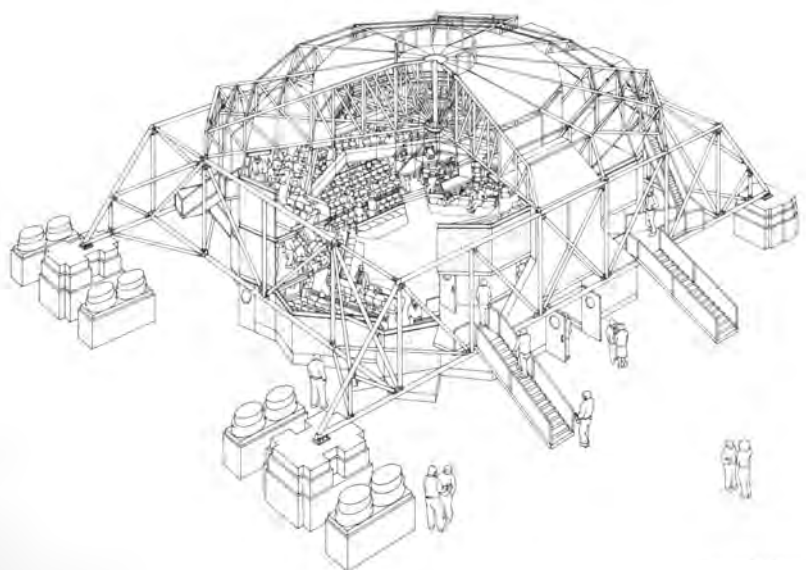
I also think that the 'clubby' atmosphere can be slightly intimidating to outsiders, but works probably much better with people

who understand the suspicion that the review are just the what's going on, p job and didn't get i they could do it particular preferen any opportunity important that the keep such downs the overall benefit is the fact that it can be a very, very constructive process.

Now, when is the right time for a Planning Committee review? Tim mentioned that the right time is early. The problem with 'early' is that it's the time when the design team themselves feel most open to criticism and sensitive about their scheme because they know that it isn't yet a complete scheme and that there's a lot of work to be done on it, and they don't necessarily want to be told by other people what they know already. That may be one of the reasons why people don't want to take their schemes to the Committee at an early stage. But if the review is as constructive as it can and should be, then there's absolutely no danger from that process at all. Everybody appreciates it, and it can work to the benefit of the scheme. I believe people should overcome that vulnerability and submit their schemes, because overall it's a very interesting process to hear what other people think at an early stage. Often you learn from the process and the schemes are better as a result. And that's all I want to say. Thank you. Ω

*The unusual process by which experienced practitioners, architects and consultants review schemes prepared by others in order to raise the design quality of performance venues is described by the chairman of the ABTT Theatre Planning Committee and commented upon by those who have brought schemes to the Committee.*

*The seven-sided module of the stage and auditorium in the Royal Exchange.*



*Drawing: Andrew Holmes*