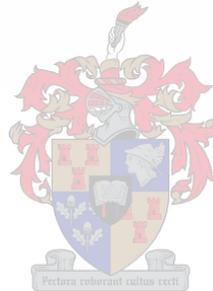


*Cape Curtains:*

A study of selected Cape Town theatres, 1843 – 1916

Miemie Neethling



Thesis submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Drama, Department of Drama, University of Stellenbosch.

Supervisor: Prof. Temple Hauptfleisch  
Centre for Theatre and Performance Studies  
March 2002

## **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature:

Date:

## Abstract

This study aims to reconstruct the history of the Capetonian theatrical venue of the second half of the 19th century. It explores the many different venues used for theatrical activities. Venues discussed include amateur theatres such as the *Hope Street Theatre*, *Roeland Street Theatre*, *Haupt's Theatre* and the *Drury Lane Theatre*. Due to the extensive research already done on the *African Theatre* on Riebeeck Square and the *Garrison Theatre* they are only briefly mentioned as part of the background to the social dynamics of Victorian Cape Town. Quite often venues such as banqueting halls, drawing-rooms and wine stores doubled as theatrical venues. Halls discussed include the *Oddfellows Hall*, the *Mutual Hall* and the *Drill Hall*. Although the main objective of the study was the theatrical venue, it is impossible not to mention the different drama companies that occupied these venues. Therefore, the activities of the drama companies were also discussed to a certain extent, because of the strong interrelationship between company and theatre house. These include, among others, the companies of Sefton Parry and Disney Roebuck.

For the purpose of this study the theatrical venue has been defined as an indoors space, which is divided into two clearly demarcated areas, namely the stage and the auditorium. Because of this definition the early African theatrical activities are not included in this study and it deals rather with the Western theatre tradition, namely that of the early Dutch and English artists. The study deals primarily with the dominant English theatre post-1850 and the shift from amateur to professional theatricals. Professional theatres include the *Theatre Royals* of Harrington Street and Burg Street, the *Exhibition Theatre* and the *Good Hope Theatre*. At the end of the thesis parallels are drawn between the 19th and 20th century theatre houses such as the *Opera House* and the *Tivoli Theatre*. Another issue addressed by the study is the quest for a permanent theatrical venue or building in the early Cape theatre tradition.

## Opsomming

Die studie poog om die geskiedenis van die Kaapse teaters te herstruktureer. Dit ondersoek die verskillende plekke en geboue wat vir teater aktiwiteite gebruik is gedurende die tweede helfte van die 19de eeu. Amateur teaters wat bespreek word is onder andere, die *Hoopstraat Teater*, die *Roelandstraat Teater*, *Haupt se Teater* en die *Drury Lane Teater*. Die *Afrika Teater* op Riebeeck Plein en die *Garnisoen Teater* vorm nie deel van hierdie studie nie, aangesien daar alreeds heelwat oor hierdie twee teaters geskryf is. Daar word slegs kortliks in die Inleiding na hulle verwys in die agtergrond tot Kaapstad gedurende die Victoriaanse tydperk. Dramas is nie net in formele teaters aangebied nie, maar ook in verskeie informele plekke soos banketsale en dies meer. Sale wat gebruik is vir sulke doeleindes was onder meer die *Oddfellows Saal* en die *Mutual Saal*. Alhoewel die hoof oogmerk van die studie die vermaaklikheidsplek (*theatrical venue*) is, sou dit onvoldoende wees om nie die verskillende drama geselskappe te noem wat in hierdie plekke opgetree het nie. Daarom is die aktiwiteite van die geselskappe ook bespreek na gelang van hul betrokkenheid by spesifieke teaters, onder andere die van Sefton Parry, James Lycett en Disney Roebuck.

Die vermaaklikheidsplek word vir die doeleindes van hierdie studie gedefinieer as 'n binnehuise spasie wat verdeel word in twee duidelik afgebakende areas, naamlik die speelarea en die ouditorium. Die definisie hou egter sekere beperkinge in: Dit sluit die vroeë inheemse Afrika teater aktiwiteite uit. Gevolglik word die vroeë Westerse teater tradisie van die Hollanders en die Engelse bespreek. Die studie fokus hoofsaaklik op die meer dominante Engelse teater gedurende die tweede helfte van die 19de eeu, en die oorskakeling van amateur na professionele drama. Professionele teaters wat bespreek word is die *Theatre Royal's* (Harrington Straat en Burg Straat), die *Exhibition Teater* en die *Goeie Hoop Teater*. Aan die einde van die tesis word daar 'n vergelyking getref tussen die 19de en 20ste eeuse teaters, soos byvoorbeeld die *Operahuis* (1893) en die *Tivoli Teater* (1903). Nog 'n aspek wat aangespreek word is die soeke na 'n permanente teatergebou binne die vroeë Kaapse teater tradisie.

## **Dedication**

To my brother, Constant Neethling (1973 – 1999).

to the National Research Foundation

Professor Tanya Huchnauer, my promoter and co-supervisor

Dr. Jan Venter, for language and editorial assistance

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Carol Leigh, from the Bronkhorst Library, who allowed  
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## Chapter 1

### 1.1 Introduction

#### Aims and definitions

This thesis involves a study of the nineteenth century theatre houses of Cape Town. Although authors such as F.C.L. Bosman (*Drama en Toneel in Suid-Afrika, Deel 1*, 1928 & *Deel 2*, 1980) and Jill Fletcher (*The Story of South African Theatre*, 1994) were largely responsible for documenting South African theatre history (using the phrase 'theatre history' in the sense delimited on page 2) since the very beginning, these authors focused on the development of the drama and theatre productions through the centuries. In other words, they primarily documented the different theatre companies, their members and their repertoires, trying to define their role and their influence on South African theatre. On the other hand, the main objective of this thesis is to reconstruct the history of the theatrical venue. The term *theatrical venue* is used here to refer both to buildings constructed for the sole purpose of functioning as a theatre, as well as other venues, such as drawing-rooms, banqueting halls and wine stores, which were converted into, or doubled as, theatrical venues. Furthermore, *theatre*, *playhouse* and *theatrical venue* all refer to a basic structure that can be divided into a spectator area (the auditorium) and a performing area (the stage area). The auditorium is "the part of the theatre occupied by [the] audience ... in older theatre [it was] divided into stalls, pit, balcony, gallery, etc" (Reader's Digest, 1964:1101). The stage area consists of a raised platform (the stage), the back-stage area with dressing rooms, and the areas above and beneath the stage for stage machinery and devices. (Southern, 1964:24) For the purposes of this study a theatre, therefore, is defined as an indoors space, which is divided into two clearly demarcated areas, namely the stage area where the action takes place and the auditorium from where the action is being watched.

Clearly, this definition has some limitations. It excludes to a large extent such forms as the early African performances, where theatrical activities were primarily performed

outside, and not indoors, and thus fall outside of the research area. The study deals with the history of an “imported Western theatre” tradition (Hauptfleisch & Steadman, 1991:4). “Western”, in this instance, refers to the Dutch and British artists who were largely responsible for the development of theatre in Victorian South Africa. According to Bosman (1951), the theatricals of the English and Dutch companies originated simultaneously and are the oldest kinds of Western theatre that were introduced in colonial Cape Town, and thus, South Africa. The exclusion of African (and other) performances from this study does not imply that these different cultural groups have no history of drama-related activities. On the contrary, theatricals were very much alive within the various cultural groups and were used as a form of escapism. Even in such dreary places as the slave lodge, for example, slaves often entertained themselves by performing various folktales. (See section 1.2 on the background of nineteenth century Cape Town).

As stipulated above, the primary concern of this study is the theatrical venue or space. Having said that, one should bear in mind that it is virtually impossible to document the history of these spaces without any reference to the various drama companies that occupied the space. The interrelationship between company and theatre is quite significant, for each company brought with it unique qualities which the theatre then adopted. These included everything from a special name to distinctive backdrops. For example, the English companies gave their theatres grand names, which included the word “Royal”, such as the *Theatre Royal* or the *Royal Victoria*. The Dutch companies, on the other hand, stuck to more descriptive names, often based on its location. Thus, we find the *Roeland Street Theatre* and the *Hope Street Theatre*. (Please note, the spelling of Dutch companies’ names are those found in references and not always correct in terms of the Dutch spelling rules.)

All the theatres dealt with in this thesis were examined separately using the same basic criteria. The criteria included the date on which the theatre was established and the demise thereof, as well as the opening night and the production staged on that evening. Also important is the owner, the manager and the lessee of the theatre. Where data is

available, the general appearance of the building is also described. Included are aspects like the design, exterior and interior, architecture, and so on.

The original intention when planning the present study was to cover the entire period of 1800 to 1900 and to discuss a selection of theatres from this period. However, after the preliminary reading of various sources, it was decided to delimit and refocus the study. This resulted in the period initially demarcated for the study, being narrowed down and being made more specific. The focus was set on the years between 1843 and 1899. It should be noted that some theatres established in the late 19th century were still in existence during the 20th century. Therefore, for all practical purposes the date indicated in the title of the thesis (1916) refers to the demise of the last theatre discussed.

