

# *The Ingram Bequest: Hurry at London Old Vic*

This exhibition shows a series of Hurry's designs from his time working at the London Old Vic, a collection donated to the Theatre Collection by Raymond Ingram, a keen theatre-goer and academic.

Further information and access to the archives can be gained by enquiring at the Theatre Collection.

## 1.

### **Prop Design by Leslie Hurry of Tamburlaine's Coronation Crown, from the London Old Vic Theatre production of Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine the Great***

24 September 1951

This prop design by Leslie Hurry was inscribed by him and given to Alix Stone, a member of the Old Vic staff, as a gift. Raymond Ingram then received it as a fiftieth birthday card from Alix on the 15 April 1992, "sent to her with love and passed on with love".

### **Photograph of the finished crown**

24 September 1951

Leslie Hurry used to great affect the props of the productions he designed to bring out the desired emotions upon the audience. With this production of *Tamburlaine the Great* he had to visualise the extravagance of the orient seen through the eyes of the Elizabethan world, bringing to life all its splendours and horrors.

Raymond Ingram, whose collection of Leslie Hurry designs the Bristol Theatre Collection has recently acquired, wrote of the triumph of Hurry's work at being able to convey the continual contrast of environments and emotions that the play demands, "the 'glowing' effects were created through ingenuity and the application of Hurry's brush to every component....What looks like a triple-crown of gold and gems is, in fact, a construct of felt, bits of linoleum and paper beads, but very evident in the close-up is the detailed painting, which gives it depth and solidity" (*Theatre In Focus: The Stage Designs of Leslie Hurry*, Raymond Ingram, 1990).

A very expensive production to produce, *Tamburlaine the Great* posed many challenges for Hurry. One newspaper article at the time commented that "astonishing things have been done with painted stage canvas and the tops of Coca-Cola bottles. Mr Hurry had to design many crowns, and when he says he could not have got better ones from Cartier than those made for him by Alix Stone and Jean Davies of the Old Vic staff, he is complimenting everyone, including Cartier".

## 2.

### **Cut out by Leslie Hurry of the permanent backcloth, illustrating the tents-cum-citadels which invaded the main stage in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Tamburlaine the Great***

24 September 1951

This cut out by Leslie Hurry was unearthed by John Armstrong, Leslie Hurry's nephew, when he moved to his uncle's cottage the Buntings and given to Raymond Ingram.

### **Production photograph of one of the many battle scenes, showing Leslie Hurry's set design of *Tamburlaine the Great* by the London Old Vic Theatre, photographer: John Vickers**

24 September 1951

Leslie Hurry's set design and permanent backcloth for this production of *Tamburlaine the Great* produces an atmospheric scene both subtle and barbaric, which many believe complimented Marlowe's text, bringing together the style and themes of the play. This three dimensional tent, portrayed by the cut out, would have been positioned to the left of the stage, with the focus of the backcloth being on the right. This would have brought these towering structures closer to the audience, the murky darkness of colouring and depth contrasting starkly with the glowing citadels upon their mountain tops. Similar structures of drapery soared to the flies to the right of the stage, some parts of which could be raised to let Tamburlaine and his army burst forward to the audience, where the action was kept well downstage. Hurry clearly demonstrated in his designs that principal of juxtaposing mass and detail which informed the whole production and brought life to Christopher Marlowe's eastern tyrant.

### 3.

#### **Programme for *Tamburlaine the Great* at the London Old Vic Theatre**

24 September 1951

*Tamburlaine the Great*, written by Christopher Marlowe, had not been seen on the London stage for over three hundred years, when it was produced by the London Old Vic in 1951. It is the story of a cruel tyrant who conquers the east, sweeping through Egypt to Turkey, and the struggles he encounters from his friends and foes alike. General themes of desire, power and greed run throughout the play, creating a very powerful narrative which contrasts Tamburlaine's violent conquests, with his love for his wife Zenocrate and the relationship he has with his sons. A challenging piece written in two plays, the director of the Old Vic Tyrone Guthrie decided in his 1951 production to reduce it to one, pulling in Donald Wolfitt to return to the Old Vic and play the leading role of Tamburlaine.

