

THE PANTOMIME THEATRE

When the doors of Tivoli were first thrown open to the public, the Pantomime Theatre was situated as it is today, on the left of the main path as you come in through the Main Entrance. The first theatre was built of wood and canvas, as were all of the original buildings in Tivoli. After various big maintenance jobs it was finally replaced in 1874 with the present Chinese Peacock Theatre.



During 1873/74 much thought was given to the question of how the theatre could be renovated and brought up to date in line with the safety requirements and technical advances of the day and without too much expense. The Tivoli management finally had to concede and agree with the experts they had called in. The theatre could not be saved. A new theatre would have to be built. Vilhelm Dahlerup, who also built the Royal Theatre, was asked to submit a proposal with the estimated cost for the new theatre building which was to become the Peacock Theatre.

Dahlerup decided to decorate the theatre in Chinese style. He was very thorough in his work and had studied pictures of Chinese building work borrowed from an engineer who had been stationed in the Orient. The peacock curtain however, was not Dahlerup's idea but came from Bernhard Olsen, Tivoli's director. It is said that he saw a fan-shaped curtain which split open and wanted to use the idea in Tivoli.

It takes 5 men to open and close the peacock curtain: 2 pull the corners, 2 fold the tail and the other, with the help of a crank, put the peacock's body in the cellar. Afterwards the men work on other tasks. There are 8 - 12 people working behind the scenes during a performance.

The Peacock Theatre is an open-air theatre. The performers have a roof over their heads but the public sits outside. The decoration is constantly at the mercy of the rather harsh Danish elements. A theatre such as the Peacock Theatre is therefore in need of constant maintenance.

In 1950 the decoration of the Pantomime Theatre had been patched up and painted so often with whatever materials were to hand that very few of the original colours remained. When the architect Hans Hansen was given the job of restoring the theatre, he had to research Chinese style and the symbolic significance of colour. His decoration is the one we see today. Hans Hansen explained the principles in connection with the restoration. The most important colours are red, yellow, blue and black. The red represents 'yang' or the male and is used for the structural elements such as the columns, whilst the supported elements such as the crossbeams represent 'yin' or the female and are painted blue or green. The colour yellow is China's main colour and represents female. Everything which is square or has an even number of parts shows the female principle, whereas the things that have an odd number of parts or are round represent the male principle. Hans Hansen tried to style the theatre according to the Chinese symbolism, but as he admitted himself, it was hard for a European to understand the symbolism completely so the colours are also arranged harmoniously to appeal to our aesthetic sense. Finally there was a problem with the Chinese script above the proscenium. Its meaning had been forgotten long ago. The individual meaning of the characters is 'with the people together happiness', but the origin of the characters and how they should be interpreted has often been speculated upon. Hans Hansen discovered that the characters come from the Chinese philosopher Meng-Tse (Mencius 400BC), who was the tutor of the Prince of Liang, and it means: Good fortune only arrives when you share your happiness with the people.

The technical design of the theatre is like a baroque theatre and is one of the few operational baroque theatres in Denmark. (The Court Theatre in Christianborg's riding grounds is the same type but the machinery is no longer

operational today). The idea is that the backdrop can be painted to give the perspective which the side wings can enhance. The Pantomime Theatre does not have a stage tower so the backdrop is folded into 3 parts before it is hoisted up on to the rigging loft. Scene changes can be done quickly as each backdrop has a cross bar with a rope, as do the side wings. In total there are 31 ropes. Today the ropes need 4 men to operate them: one controls the backdrop, one the covering of the roof and 2 men 'the trucks' at the side.