The study deals primarily with the theatre houses used during the second half of the 19th century, a period dominated by the English theatre and signaling the beginning of the professional era. According to Bosman (1928), for the period 1852 to 1855 the theatricals at the Cape could principally be classified as amateur drama; and this was the case for both English and Dutch theatricals. Only after this date did professional drama find a more permanent home on the Cape stage, and then mainly on the English stage. As English theatricals mostly overshadowed the Dutch theatricals at the Cape during this time, the study inevitably covers a large part of the history of the English theatre. It was not the intention to exclude the Dutch dramatics – even though it may seem to be so to some. It was pure co-incidence, due to the time-focus of the study, that they are discussed to a much lesser degree. Nor does this imply that there is no mention of the Dutch theatricals at all, since relevant reference is made whenever possible. The second chapter deals with the pre-1850s, which was the time of Dutch theatrical domination. The larger part of that chapter, therefore discusses the Dutch theatrical venues before the shift, dealt with in Chapter 3, to the English stages.

Although it was initially proposed that an entire chapter would be devoted to each theatre, further research showed that it would be more logical to organise the various

theatres chronologically into chapters. As a result three time-periods have been identified, and according to the dates of their rise and fall, each theatre was placed into one of the three categories.

The first chapter (Chapter 2) focuses on the years between 1843 and  $\pm$ 1855; the next chapter (Chapter 3) covers the period between  $\pm$ 1856 and 1860; and the last chapter (Chapter 4) deals with the period 1860 to 1916. Moreover, Chapter 2 concentrates (as mentioned above) on the pre-English theatrical era, whereas Chapter 3 discusses the first proper theatre built in many years, and the various halls used as theatrical venues, from the demise of the *Harrington Street Theatre* up to the time when new theatres were built. Chapter 4 outlines the history of the first and second *Theatre Royal* in Harrington and Burg Streets, as well as the *Exhibition Theatre* used during that time. Another theatre featured in chapter 4 is the *Good Hope Theatre* which takes us into the 1900s.

The selection of theatres on which research has been conducted was done during preliminary reading. It would not have been possible to discuss *all* the different theatrical venues, as that would have exceeded the bounds of this study. It was decided at the outset that the history of the *African Theatre* on Riebeeck Square and the *Garrison Theatre* would not form part of the study, due to the extensive research already done on these two theatres, especially on the *African Theatre*. Therefore, the two theatres will only briefly be mentioned further on in this Introduction as a background to the Cape Town theatrical situation of the nineteenth century (see section 1.2). A total of 17 theatrical venues were selected for this study. Some of these theatres were less popular and considered to be inadequate as theatrical venues, while others were well-equipped for theatrical use. It is, however, important to discuss these less popular theatres as well, because of their significance to the theatrical scene. At times these venues were the only theatres available to the drama companies. At the back of the thesis is a map with the locations of some of the theatres discussed below.

One of the main problems encountered during the present research was the lack of substantial secondary material on the research topic, i.e. the Cape Town theatrical

① 1652-1795  
② 1795-1875  
③ 1875-1948

venues. Another issue that had to be dealt with was the many contradictions encountered, especially with regard to important dates such as the demise of a theatre. The most important sources used in this study were the works of Bosman and Fletcher, mentioned above, as well as Racster (1951), Laidler (1926) and the African Journal of Mr. Edmond Lyton Sammons, known as Sam Sly. In some instances the only sources of information were the various newspapers. The *Cape Argus*, in particular, proved to be a reliable source.

## 1.2 Background: Cape Town in the 1800s

### Defining Victorian Cape Town's social dynamics

With the second British occupation of the Cape Colony in 1806 (the occupation was only confirmed in 1814), the Cape became one of Britain's Crown Colonies. This meant that it had its own civilian governor based in Cape Town. Despite the visible British element in the form of British soldiers and flags, Cape Town was far from being a homogeneous city. (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998) The term *diversity* certainly springs to mind when one considers Cape Town's then small population of 16,000 people. Apart from the British soldiers and civilians, the town also had a large Dutch community -- people who decided to stay in the Cape regardless of the recent British occupation. (Bickford-Smith, 1995) Slaves also formed part of Cape Town's population, and were brought from a number of countries, including Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique and Indonesia. (Martin, 1999:51) Slaves were also brought in from the then Malaya. Figures for 1822 state that an estimated 1,600 of the estimated 1,900 free slaves were Muslim. This, however, does not mean that all of these 1,600 slaves were Malays, but certainly that a large number would have been. Further statistics of the same year show that the total slave population in Cape Town came to 7,000 and an estimated 1,300 practised the Muslim religion. After the abolishment of slavery in 1834, the Malays, joined by other Muslims from abroad, became a dynamic community in their own right. Another ethnic group that co-existed in the Cape environs was the indigenous Khoi. They were few in number and thought to be "virtually extinct as a race" (Bickford-Smith, 1995:30). Later the label "Hottentot" was given to people with Khoi features. After 1836 ex-slaves, Muslims and Khoi were all called "Coloured", as well as all those people considered to be of non-European descent. The term "White" was used for the British and Dutch inhabitants; moreover, all other Europeans fell into this category. Bickford-Smith (1995:24) explains:

...White ethnicity, based on the presumption of shared European ancestry and cultural heritage, served to unite bourgeois Capetonians across potential divisions

1875-1948

of language, Christian denomination or individual economic interest. The synonym of 'White' was 'European'. White or European ethnicity obscured actual differences of ancestry or geographical origin.

This by no means suggests that there was no form of segregation between British and Dutch communities. On the contrary, both groups tried (and succeeded) to uphold their own exclusive cultural identity, or customary exclusivity (Bickford-Smith, 1995:1). The two groups were united by the power they had in the society; they controlled both the politics and economics of Cape Town. Although, it would appear as if there existed rigid segregation amongst the various ethnic groups in Cape Town in the early nineteenth century, this was not entirely the case. Distinctions were made in terms of social class, rather than ethnicity or race. Until the mid-1870s social integration was common amongst the lower classes, while the upper class preferred to uphold a status of superiority, and thus, isolated themselves from social interaction with the poorer (lower) classes. Moreover, the upper class preferred to live in isolation in their mansions and villas outside of the city centre, while the lower classes lived in integrated neighbourhoods in the not-so-popular areas of Cape Town. According to Bickford-Smith (1995:37), residential integration amongst the lower classes was very much a universal phenomenon during the early nineteenth century. She compares Victorian Cape Town with New Orleans where the situation was very similar. It was only after 1875 that segregation amongst the lower classes became prevalent. Africans were the first to be separated and moved to locations at the docks or elsewhere; separation between Coloureds and Whites occurred later and was marked by the segregation of mission schools in the late 1890s. Thus, segregation was initially "confined to the social exclusivity of the dominant class" (Bickford-Smith, 1995:210). From 1875 to 1902 segregation gradually became more common amongst all classes and institutions such as schools, hospitals, asylums and prisons. (Bickford-Smith, 1995)

Interestingly, many people managed to make their way into society's dominant (white) class through their general appearance, despite having African or Asian origins. Fredrickson (1981:113) explains:

The Coloreds who were most likely to 'make it as white' in the late nineteenth century were those who both came close to a not very exacting notion of European appearance and had some degree of wealth or education.

It was especially members of the Malay community who could frequently "pass as white" and in doing so ensured upper class social status for themselves. (Bickford-Smith, 1995:24) Apart from this, the Malay community was united in its religion and a great many became wealthy citizens as tradesmen. They had their own distinct attributes that made them a powerful ethnic group, i.e. the Muslim religion, distinctive colourful dress, education in Arabic, culinary practices and knowledge of medicine. (Bickford-Smith, 1995; Rassool, 2000)



A Victorian Cape Malay couple in traditional dress. (Rosenthal, 1977:100)

From 1806 to about 1875 Cape Town's demographic growth increased steadily, but by no means dramatically (see Table 1). During the 1850s the population of Cape Town was an estimated 25,000, and by 1875 this figure almost doubled to 45,000. De Villiers (1985:26) ascribed the enormous growth during this time to the discovery of diamonds (in 1867) and gold (in 1886). This so-called Mineral Revolution led to an influx of people

from a great many countries, persons who hoped to find their fortunes on South Africa's mineral fields. The Mineral Revolution caused many changes in the Colony's infrastructure, as well as changes in the general composition of Cape Town's population. The Revolution led to immigration, industrialisation and urbanisation. By 1875 Cape Town was by far the largest city, not only in South Africa, but in southern Africa. (Bickford-Smith, 1995)

**Table 1:**

*Approximate population of major towns in the Cape Colony, 1806-1904*

	Port				Colony Total
	Cape Town	Elizabeth	East London	Kimberley	
1806	16,000	—	—	—	75,000
1865	27,000	11,300	—	—	470,000
1875	45,000	13,000	2,000	136,000	720,000
1891	79,000	23,000	7,000	29,000	1,500,000
1904	170,000	33,000	24,000	34,000	2,400,000