Leslie Hurry was commissioned to design the scenery and costumes, of which there were many, spanning two acts. As Raymond Ingram writes, "Hurry's task was to create an environment in which splendour, lyricism, sadism and death could co-exist, and in which the action could move instantly from desert plains to the courts of mighty kings, from the claustrophobia of a prison cell to the walls of a beleaguered city. The characters had to be both primitive and sophisticated, capable of ravishing the ear while they mutilated the enemy. If ever a play suited Hurry's style it was *Tamburlaine*" (*Theatre In Focus: The Stage Designs of Leslie Hurry*, Raymond Ingram, 1990). Leslie Hurry put into stunning effect his visual language for the play, creating the highly intricate props and costumes and the expansive permanent scenery of great tent-like citadels.

When Guthrie left the Old Vic at the end of this 1951-52 season to become the first Director of the Stratford Ontario Shakespeare Festival, he invited Hurry to join him in Canada. There, in 1955, they were to remount *Tamburlaine the Great* as a Festival Theatre venture for performance in Toronto and New York. This move across the Atlantic was to be Hurry's first association with the company for whom he was to primarily work for the final ten years of his career.

## 4.

### **Prop Design by Leslie Hurry of the hearse of Zenocrate and Tamburlaine, for the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Tamburlaine the Great***

24 September 1951

### **Production photographs of the hearse in action and a cast photograph of Jill Balcon who played Zenocrate, wife of Tamburlaine, in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Tamburlaine the Great*, photographer: John Vickers**

24 September 1951

This prop design by Leslie Hurry is another example of how the intricate work of the designer conveyed the extravagance and detail of the orient onto the stage for all to see. As with Tamburlaine's crown, there were many designs for the hearse of Zenocrate before one was finalised. This double hearse was to convey the body of Zenocrate and later her husband Tamburlaine on his death at the end of the play. Very theatrical in design and with great detail, Hurry used these props to develop his visual language of the play, bringing together the conflicting themes of love and war in Marlowe's work.

## 5.

### **Prompt Book from the London Old Vic Theatre production of *The Cenci***

29 April 1959

The prompt book for a performance was one of the most important tools of a production. It was used by all parties, from actors to stage hands, throughout the entire show. Compiled by the director as the production took shape, it would indicate changes in script and direction, when actors were to enter and exit, where the music was to be played, the lights to shine and the set placed. All changes and amendments were written down in these books, highlighting the roles of specific staff and the props needed in each scene. As one of the only ways to record the preparation taken, and the many stages involved prior to a play being performed before an audience, prompt books such as this are a vital piece of our theatre history, one which many come to view from all over the world.

Used by the Old Vic staff in rehearsals to prompt the actors with their lines and monitor the stage directions of the play, these prompt books from *The Cenci* would have been great aides in bringing the performance together, ready for the opening night. Within this particular copy drawings can be seen of the set placing, something which would have continually changed as rehearsals persisted and problems found and solved. The set designs of Leslie Hurry would have adapted to the challenges of the stage and staff, where actors would come on and off, how props were to be used, making the job of the prompt one that always altered and very important to keep abreast of.

## 6.

### **Programme for *The Cenci* at the London Old Vic Theatre**

29 April 1959

*The Cenci*, written in five acts by Percy Bysshe Shelley, is a tragic play written in the late spring, early summer of 1819. When travelling in Italy Shelley discovered the horrible details of the demise of the Cenci family, in particular Beatrice Cenci, in 1599. Shelley decided to chronicle the events behind the death of the tyrannical Count Cenci, a conspiracy by his wife and children, and the eventual execution of the culprits, which ultimately ended in the extinction of one of the noblest and richest families of the city of Rome. A tale of the abuse of power, Shelley hoped that the folk lore nature of the story in Italy would make it a sure success when dramatised in England. The story was one “not to be mentioned in Italian society without awakening a deep and breathless interest....All ranks of people knew the outlines of this history, and participated in the overwhelming interest which it seems to have the magic of exciting in the human heart” (*Shelley’s The Cenci: Economies of a “familiar” language*, Stephen Cheeke, *Keats-Shelley Journal*, Vol. 47, (1988), pp. 142-160).