(Bickford-Smith, 1995:11)

### Commerce in Cape Town

Cape Town had a large farming community and functioned as a market centre. Farmers, mostly Dutch, 'specialised' either in agricultural or pastoral farming. On market days farmers brought their cattle, sheep, milk, wheat, wool and other products into town. On the western side of town, small plots of land (individually owned) were cultivated, here vegetable crops were grown and sold on market days to Capetonians or passing ships. (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998)

Apart from functioning as a market centre for farmers, Cape Town was first and foremost a trading centre. From the time of its foundation it functioned as a trade centre for passing ships, supplying them with fresh produce and obtaining from them sugar, coffee, tea and spices. In the Victorian era this was still an important function of Cape Town, being the link between established inland communities and port, port and passing ships. For many years it was the only trading harbour in southern Africa. Later,

competition arose with the establishment of Port Elizabeth and East London on the east coast. In 1860 Cape Town boasted a new harbour, the Alfred Dock, which contributed to its status as the principal import and export harbour. Furthermore, Cape Town had a great many successful mercantile firms and retailers. In 1820, for example, an estimated 293 people were recorded to be retailers, some owned stores while others sold goods from their houses. During this time retailing was by far the most practiced occupation in Cape Town, the second most practiced occupation being carpentry, with about 173 carpenters recorded in Cape Town in 1820. (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998)

### **Social life and leisure activities**

Early nineteenth century Cape Town was still a rather small town without much luxury. Although, the inhabitants were quite content with their town, visitors thought that it was rather odd-looking:

The main streets are broad and regular, crossing each other at right angles; but they are unpaved, and consequently at this season [summer], excessively dusty; many of them are shaded by rows of oak trees; and a canal, at present nearly dry, runs down the whole length of the principle street, which is called the Heergracht. There are no regular foot-pavements; but in front of most of the pavements are brick terraces, more or less raised above the level of the streets: this terrace is called the *stoep*, and forms the usual evening lounging place of the inhabitants. The houses are rather low, always flat-roofed, either white-washed or painted, with glass windows of numerous panes. ... The mixture of English and foreign in all that meets the eye is one of the striking things in this town. (Bunbury, 1848:49, 52)

The “foreign” element that Bunbury (1848) refers to here was the presence of the Dutch inhabitants. Greig (1971:29) also addresses this inevitable fusion of English and Dutch elements in nineteenth century Cape architecture. She stated that

these English and Dutch ideas provided the town with a rare civic quality. It foreshadowed a country-wide fusion of English ideas and the Cape vernacular.



View of Table Mountain, Devil's Peak, Cape Town, Table Bay and Hottentots Holland taken from half way up the Lions Rump, June 18th 1832 by F.B. (ink and wash drawing, 1832, 230 mm x 543 mm) ART.324/8. The Brenthurst Library, Johannesburg.

Cape Town's infrastructure during the early nineteenth century was not yet well developed. Sewage and refuse became a huge problem, and as a solution vast amounts of sewage was drained into the sea. The military hospital, next to Fort Knokke, made use of a pipe to dispose of their waste, this pipe led straight into the sea in front of the hospital. Similarly, at the sea end of Adderley Street sewage pipes ran into the Central and North Warth, consequently it became known as "Harbour of Refuse" (Rosenthal, 1977:11). Capetonians were first introduced to gas lighting in 1844, when the streets of Cape Town were lit up with gas supplied by the newly established *Cape of Good Hope Gas Light Company* (also known as the *Gas Works*), and for the first few years the use of gas was restricted to that of street lights. (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:172) According to De Villiers (1985:26), it was only thirty years later, in 1870, that Cape Town saw its first electric lights. Thus, many Capetonians relied on candles for light and fire for cooking purposes. It was only a few of the upper class residents that had the luxury of gas fixtures inside their houses. (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998; De Villiers, 1985)

Capetonians often complained about the dust of their broad streets in summer, and about the mud in winter. Unfortunately, the streets were turned into mud baths by the Cape storms. In the early 1800s public transport was almost non-existent. Those who did not own or could not afford their own carriages, could make use of a horse-drawn tramway. The first train to link farmers from Eerste River and Stellenbosch was only completed in 1862. The railway was built and administered by the *Cape Town Railway and Dock Company*. In 1890, the privately owned Metropolitan Railway was established and also made life easier for residents who wanted to visit friends and families in the suburbs. (Rosenthal, 1977) On 6 August 1896 the first electric trams, imported from the United States, were put to use in Cape Town, running between Adderley Street and Mowbray Hill. (South Africa's Yesterdays, 1981)

Capetonians showed a healthy appetite for the printed media. In 1824 an independent newspaper, the *South African Commercial Advertiser*, appeared. In 1830 *De Zuid-Afrikaan* was first published. This was a bilingual newspaper that remained in print for more than 100 years. By the middle of the nineteenth century Cape Town boasted a whole array of newspapers: The year 1857 saw the rise of the *Cape Argus* and in 1876 the *Cape Times* appeared – today the *Cape Times* is the oldest surviving daily newspaper in South Africa. (South Africa's Yesterdays, 1981:206) Fortunately, a great many of these newspapers have survived through the years and proved to be excellent sources of secondary data, especially with regard to theatrical reviews and announcements.

Before the theatre became a main attraction in the Cape, the few available leisure activities included balls, private parties, card evenings and visiting friends. Another pass-time that became common, especially with the Dutch folk, was that of "street-walking". (Bradlow, 1968:35) Basically, small groups of people would walk the streets during the early evening, laughing and chatting, and occasionally they would stop to converse with other groups. This activity often continued till midnight. (The pass-time of street-walking is very much the same as that of promenading, i.e. to take relaxed strolls in public to meet other sociable people engaged in the same activity. It was particularly

practised by the British along the seaside at Bath and by fashionable Parisians in the 1800s.) As explained above, these different activities were largely “inclusive of the city’s social spectrum” (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:190) for there existed a strong division between the Dutch and the English inhabitants.

When a more permanent theatrical tradition was introduced at the Cape at the beginning of the nineteenth century Lady Anne Barnard (1913:296) described this new pass-time as being

Altogether ... very good, innocent fun, and much more harmless than horse-racing, drinking, or any other amusement that could be introduced to bring people together in such a place like this.

During the Dutch East India Company’s occupation of the Cape, no noteworthy theatrical entertainments were recorded. It was only when the French soldiers arrived in the late 1700s that a theatrical tradition was introduced at the Cape. When Britain declared war on Holland, France sent 3,000 of its soldiers to assist the Dutch troops at the Cape. Obviously, there was not enough room for all of them in the barracks at the Castle. The rest, therefore, were housed in the uncompleted new hospital, built in 1772 by the Dutch East India Company. It was in this barracks that the French soldiers started to perform, in the Comédie Française style, for the amusement of fellow soldiers. Strangely, theatrical amusements did not surface in civilian Cape Town during that time, and the Dutch residents were content with the various leisure activities mentioned above. (Fletcher, 1994; Bosman, 1928)

However, the soldiers were not the only ones to perform in isolation from Cape society. Theatrical activities provided escapism for the many slaves who lived in the bleak surroundings of the slave lodge. Unfortunately, the history of the theatricals performed by and for slaves has passed into obscurity and was never properly recorded. Nevertheless, they too played an important role in the establishment of what could be called an indigenous theatre tradition. (Fletcher, 1994)



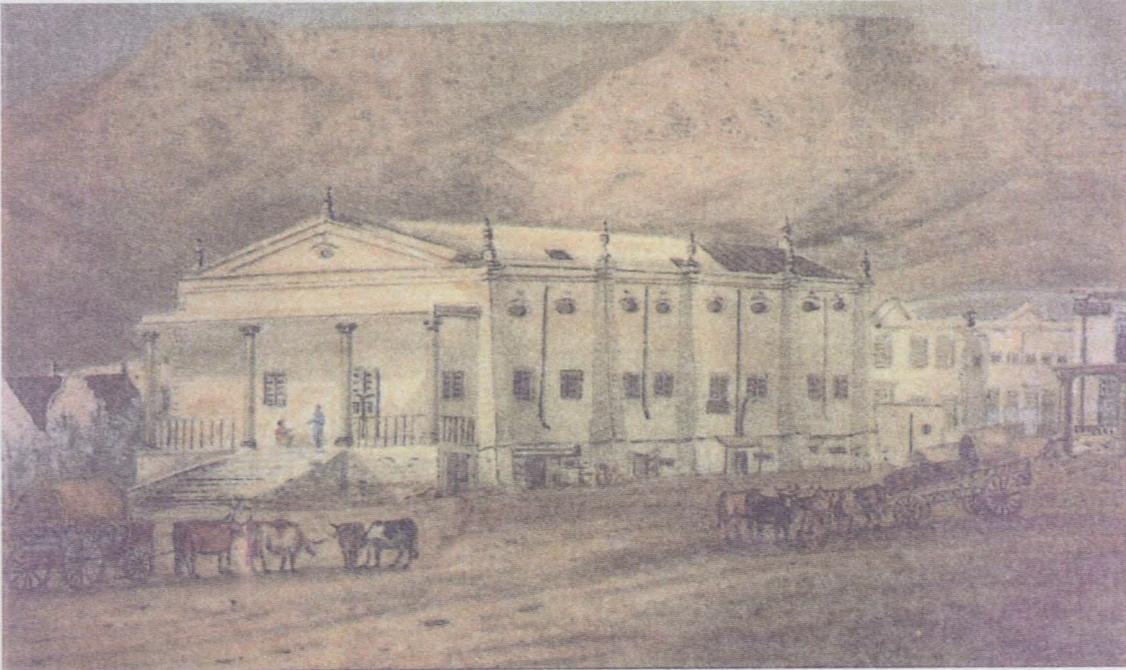
In the late 1800s groups of Malays often socialised on the beach. Here a small group is being entertained by drum players. (Rosenthal, 1977:105)

### 1.3 The *opening of the Garrison Theatre*

The French soldiers did not perform exclusively for their comrades-in-arms. At times the public was invited to share in an evening of theatrical entertainment. One such play presented by the soldiers was De Beaumarchais' *The Barber of Seville*. The soldiers performed in a room in the French barracks, neatly converted into a small theatre and aptly named the *Garrison Theatre*. The spectators were delighted by the production and many such evenings followed. (Fletcher, 1994) The theatre was situated on the second story of the barracks building, looking out over Zieke Street. The auditorium was divided into boxes, pit and gallery. The stage was fitted up with the necessary scenery; and there were also a small dressing-room and an orchestra. (Bosman, 1928:474) On the downside, spectators often complained about the poor ventilation.

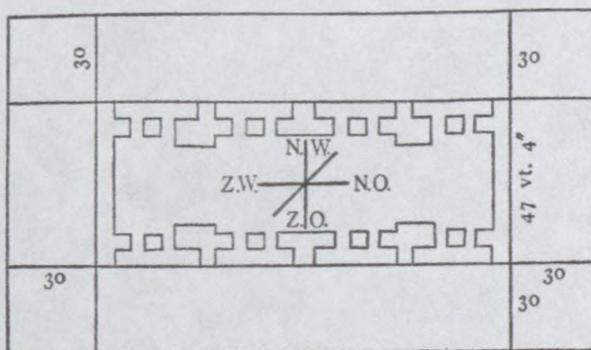
In 1795 Britain occupied the Cape and initially theatrical activities were once again sidelined. It was only in 1800 that Dr. Edmund Somers, director of the hospital formerly used as a barracks, started to use the very room in which the French soldiers first presented their theatrical entertainments. He used British soldiers to perform in his plays, and as with the French soldiers, he too was unable to persuade any ladies to perform on stage. Thus the soldiers played both male and female parts. Nevertheless, the *Garrison Theatre* was in use once again to the delight of the public of Cape Town. However, the need for a more permanent theatrical structure was soon aired, and this led to the construction of the *African Theatre* on Riebeeck Square. Despite the availability of a new theatre, the soldiers continued their theatricals at the *Garrison Theatre*. This theatre was in use for the greater part of the nineteenth century, and was one of only three theatres in Cape Town between 1822 and 1839. (Fletcher, 1994)

## 1.4 The African Theatre



A sketch of the *African Theatre* by Lieut. John Dade, 18 November 1824. (Fletcher, 1994)

The *African Theatre* was Cape Town's first proper theatre. Sir George Yonge, the British governor of the Cape, played a major part in the establishment of this theatre. It was built in 1800 and stood on Hottentot Square (later renamed Riebeeck Square). It was a large theatre built in the classical Italian style. The building measured 47 feet 4 inches in width and 167 feet 4 inches in length. Furthermore, the theatre was designed in such a way as to provide storage facilities underneath the building. These cellars were used to store farm produce, mainly wheat. (Bosman, 1928:60-64) Below is a copy of the ground plan.



167 vt. 4 dm., Rhynl. maat

(Bosman, 1928:64)

The theatre was opened in October 1801. After attending the opening night, Lady Anne Barnard described the theatre as being “a very pretty one indeed.” (Fairbridge, 1924:289) And with this she also gave what is today regarded as one of the oldest theatrical reviews:

The scenes were very well done. ... It opened with an address to Apollo, spoken by Dr. Somers, and written by Mrs. Somers. It was too fine for anyone to understand it, and seem'd rather an index to pretty learning than any conversation which Apollo could have liked to listen to – however the scene was good, and all was new. The piece was a dull one, the first part of “Henry the 4<sup>th</sup>”... (Fairbridge, 1924:289)

For many years German, Dutch, French and British amateurs alike, all played to the amusement of the Capetonian public in the *African Theatre*. Despite its promising beginning the theatre could not sustain the onslaught of the conservatives, who were of the opinion that all theatricals had a pernicious influence on civilised society. In 1839 the theatre was sold and, quite ironically, turned into a mission church for emancipated slaves. The church still exists today as St. Stephen's Church. In 1839 all theatrical elements were removed from the interior, even the stage. It is only the exterior and the cellars beneath the building that were kept in place. (Bosman, 1928:60-64)



The *African Theatre* as it looks today. The back of the (church) building and ‘cellars’ are used as little offices. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

## 1.5 The model for the nineteenth century theatre

One should remember that the so-called South African theatre house built in the colonial era was largely based on the design of the British theatre houses of London. Although the South African theatres could not be compared to their British counterparts in terms of size and scale, they shared the same basic features. A large number of London theatres of the 1850s had a capacity of almost 3,000. According to J.L. Styan (1996:305), when the *Drury Lane Theatre* in London was rebuilt (it was destroyed by fire in 1812) its capacity exceeded 3,000; the stage was 96 feet deep and the length of the auditorium 56 feet. Another London theatre, the *King's Theatre* (which was renamed to *Her Majesty's Theatre* in 1837) after reconstruction work in 1818 boasted a capacity of 2,500 (Mander & Mitchenson, 1961:103). These theatres were, indeed, of enormous proportions compared to the South African theatres. It was only in 1860 with the newly built *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street that Cape Town had a theatre house that could boast a capacity of 1,000. But, apart from the proportions, the general layout of the interior was very much that of the Victorian age.

Throughout the nineteenth century the Victorian theatre underwent a series of changes. The auditorium was divided into three areas for boxes, the pit and the gallery, "an arrangement that had served to separate and distinguish the social classes of its audience" (Styan, 1996:305). The cheapest seats were found in the gallery. The occupants of these seats were from a lower social class than the rest of the audience. They were referred to as "the gods" and known to be "noisy and riotous" (Lynch, 1971:203-204). Sometimes these vociferous gods reacted to the production by throwing decaying fruit or dried peas from the gallery. Members of the middle-class occupied the pit, found immediately in front of the raised stage, while the boxes were reserved for the social elite. However, by the middle of the 1800s stall seats were introduced in the front rows of the pit. This resulted from "the increased size of the auditorium which made hearing and seeing from the boxes more difficult" (Brockett, 1969:244). These stall seats were very comfortable and soon took over most of the pit area. According to Brockett (1969:244), the stalls replaced the boxes in "prestige and desirability." These



## Chapter 2

### 2.1 Amateur Theatricals

*South Africans have at least one thing in common with people all over the world: they love to be entertained. (South Africa's Yesterdays, 1981)*

From the late 1830s into the 1850s amateur theatricals abounded in the Cape of Good Hope. These amateur companies obviously needed theatrical spaces in which to perform, and they made use of whatever location was available. During this period the Dutch and English communities each had their own theatres in which they preferred to play. The two cultural groups initially avoided sharing theatrical venues and exercised some sort of exclusivity towards their various places of entertainment. However, both groups had a love for the theatre and things theatrical, and in depressing times joined forces to promote the theatre. Therefore the English would sometimes perform in an exclusively Dutch theatre, and vice versa. This did not necessarily mean that the particular theatre would lose its exclusivity as a group-specific venue, though in some cases this did happen as with the *Hope Street Theatre* that became an English venue.

In this chapter two Dutch theatres, the *Hope Street Theatre* and *Roeland Street Theatre*, as well as two English theatres, *Drury Lane Theatre* and *Haupt's Theatre*, will be discussed. At the end of the chapter the *Rose Street Theatre* and *Bree Street Theatre* will be mentioned briefly.

## 2.2 The Hope Street venues

### 2.2.1 The *Hope Street Theatre*, post-1843

The *Hope Street Theatre* was originally an exclusively Dutch theatre, but later it was also used by the English companies and, as mentioned above, became an English venue for some time. During its Dutch era it was known as the “*Liefhebbery Tooneel*”, while the English advertised the theatre as the *Amateur Theatre*. Both these names mean exactly the same thing, i.e. amateur theatre. In 1848, when Dalle Case and his French company occupied it, it adopted the name *Sans Souci*. Despite these different names used for the same theatre, it was most commonly known as the *Hope Street Theatre*, or the *Theatre in Hope Street*. The phenomenon of using different names for the same venue can be ascribed to personal preference of the different companies for a particular name. F.C.L. Bosman (1928:360) reasons that it could also possibly have been a deliberate strategy of the different drama companies to make it easier for the public to make a clear distinction between different companies who performed in the same venue.