However, producing *The Cenci* was to prove quite difficult. It remained unperformed until 1886 and despite a degree of notoriety achieved by Artaud’s 1935 production, has seldom been performed since. The 1959 production of *The Cenci*, by the London Old Vic, was to be the last performed in London theatres, the next major staging being that by the Bristol Old Vic in the 1980s. Reflecting Shelley’s views of the social and political upheavals of the time, this play dramatised some troublesome themes surrounding power and wealth and was perhaps a little risky, questions being raised over its suitability for the audience. Whilst wishing to show a more varied programme to theatre goers and wanting to move away from the assumption that the Old Vic only tackled Shakespeare, Shelley’s work provided one of several British writer’s drama to come to the stage in the late 1950s. The Old Vic was a theatre which was allowed freedom from entertainment tax on the grounds that the plays produced were of educational value. Shelley’s *The Cenci* may have been said to have cultural value, through the beauty of its verse, yet its subject of incest was perhaps too strong an issue to maintain.

An Italian legend come to life, Leslie Hurry depicted the darkness of this play, with its themes of tyranny, incest and murder, through his use of dark colours and bold shapes, creating an atmosphere of despair and grandeur. Both his costume and set designs mirrored the nature of the play, the simple, yet elegant look of Beatrice contrasting with that of her heavily dressed father, the sets from the grand banquet stark against the bleak, spiralling backdrop of the prison scenes.

## 7.

**Costume Design by Leslie Hurry, for Beatrice at the banquet scene, in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *The Cenci*, written by Percy Bysshe Shelley**

29 April 1959

**Production photograph of Barbara Jefford, who played Beatrice in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *The Cenci*, photographer: Angus McBean**

29 April 1959

Through his designs Leslie Hurry brought to life the characters that were being portrayed, adding colour and texture to the actors' performance. In this instance, the innocence of the character Beatrice is mirrored by the colours and delicacy of her dress, creating a visual stimulus for the audience to take hold of. Her costume for the banqueting scene is one of the first the audience would see, helping to set up the virtues of the character.

In this scene a large banquet is held by the Count Cenci to celebrate the death of his two "rebellious" sons, who had been sent to Spain. He then tells his guests of the doom and despair he wishes upon the rest of his family, shocking them all. Beatrice, the Count's daughter, pleads with the company not to leave her, her stepmother and brother to this tyrant, but they refuse to help them, too horrified by what they've witnessed and scared of the Count's behaviour.

**Costume Design by Leslie Hurry, for Beatrice at the trial scene, in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *The Cenci***

29 April 1959

**Production photograph of Barbara Jefford, who played Beatrice in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *The Cenci*, photographer: Angus McBean**

29 April 1959

Leslie Hurry has contrasted his earlier designs for Beatrice with this much darker, heavier costume to emphasise her altered situation and the trauma she has experienced. This is a technique that is used to great effect to visually convey to the audience the emotion of the scene.

At this point in the play Beatrice and her stepmother Lucretia are on trial for the murder of Count Cenci, something which Beatrice refuses to admit to under the tortures of the Pope and Cardinal Camillo. She compares the tortures of the church with those of her father. Knowing that her fate is already sealed, she makes one final speech before walking to her death.

## **8.**

**Costume Design by Leslie Hurry, for the Queen's outfit, in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Richard II*, written by William Shakespeare**

18 January 1955

**Production photograph of Claire Bloom, who played the Queen in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Richard II***

18 January 1955

As with many of the productions that Leslie Hurry designed, great detail was put into every element of the show, making sure the audience got the best visual complement to the actors' performance. *Richard II* had quite a vast cast, ranging from nobility to peasants, with many characters to consider. This design for the Queen illustrates some of that detail, with the intricate headpiece and the decoration down her sleeves, whilst keeping the dress simple and elegant, as is her station.

**Costume Design by Leslie Hurry, for an attendant of the Queen, in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Richard II***

18 January 1955

**Production photograph of the Queen and her attendants in the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Richard II***

18 January 1955

This costume design by Leslie Hurry is a good example of how he used the outfits of the characters to group them together, giving them a sense of identity within the play. The design shown here appears to be seen on the attendant to the bottom left of the Queen in the photograph. The decoration on the sleeves and the headpiece of the attendant mirror that of the Queen's outfit. Whilst not so delicate, they complement the Queen's dress, accompanying it in style and clearly defining their roles within the play.