Originally, in 1825, the Dutch amateur companies opened the *Hope Street Theatre* as a Dutch theatre. It was one of only three theatre houses in use in Cape Town from 1825 to 1839. The other two theatres were the *African Theatre* and the *Garrison Theatre*. (Bosman, 1928:358-359) The *Hope Street Theatre* was viewed as the Dutch equivalent of the *African Theatre* on Riebeeck Square. The theatre was opened by *Tot Nut en Vermaak*, who played there from 1825 to 1836. From 1835 to 1836, the theatre was also occupied by *Kunst en Smaak*, a children’s company. After *Tot Nut en Vermaak*, in 1837, another Dutch company, *Tot Oefening en Vermaak*, used the venue. From 1834 to 1838 Boniface’s company, *Vlyt en Kunst*, played mainly in the “*Liefhebbery Tooneel*.” According to Bosman (1928:358-359), it is evident that this period, 1825 to ±1840, was a Dutch one for the *Hope Street Theatre*. However, the present study will focus only on the post-1840 *Hope Street Theatre*.

## The Dutch at the *Hope Street Theatre*

The *Hope Street Theatre* or "*Liefhebbery Tooneel*" was situated, as the name indicate, in Hope Street, on the second story of a wine store. It was built over the wine cellar. Mr. William L. Sammons, also known as Sam Sly, remarked in his African Journal:

... if the Architect had not done his duty, what a strange event it would be to sink into the wine tubs below, how much spirit might be lost, and how many spirits and shins broken! (Fletcher, 1994:70)

The *Hope Street Theatre* has been compared to another Dutch theatre, namely the *Roeland Street Theatre*, but it was, a smaller and less popular venue. Yet, in terms of interior design and decoration it was similar to that of the *Roeland Street Theatre*. (The *Roeland Street Theatre* is discussed below.) The interior of the *Hope Street Theatre* has been described as follows:

... there being crimson and gold festoons running round the dress boxes ... with the addition of a silk-tassled fringe and a greater display of loyalty, in the exhibition of the "arms", the British and Dutch being united on two flags, springing from a crown and a cushion, and may be said to form one root, as also other crowns over the boxes, and the British arms again – the lion and the unicorn and "honi soit" – above the proscenium. (Racster, 1951:12-13)

The theatre had a beautiful cut-glass chandelier that hung from the auditorium roof, and candles were used for lighting. It had a well-painted drop curtain "representing a Roman City in decay" (Racster, 1951:12). The rest of the interior, more specifically the scenery, was more complete than that of the *Roeland Street Theatre*. Also, the lobby of the *Hope Street Theatre* was much larger and provided cool refreshments for patrons, especially those occupying the hotter pit seats. On offer at the refreshment table were Cape beers, wine, milk, biscuits and sandwiches. The beers and wine were costly, selling for two shillings and sixpence, respectively. (Racster, 1951) There was a staircase leading

up to the theatre (as it was built over a wine store) that made it an inconvenient and unattractive theatrical venue from the outside.

The Dutch amateur company, *Door Yver Vruchtbaar*, opened their season at the *Hope Street Theatre* (as the “*Liefhebbery Tooneel*”) on 18 July 1843. According to Bosman (1928:501-502), they held five performances at this venue, closing their season on 17 November 1843. Laidler (1926:49) recorded that the company had an extensive orchestra consisting of six violins, a trombone, a bass drum, a cornet, one or two horns, a flute and a few supernumeraries. They also boasted a large wardrobe.

### **Anglicisation of the *Hope Street Theatre***

During the same year, 1843, a third English amateur company was established, known as *All the World's a Stage*. At first they too performed at the *Hope Street Theatre*, which they called the *Amateur Theatre* whenever they occupied it. The first performance of *All the World's a Stage* in the *Amateur Theatre* was given on 18 August 1843. The company's performances were limited. In 1844 they moved to the *Rose Street Theatre* and in 1845 they performed in what was also at first an exclusive Dutch theatre, namely the *Roeland Street Theatre*. The Dutch company, *Door Yver Vruchtbaar*, followed suit and in 1844 they joined forces with *Tot Nut en Vermaak* and performed in the *Roeland Street Theatre*. It is not clear what happened to the *Hope Street Theatre* during 1844. Bosman (1928:483) reported that nothing was heard of the theatre in that year. The reason could have been the growing popularity of the *Roeland Street Theatre* which was, in essence, a better equipped theatre than the one in Hope Street. The year 1845 was also a quiet one for the *Amateur Theatre* in Hope Street. Bosman (1928:484) ascribed this to the bad condition of the theatre. It was only by the middle of 1845 that things started to improve at the dark *Hope Street Theatre*. Plans were set in motion for the renovation of the theatre. The initial plans took long to implement, and almost a year went by before the renovation was completed. It was only in June 1846 that the following article appeared in the *African Journal* (25 June 1846):

VICTORIA THEATRE – Hope Street. This Theatre having undergone a thorough repair, with the addition of new scenery, dresses, and decorations will be opened to the Public on Thursday Evening July 9<sup>th</sup> 1846...

The company to reopen the old *Hope Street Theatre* was no other than *All the World's a Stage*. As the above article indicated, they renamed the theatre the *Royal Victoria Theatre* (also referred to as the *Victoria Theatre*). This change was the start of the English era in the *Hope Street Theatre*. *All the World's a Stage* continued to play in the *Victoria Theatre* until 1848.

Although the *Victoria Theatre* boasted new scenery, decorations and a wardrobe, it was, according to Sam Sly, still not an extraordinary playhouse. He was upset that the Capetonians still did not have a proper theatre house of a reasonable size. He concluded that:

For two hundred years has Cape Town been planted, and at present cannot boast a theatre – one in every respect worthy of its pride and consequence...  
(African Journal, 16 July 1846)

However, the *Victoria Theatre* was the best English theatre available to the English players in Cape Town. (At that point the *African Theatre* had been turned into a mission church which caused “an overflow of audiences and amateurs” (Racster, 1951:20) at the Hope Street venue. And the *Garrison Theatre* was, like always, an inadequate venue). According to Racster (1951:20), the *Victoria Theatre* was one of the first theatres to be renovated with the assistance of professional craftsmanship. The new theatre was considered to be a very neat little theatre and decorated with taste. The auditorium was divided into a pit, boxes and a gallery. The boxes were lavishly draped in crimson and gold and the seats covered with the same crimson cloth. (Fletcher, 1994:74) Sam Sly reported that

...the proscenium represented Tragedy on the left, with a bust of the Bard of Avon over-head, and on the right, Comedy ... and at the back of the theatre was a plume of Prince's Feathers... (African Journal, 16 July 1846)

The theatre was not without fault: the acoustics was reported to be of poor quality and the stage lighting was also insufficient. The bad acoustics lead to the actors having to project their voices more efficiently. The lighting used during this time was candlelight, and the problem was rectified by adding more chandeliers or other sources of light on or above the stage area. (Fletcher, 1994:74)



**Victoria Theatre,**  
HOPE-STREET.  
**On Thursday Evening,**  
JULY 9<sup>TH</sup>, 1846,  
Will be represented, Mr. PLANCHÉ's Romantic  
Drama, entitled  
**THE BRIGAND;**  
*TO BE FOLLOWED BY SONGS.*  
To conclude with the laughable Farce of  
**A DAY AFTER THE FAIR.**  
Admission, 4s. Tickets to be had of Mr.  
ASCHEN Music Seller, No. 6, Plein-street, where a  
Plan of the Theatre may be seen.  
*Doors to be opened at ½-past Six o'Clock, the Per-  
formances to commence at Seven precisely.*

An advertisement for the production of *The Brigand*. (Fletcher, 1994:73)

*All the World's a Stage* opened the *Victoria Theatre* on 9 July 1846. On the programme for the evening was *The Brigand*, which was followed by a musical interlude, the evening ended with *A Day at the Fair*. The doors opened at half-past six and the production started at seven o'clock in the evening. This was the standard time for shows to commence during the winter months. Spectators paid four shillings for admission (Racster, 1951:20). Fletcher (1994:74) reported that after the official

opening of the *Victoria Theatre* “intense activity followed.” The amateur company performed for almost two more years. Productions included, *Who’s Who*, *Fortune’s Frolic* and *The Village* (Fletcher, 1994:74). The years 1846 to 1848 could well be described as the *Victoria Theatre’s* English period, as Dutch companies sought other venues during this time. However, *All the World’s a Stage*, was not the only company to perform on the Hope Street stage during this time.

### **French flair at the *Hope Street Theatre***

At the beginning of February 1848 Dalle Case, assisted by a company of professional French actors and actresses – the *French Dramatic Artistes* from Mauritius – appeared on the Cape scene. Case secured a short lease for the *Victoria Theatre*, and subsequently renamed it the *Sans Souci Theatre*. There he presented what Fletcher (1994:77) described as “a Grand Musical Interlude, a Grand Comic Ballet, a Comic Solo, a Grand and Comic Galopade and a Graceful Waltz”. Case produced his first production under the patronage of the Governor’s wife, Lady Smith, on 14 February 1848 in the *Sans Souci Theatre*. Seat prices were rather expensive: dress circle seats cost seven shillings and sixpence, and seats in the pit five shillings (Bosman, 1928:484, 500). The company’s second performance followed on 17 February 1848. According to Laidler (1926:52), the programme on that evening lent itself more to vaudeville, comprising *The Resources of Jonah*, followed by a musical interlude, a dance, a Spanish dance, a sailor’s hornpipe, a grand duet, and the pantomime *Going Mad Through Love*. The previous programme of 14 February was repeated a week later on 24 February. The French company also held a few performances at the *Garrison Theatre*. According to Bosman (1928:500), the Dalle Case Company gave their last performance at the Hope Street venue on 20 March 1848. Thereafter they disappeared from the theatrical scene, as did Case’s name for the theatre, *Sans Souci*. The name was changed back to the *Hope Street Theatre*.

### The return of Dutch theatricals to *Hope Street*

By 1848 the Dutch drama companies started to make a comeback to the *Hope Street Theatre*, gradually regaining what once was an all-Dutch theatre. (However, it is by no means suggested that the *Hope Street Theatre* was now turned back into an exclusive Dutch venue; both language groups made use of the venue during this time.) By the end of 1848 *Hoop en Trouw* appeared briefly in the *Hope Street Theatre*, but the following year productions were presented on a more permanent basis. On 24 November 1848 they performed *Siegfried von Hohenhart* and *Sans Quartier, of Het Vergenoegen Overtreft den Rykdom*. (Zuid-Afrikaan, 20 November 1848) The Zuid-Afrikaan (20 November 1848) praised this performance, saying that the company's acting was of a rare quality. They opened their 1849 (Hope Street) season in May. In the Zuid-Afrikaan of 10 May 1849 the company announced that they would be playing under the new motto *Tot Oefening en Vermaak*. Thus, *Hoop en Trouw* became *Tot Oefening en Vermaak*. During 1849 it was mainly this Dutch company that used the *Hope Street Theatre*. Other performances in their repertoire included, *De Onechte Dochter*, *Getrouw tot den Dood*, *Zoë*, *of De Zegepraal eener Standvastige Liefde*, *De Hoefsmid*, *Claudine* and *De Spraaklooze*. *Tot Oefening en Vermaak* ended their season in December 1849. (Bosman, 1928:453-455)

During 1850 nothing was heard of Dutch theatricals. Bosman (1928:455) is of the opinion that 1850 was a time of great prosperity for English theatricals, and they totally overshadowed the Dutch's attempts that year. Thus, in 1850 we find Mr. W.F.H. Parker in the *Hope Street Theatre*. He referred to himself as the owner or "proprietor" of the theatre. (Cape of Good Hope Exchange Gazette, 7 December 1850) His company consisted of amateurs, as well as members of the Garrison theatricals. They produced, amongst others, *Victorine's Dream, or The Orphan of Paris*, *Woman's the Devil*, *Matteo Falcone* and *Tricks of Legerdemain*. The following year, 1851, he moved to the *Drury Lane Theatre*. (Bosman, 1928:419)

In 1851 another Dutch company found a home in the *Hope Street Theatre*. It was *Door Yver bloeit de Kunst*. This company of Dutch amateurs was resuscitated in 1849; it had both male and female actors in its corps. In 1851 they performed mostly in the *Hope Street Theatre*, and to a lesser extent in the *Drury Lane Theatre*. They performed in August 1851 *Frederik en Charlotte* and *Ieder Veege Zyn eigen Vloer*. Later, in October 1851, the company staged *Nathan van Geneve* and *De Listige Weduwee*. In 1852 they gave only one performance in the *Hope Street Theatre*. On 10 June 1852 they brought to the boards *Storb en Werner, of De Gevolgen van een Tweegevecht* and *De Uniform Rok van Wellington*. The rest of the 1852 season's performances – a mere two more evenings of productions – were held in the new *Bree Street Theatre* (Bosman, 1928:455, 456). Although, *Door Yver bloeit de Kunst* had limited seasons, it was recorded that 1851 and 1852 were a Dutch period for the *Hope Street Theatre*.

In 1851 the theatre house was shared by *Door Yver bloeit de Kunst* and an English company. At this stage the sharing of venues by different language groups (Dutch and English) was not uncommon, though it was not the norm. During 1851 Mr. J. Russell organised a number of performances in the *Hope Street Theatre*, the first of which he advertised as an *Evening of Comicalities*. Later, he also presented what he called *Evening Concerts* (Bosman, 1928:419).

### **The end of the *Hope Street Theatre***

Fletcher (1994:79) reported that by 1853 the sharing of a theatre by the two language groups was something of the past. In 1853 the *Hope Street Theatre* became (once again) the domain of the English theatre enthusiasts. According to Bosman (1928:484), by the close of 1853 the history of the *Hope Street Theatre* came to an end. However, theatricals at the *Hope Street Theatre* did not come to an abrupt halt, Fletcher (1994:85) reported that in 1858 the theatre “was still in existence”. One can assume that now and again presentations of less importance and low quality were still presented at this venue. There is no clear record of when precisely the *Hope Street Theatre* closed its doors for the last and final time.

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Except for the newspaper reviews and articles about the 1846 renovations, very little has been recorded of the particular state that the *Hope Street Theatre* was in at the time of its closure. Therefore, it is difficult to report now exactly what the theatre looked like at later stages, also whether or not the different companies made any serious changes to its interior, apart from the change in names that the theatre underwent. It is highly unlikely that no renovations or modifications were made in the years after 1846. One can assume that as soon as a new company moved into the theatre they would have made some adjustments and/or repairs, or maybe decorated it in such a way as to bear the signature of the occupying company.

### 2.2.2 Haupt's Theatre

The *Hope Street Theatre* was not the only theatrical venue located in Hope Street. There was, in fact, another venue called *Haupt's Theatre*. The history of the theatre, known simply as *Haupt's Theatre*, is an interesting one. *Haupt's Theatre* was the brainchild of James Lycett. He arrived with his family in South Africa in 1848 and it seems that he always carried a volume of Shakespeare around with him. (Racster, 1951:22) He had no professional acting or drama training, but his love for the dramatic art, Shakespeare in particular, proved to be enough to ensure him a successful career as stage manager, theatre proprietor and actor at Cape Town.



James Lycett (Laidler, 1926)

James Lycett, who was also a freemason, was installed as the Noble Grand of the yet to be built Masonic Lodge. He immediately organised a drama group in order to raise funds for the lodge. (Groom, 1897:520) After his successful opening night he realised that there was a market for his talent and set out to find a proper theatre. He discovered a room in Mr. Haupt's wine store, and in no time fitted it up as a theatre. The theatre was situated at 21 Hope Street and was referred to as *Haupt's Theatre* (Racster, 1951:22).

Some authorities argue that it is quite possible that this theatre is the same as the original *Hope Street Theatre* (later *Victoria Theatre*). Fletcher (1994) presumes that it was, but it is quite possible that her sources were the works of Laidler (1926) and Racster (1951), who both report that the room Lycett took was “previously used by the Dutch companies as a theatre.” However, F.C.L. Bosman (1928:483, 484) disagrees. According to him this could not have been the same theatre, and these were, indeed, two different theatrical venues altogether. He argued that if *Haupt's Theatre* had been used as a theatre before, it would have been advertised as such. The advertisement clearly stated that the new theatre was fitted up in a “large wine store”, that belonging to Mr. Haupt. The author tends to agree with Bosman that *Haupt's Theatre* and the old *Hope Street Theatre* could, for reasons stated above, not have been the same venue.

Be that as it may, Lycett took a room on the upper story of Haupt's wine store and renovated it into a small theatre. The theatre looked as follows:

The upper story ... was divided lengthwise by a wooden partition for about half the length of the store, which was crossed by a partition for about midway in the length of the store, one side being devoted to the refreshment department and promenade, the other to the auditory, which was fitted up much after the Roelandstreet plan, but with a gallery at the street end. Behind the middle partition was the stage and dressing-rooms, arranged respectively on each side. (Bosman, 1928:483)

The first drama produced in this theatre was Shakespeare's *Richard The Third*, played to perfection by Lycett. It was rare for Capetonian audiences to watch plays being performed in their entirety. They were used to only segments of plays. Thus, Lycett's production of this five-act drama was an immediate attraction. He continued to stage Shakespearean productions throughout his seasons. According to Laidler (1926:54), Lycett introduced a period which “may well be called a Shakespearean one, he keenly produced *entire* plays.” The production of “entire plays” was not very common during these times, amateurs performed whatever scripts they could find and these were often incomplete, therefore, quite often only certain acts of a play were performed.