**9.**

**Music Score from the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Richard II***

18 January 1955

As an aural accompaniment to the actors' performance, the music of a play could add greatly to the atmosphere and drama of the story being told. One of Leslie Hurry's first commissions was for the production of *Le Lac des Cygnes* for the Sadler's Wells Ballet in 1943. In designing this production Leslie Hurry "went many times to performances in order to memorise the movement patterns and to absorb the music's atmosphere" (*Theatre In Focus: The Stage Designs of Leslie Hurry*, Raymond Ingram, 1990). He recognised that to create a good visual design you had to be familiar with the other components of the performance. Taking into consideration the whole, the way the actors' moved about the stage and the rise and fall of music in addition to this, meant he could better add his own interpretations of set, props and costumes to the overall effect. He believed the atmosphere of a production was crucial to creating an unforgettable experience for the audience, the performance, music, set and costumes all coming together to make one sensory overload.

The score for this performance of *Richard II*, by the London Old Vic, was composed by Christopher Whelen. As you can see, this copy has been illustrated on, showing a horned animal down the left hand side of the page. This was presumably done by the musicians, perhaps an indication to the amount of time they had between rehearsals.

**10.**

**Prompt Book from the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Richard II***

18 January 1955

As stated in number five of this booklet, the prompt book played a crucial part in the development of any production. It was one of the most important tools used by the director, actors and stage hands to note down changes and alterations in script, direction and set design.

This copy of the *Richard II* prompt book is turned to Act IV where there are illustrations drawn, perhaps of one of the characters. These books would be a guide to the whole production, notes and in some cases drawings needing to be made to document the amendments to the play.

## 11.

### **Programme for *Richard II* at the London Old Vic Theatre**

18 January 1955

*Richard II*, written by William Shakespeare, was a tale of kingship, power and politics. One of historical content, the play tries to tackle the conflict between the legal and divine right to rule, and the effectiveness of that leader. Thought to be written around the middle of the 1590s, this play came at a time of political unrest in Queen Elizabeth I's court, when many compared her to King Richard II for her lack of an heir, heavy taxation and indulgence of favourites among court, culminating in the Earl of Essex staging an unsuccessful rebellion in 1601.

The works of William Shakespeare were something that the London Old Vic was renowned for dramatising and a form of theatre that they excelled in. Whilst they did venture to try works other than Shakespeare, the London Old Vic found it difficult to attract big names for these performances, actors preferring to play better known Shakespearean characters, such as John Neville and Claire Bloom as the king and queen in this 1955 Old Vic production of *Richard II*. The status of the Old Vic also seemed increasingly high abroad, *Richard II* and its cast being taken on a tour round North America in 1956-7, performing other plays by Shakespeare, such as *Macbeth* and *Romeo and Juliet*.

## 12.

### **Trial Set Design by Leslie Hurry, for the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Richard II***

18 January 1955

### **Production photographs showing the finished set, for the London Old Vic Theatre production of *Richard II***

18 January 1955

This is one of Leslie Hurry's trial designs for the set of *Richard II*. Whilst this is not the finished version, similarities are evident between the design and the production photographs. The raised stage in the centre and the shield like motifs of lions are both apparent on the finished set, the more detailed backdrop of pillars and arches being simplified, perhaps to keep focus on the action in front.

Leslie Hurry started out his professional career as a painter, a passion of his until his death. His style, before the commencement of his time with the theatre as a stage designer, had grown to be more abstract and representational, using bold colour and shapes to convey his images and feelings to paper. This shows through to his work for the stage. His designs are very bold and atmospheric, often able to parallel the emotive feelings of the productions he worked on, bringing together the characters,



story and music within a visual understanding. Hurry knew that the visual aspect of the theatre was the first impression an audience were to experience, be it at the start of a scene, the appearance of a new character or a significant development in the action. As a designer, Hurry had to provide a set of signals which would prepare the viewers and then support the subsequent information to the ear, playing a very important role in the response of the spectators (*Theatre In Focus: The Stage Designs of Leslie Hurry*, Raymond Ingram, 1990).

## Biography of Leslie Hurry

Leslie Hurry was born in London on 9<sup>th</sup> February 1909. He showed from an early age a love of drawing and painting. This led his parents to send him at the age of sixteen to be trained as an artist at the nearby St. John's Wood Art School. Two years later he won a five year scholarship to the Royal Academy of Painting. However, he did not particularly get on there and after only three years left the school in 1931. Being capable in his ability to draw he got work decorating the walls of a chain of saloon bars and painting murals in his father's house. Dissatisfied with this, Hurry decided to leave home in 1934 and travel Britain and Ireland to paint all that he saw.