Lycett was always on the lookout for new and hidden talent. His drama company included many talented individuals such as, Mr. Adams, a land surveyor, Mr. Shaw, a watchmaker, Mr. Brannigan, the Inspector of Police; Mr. Charles Spolander, a butcher. The company also had a few actresses and included, Miss Blakemore who played Lady Anne in *Richard The Third*, Mrs. Burdett and Mrs. Loosemore, the wife of a clerk at the *Monitor* newspaper (Racster, 1951:22,23).

It is not clear for what period Lycett continued to perform in *Haupt's Theatre*. It is reported that he also performed in the "often dark" *Drury Lane Theatre*. (Fletcher, 1994:82) Apart from this theatre and the uncomfortable *Garrison Theatre*, during this time *Haupt's Theatre* was the only other English theatre.

This little theatre was used from 1849 until 1850. In 1850 an advertisement appeared from P.J. Haupt & Co.:

To Let, *The Theatre* and Theatricals, in Hope Street, Cape Town, with immediate possession. (Cape Advertiser, 10 July 1850)

Although, Mr. Haupt tried ardently to rent out the premises, it was obvious that the theatre had served its time. It was no longer considered to be an adequate theatrical space and the amateur companies showed no further interest in it. This signaled the end of *Haupt's Theatre*. The end of the theatre was not the end of James Lycett. When Sefton Parry arrived in Cape Town in 1855 Lycett joined his company (Racster, 1951:23). No more productions were staged at *Haupt's Theatre* during this time and it is not clear what eventually happened to the little theatre. More likely than not, after his plan to rent it out had failed, Mr. Haupt converted it into a storage room for his wine store.



19 to 25 Hope Street as it looks today with Table Mountain in the background. Mr. Haupt's wine store was located in 21 Hope Street (the pink-building). The *Hope Street Theatre* was also located in this street, possibly not too far up the street. Unfortunately, the exact location of the *Hope Street Theatre* could not be found. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

### 2.3 The *Roeland Street Theatre*

#### A theatre for the Dutch community

Apart from the *Hope Street Theatre* used since the 1820s for the greater part by the Dutch play-going community, the Dutch also had another all-exclusive Dutch theatrical venue. This venue was situated in Roeland Street and known as the *Roeland Street Theatre*. (Clearly, the Dutch were not very concerned about impressive or elegant names for their theatres.) More specifically, the theatre stood between Roeland and Boom Streets – today Boom Street no longer exists – with the front facing the “fashionable” Roeland Street, and the gardens of the Normal School (Racster, 1951:19). Interestingly, years later Sefton Parry had the *Harrington Street Theatre* built in Harrington Street, just above Boom Street, almost backing onto the site where the *Roeland Street Theatre* once stood (Fletcher, 1994:83).



The corner of Roeland Street (left) and Harrington Street (right): The *Roeland Street Theatre* was located close to this corner fronting Roeland Street and the *Harrington Street Theatre*'s entrance was in Harrington Street. (Photos: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

The *Roeland Street Theatre* was a large red-brick building, formerly used as a wine store. The wine store belonged to Mr. De Vos and was known as De Vos' Wine Store. In 1843 the store was neatly fitted up and transformed into a proud little theatre house. The building was a long and narrow one with a single row of boxes all along its sides (Laidler, 1926:48). Sam Sly was impressed with this new Dutch establishment and

attended a few evenings there (even though he could not understand the Dutch vernacular). He wrote a descriptive column on its interior and its Dutch occupants:

See! Look! Look! There they all are. It is a long room – once used as a wine store – somewhat narrow, but admirably contrived for the purpose. Two brass chandeliers are suspended through an artificial ceiling of canvas, which covers those wooden beams that ornament most of the rooms in Cape Town, except where modern refinements have given lath and plaster. A raised gallery runs all around the sides and forms the dress boxes that are embellished with festoons of crimson and gold fabric, and the slight pillars, at intervals, being garnished with branches and sockets for candles, render the “tout ensemble” gay and cheerful. ... the drop scene – on which is painted a fragment of the ruins of Pompeii, or somewhere else... (African Journal, 14 July 1843)

One thing that struck Sam Sly was the separate areas designated for male and female spectators –

Coming from a country where the sexes are not odd to separate, it seemed curious in our eyes to see the ladies all arranged around in a row, without a gentleman to divide them... (African Journal, 14 July 1843)

This custom of separate seating for the different sexes continued for many years in the Dutch theatres. During the interval a variety of refreshments could be purchased. Usually, the men took care of the buying and handed the purchases to the ladies who remained in their seats. There were cakes, jellies, sandwiches, milk and lemonade. Smoking inside the theatre was not allowed at all, and a bold sign in Dutch and English reminded patrons not to smoke. William Groom (1899:518) reported of the Dutch theatrical evenings that it was like a “large family party” where “everybody knew everybody else, and good-will seemed to be at the order of the day.” Due to the dimensions of the theatre – it being long and narrow – not only was the view of occupants in the furthest seats hampered, but hearing was also made difficult. This resulted not so much from the great distance between the back seats and the stage, but

more from the leveled pit-floor. Unfortunately, the owners did not take into consideration that a slightly elevated floor would have created clean sight-lines from the furthest seats in the auditorium (Bosman, 1928:485).

According to Laidler (1926:48), the *Roeland Street Theatre* was known as a "Private" theatre. Apparently in those days the Dutch were constantly ridiculed for advertising (and calling) a great many things "private" – meetings, letters, communications, roads, theatres, et al. Furthermore, the theatre had its own orchestra that consisted, for the most part, of only two coloured men. This talented musical duo was known as Alie and Jacob (Racster, 1951:18).

The first company to open the little Dutch theatre was *Tot Nut en Vermaak*. According to Bosman (1928:484) this company was the principal company of the theatre, and it performed there from the opening in 1843 to 1847. *Tot Nut en Vermaak* opened the season on 5 May 1843, and that season gave a total of six performances. On 4 July 1843 the company staged *De Verzoening, of De Brodetwist* (Laidler, 1926:48). Other productions of the 1843 season included, *De Trouwring, Het Zal Laat Worden* and *Wie Weet waar voor het Goed is?* (Fletcher, 1994:69). The last performance of the season took place on 27 October 1843 (Bosman, 1928:501, 502).

In 1844 *Tot Nut en Vermaak* joined forces with another Dutch company, *Door Yver Vruchtbaar*, and presented theatrical entertainments in the *Roeland Street Theatre*. The joint company was referred to as *Het Privaat Hollandsch Tooneelievend Gezelschap*, as well as *Tot Nut en Vermaak en Door Yver Vruchtbaar* (Fletcher, 1994:70). The two companies' first conjoint performance was to take place on 31 May 1844, but it was postponed to 5 June 1844. During this season they had particular success with the production of *Natuur en Plikt* and *De Dronkaard* (Fletcher, 1994:70). On 28 May 1845 the joint company gave their first performance of the new season (Bosman, 1928:500). Throughout 1845 and 1846 the Dutch amateurs continued to perform in their theatre to the delight of the Dutch play-going community. The year 1847 was their last year in the *Roeland Street Theatre*, the following year they moved to another venue. For most of

the Dutch seasons in the *Roeland Street Theatre* the doors were opened at half past six and shows commenced at seven o'clock in the evening (Bosman, 1928:500).

In 1845 it was not only the Dutch companies who played in their theatre. The doors (and stage) of the *Roeland Street Theatre* were made accessible also to the English companies. On 17 July 1845 *All the World's a Stage* became the first English company to grace its stage. Tickets cost four shillings and children under 14 years of age paid half price (Bosman, 1928:500). On the opening evening they performed *The Wandering Boys* and *The Queer Subject* (Fletcher, 1994:72).

Another English company that played a season in the *Roeland Street Theatre* in 1847 was the *English Private Theatricals*. They gave a limited number of performances towards the end of the second half of 1847. The company also played under the name *Private English Amateur Theatrical Company*. The company's secretary was Mr. A. van Breda (Bosman, 1928:486, 416, 417).

On 17 November 1847 an advertisement appeared in the *Commercial Advertiser* that signaled the end of the Dutch theatre:

Sale of the *Fittings* etc. of the *Dutch Theater* in Roeland Street. *By tender*. The undersigned will receive *Tenders* till the 25<sup>th</sup> inst., for the above consisting of 22 Benches side and circle Boxes, the Stage (for which 150 Deals were used), Side Scenes, Drop Scenes, Clothing etc. etc. as per Inventory to be seen on Application to the Undersigned, where the terms can also be ascertained. As some English Companies are about to be established next year it offers a favourable opportunity to Capitalists, the rent received by the present Company from others having been £10 for each Performance, and the cause of the Company breaking up being solely the want of sufficient support from the Cape Dutch Public.

C.J.O. Werdmuller, Hon. Sec.