Twenty-one of these paintings were shown in his first exhibition, opening at the Wertheim Galleries in London on 9<sup>th</sup> March 1937. Enough attention was gathered from this to get him several commissions to paint views of country estates, a job that he soon exhausted him. He retired to a cottage in Essex where he spent time walking and developing his style to the more abstract, surreal images recognised as his today.

The following five years were spent trying to perfect his visions on paper, giving expression to his subconscious thoughts and feelings. His illness, contracted on a previous trip to Europe, fuelled his ambition and his work finally culminated in two personal *Narratives*, books of introspective drawings describing the journeys he had been through. These were named *The Journey*, made at Shillingston, Dorset in 1940, and *The Book of the Seven Eagles* in 1941.

In February 1941 a selection of Hurry's paintings were exhibited at the Redfern Gallery in London, followed by a larger show in November. It was apparent that his work had turned more dreamlike, critics describing it as ultra-surreal, incorporating a lot of his reactions to the horrors of war surrounding him.

One visitor to the gallery was Robert Helpmann, who was so taken with his tortured visions, that he asked Hurry if he would consider designing his new ballet *Hamlet*. The success of this production propelled him into the world of the theatre, going on to design *Le Lac Des Cygnes* in 1943 for the Royal ballet.

By 1950 Hurry's painting had taken second place, as his production designs required a great many drawings and a lot of time and effort. He refused to believe that his work for the theatre was in any way allied to his artistic aspirations and found the constant pressure of designing a toll on his art. In 1954, whilst designing the *Ring* cycle, he bought an isolated cottage in Suffolk called the Buntings. This home was to become one of the most important places in his life, a refuge from the hectic life of the theatre and an inspiration for many of his paintings.

Over thirty-three years Hurry designed nearly sixty productions for theatre, ballet and the opera, working for major companies such as the London Old Vic Theatre Company and the Royal Ballet in both Britain and North America.

After designing *Tamburlaine the Great* for Tyrone Guthrie at the London Old Vic Theatre in 1951, Hurry was invited to work on a second production of the play in Canada, when Guthrie was appointed Director of the Stratford Ontario Shakespeare Festival. Greatly enjoying the atmosphere of the smaller theatre in Canada, Hurry returned to design Michael Langham's *King Lear* in 1964, eventually working exclusively in Canada.

1969 saw Hurry's last design production in England, the Humphrey Searle opera of *Hamlet*. His designs for this production showed a keen relationship with his paintings, something which he continually denied. He used much the same abstract geometric patterns which can be found in his paintings, going into great decorative detail.

Leslie Hurry died at the London Chest Hospital on November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1978.

# Biography of Dr Raymond John Ingram



Ray spent his childhood at Waggoner's Wells, a National Trust property in a beautiful setting and loved it so much he continued visiting there all his life. He had many facets to his character and his love of drama and the theatre was the common thread in these from childhood.

As a teenager he acted as well as designed and made sets for the Headley Theatre Club productions and his academic abilities

won him a place at Churcher's College where he extended these interests and made lifelong friendships. He pursued his passion for drama throughout his years as a student at King's College, London, stretching his meagre funds to see the best dramatic productions London and Stratford had to offer.

At this time he visited the stage and set designer Leslie Hurry who became a friend and had a strong influence on him. He collected many of his designs and artworks and later became known as the leading authority on his work. He advised museums, theatres and collectors and played a leading role in exhibitions of Hurry's designs.

A major inspiration in his life was the years spent at the newly opened, revolutionary, Nottingham Playhouse. He worked with and directed many famous actors and began a lifetime friendship with John Neville.

King Alfred's College, now the University of Winchester, gave him ample scope to capitalise on what he had done before in schools and in the theatre. Ray played a key role in the development of Drama as an academic subject in Winchester and in the College's diversification in the late 1970s. In due course Ray became Head of the Drama Department and his productions at the college as well as the Shakespeare plays presented in the idyllic setting of Mottisfont Abbey, allowed his remarkable flair and creativity to flourish and inspired all involved.