This effort to sell or rent the *Roeland Street Theatre* was unsuccessful and it was clear that the theatre was no longer a favourite place of entertainment. By December 1847 Mr. Werdmuller gave notice that the entire contents of the theatre will be sold out of hand by Mr. C.W. Adams "at his Commission Sale without the least reserve" (Fletcher, 1994:74). This took place on 18 December 1847 and brought about the end of the *Roeland Street Theatre* where a great many evenings were enjoyed by the Dutch communities and later also the English. The building was later used as a synagogue and later in the 1950s housed the headquarters of the St. John's Ambulance Brigade (Collier, 1961:71). The building no longer exists.

## 2.4 Drury Lane Theatre

### Proposals for the building of an English theatre

After the loss of the *African Theatre* in 1839 the English play-going community was left without a proper theatre house. Although they had no other choice but to perform in wine stores used as theatrical venues, unlike the Dutch they refused to be satisfied with these venues. A few years after the *African Theatre* had been sold they started to make serious plans for the building of a proper theatre house that could serve the English. But the actual building of a theatre proved to be a difficult task, and it was a slow process.

As early as 1841 a lengthy advertisement appeared in the press regarding the building of a new theatre:

It is proposed to build a new and commodious Theatre, to be called the *Royal Victoria*, for the rational amusement of the public, both English and Dutch; in 500 shares, at £10 each. One pound to be deposited on each share, and the remainder to be paid in installments. ... The business of the Theatre, when finished, to be managed either by a committee appointed for that purpose, or let ... as the managing committee may think most advantageous to the shareholders. ... That, when finished, there shall be a performance once in every week, in English, (assisted by a few amateurs) so as to merit the approbation of the public. And that the public may enjoy a rational (as well as moral) amusement, as cheaply as possible, the prices of admission to be the same as in London. That, occasionally, the performances be appropriated for charitable purposes.

Any lady or gentleman wishing to forward so laudable an undertaking, any donation will be thankfully received by Mr. DYASON, Keizersgracht, at the Commercial Exchange, the Public Library, the office of the *Zuid-Afrikaan* ... at which places, lists of shareholders will lie open, for the inspection of the public (Commercial Advertiser, 6 November 1841).

Clearly, the proposal was well formulated and thought through. However, this first attempt did not succeed. Four years later, in 1845, Sam Sly reported that “a project is afloat for the erecting of a new and commodious theatre” (African Journal, 5 June 1845). William Groom recalled the occasion:

During business hours, three young men one of whom was Mr. Carpenter ... called on my employer with a prospectus and plans for building a small theatre at the corner of Drury Lane and Constitution Street, the shares in which were, I think, £10 each, and a stipulation with the architect and builder that should the scheme not prove a success the building should be so constructed as to be readily turned into dwelling houses (Groom, 1897:519).

In January 1846 Mr. William White sold a site “with a frontage of 70 feet” on Constitution Hill to Mr. Petrus Cauvin and Mr. John Francis Long, as the trustees of the new theatre, called *Drury Lane Theatre*. They bought the land for £50 (Racster, 1951:22). According to Bosman (1928:478) the new theatre’s proper name was *Royal Victoria*, but it was mockingly called *Drury Lane*. Unfortunately, that is the name that came to stay and *Royal Victoria* was never used. (In fact, the *Hope Street Theatre* came to be known as the *Victoria Theatre* in 1846.) At the outset, the progress of the new theatre went swiftly and smoothly. Sam Sly followed its progress closely, he wrote a commentary in February 1846:

... two important buildings are now showing bold fronts, and lifting their lofty heads in Cape Town, the completion of which will have a singular effect upon men and manners. The one to lighten our darkness and street-speaking unprofanedly – and the other to enlighten our minds and reform the age. ... *The Gas Works* and *The New Theatre*. ... Drury Lane and Constitution Hill, is also much advanced, and the scene of ‘Exits and Entrances’, side boxes, foot lights, pit, and dress boxes will soon be discoverable... (African Journal, 26 February 1846).

Although, it seems from the above article that the construction of the building was making rapid progress, by June 1846 the theatre was not yet completed. It was far from completion, for the building process ran into some misfortune. Again, Sam Sly (African Journal, 11 June 1846) reported that due to the winter weather and the floods, part of the walls were washed down. This caused the entire building process to stop. During this time he referred to the theatre as “dreary lane”. According to Bosman (1928:479) the *Drury Lane Theatre* could not have been completed before the end of 1846, possibly even later, at the beginning of 1847. The completed theatre was not described as having particularly attractive features. However, it fulfilled its function as a theatrical venue. Although, the *Gas Works* was also built that year, gas was not used inside the theatre. The *Cape of Good Hope Gas Light Company* initially only supplied gas for street lamps. Thus, the *Drury Lane Theatre* had to be content with the use of candle light and oil lamps. One complaint brought in against the theatre was its poor ventilation. Especially during the hot summer evenings, spectators and actors found it difficult to withstand the heat and stuffiness.

### **The opening of the *Drury Lane Theatre***

In 1848 Mr. L. Victor, Mr. C. Crosset and Mr. X. Hus announced in the *Commercial Advertiser* (25 March 1848) that they have organised themselves into a “(French) Theatrical Company under the motto *L’Union*.” They were all from Dalle Case’s disbanded company. (Their first performance was given in the *Garrison Theatre*.) They were the first company to play in the *Drury Lane Theatre* and advertised it as being a newly-built theatre. Subsequently, in their advertisements they referred to the theatre as the *Theatre de L’Union*, the name did not stay for long and soon the theatre was, again, called *Drury Lane*. The theatre was newly fitted up for a staggering £700 pounds and hired out for £12 a month. On 19 June 1848 they opened in the *Drury Lane Theatre*. Sam Sly reported of the theatre and the French company’s performance:

... the house was a good one, and the various tragic scenes, vaudevilles, and interludes of music and dancing went off better than ever they had done before...

The getting up of the theatre was much admired, and the scenes, proscenium, and various ornaments – for so small a place – reflect high credit of the company, who took part in the decoration and arrangement... The entertainments were concluded by 10 o'clock. ... Yet, all things considered, Drury Lane has had a successful beginning... (African Journal, 22 June 1846).

The French company continued to present a few more performances in the *Drury Lane Theatre*. After *L'Union's* run there, they were followed by the *Private Amateurs*. It is not clear who exactly this company of amateurs was. Bosman (1928:424) is of the opinion that they could have been James Lycett's company, but Groom recorded that the Lycett Company performed for the first time in *Drury Lane* only in 1850. The author finds it highly unlikely that the *Private Amateurs* could have been the same company as that of Lycett's. However that may be, the *Private Amateurs* was the second company to perform in the *Drury Lane Theatre*. There are no records of a performance list or dates on which they performed.

By November 1848 Mr. William White advertised that his property on Constitution Hill was for sale. This included the *Drury Lane Theatre* with its entire contents – scenery, decorations, properties and more than two hundred play-books (Laidler, 1926:53). Apparently, Mr. White still had a reasonable share in the *Drury Lane Theatre*. He advertised that his property would be sold by public auction on Monday 6 November 1848. Mr. White also mentioned in his advertisement that the *Drury Lane Theatre* had been built in such a way that (if it did not prove to be financially viable as a theatrical enterprise) it could easily be transformed into dwelling houses (Bosman, 1928:479, 480). Reportedly, Mr. L.P. Cauvin bought the theatre for £235. This is the same man who bought the site from White a few years before.

### ***New English Theatrical Company and Tot Oefening en Vermaak***

Early in 1849 the theatre was rented out to Mr. Parker and an amateur company entitled, the *New English Theatrical Company*. The company included both actors and actresses, they were: Mr. Wilding, Mr. Greenwood, Mr. Russell, Mr. Maynard, Mr. Lewis,

Mr. Edwards, Mr. Eiles, Mr. Lamberts, Mrs. Frederick, Mrs. Vivian and Mrs. Dunn. The company's stage manager was Mr. Russell who was known on stage as the actor Hughes. They opened on 3 January 1849 under the patronage of the governor, Sir Harry Smith, with *Luke the Labourer*. Admission prices were four shillings for the boxes and two shillings and eight pennies for seats in the pit (Racster, 1951:24). For the rest of the season the company produced light dramas and farces, such as *Victorine*, *The King's Command* and *Damp Beds* (Bosman, 1928:418-9). Unfortunately, the official date of their first performance was not recorded. According to Bosman (1928:418) the company did not achieve great successes at the *Drury Lane Theatre*. Sam Sly agreed and reported of the opening evening:

In the first place there was a disturbance because there was no boxkeeper, secondly the ventilation was abominable, thirdly the acting was no good. No mode of purfling and no embellishments to the house, however perfect and gorgeous, will stand in the room of decent acting and proper respect to audience (Bosman, 1928:419).

Towards the end of 1849 the Dutch company, *Tot Oefening en Vermaak*, made an appearance in the *Drury Lane Theatre*. They were the first Dutch company to tread the boards of the theatre. The reason why the company performed in this all-English theatre was probably a lack of theatrical venues, but also because the company anticipated a large audience for their production of *Geenen Bandieten*. On Monday 3 December 1849 they produced as main feature, *Geenen Bandieten*, as well as a musical interlude, *Zeeman's Hornpyp*, a Highlander's Dance, Kotzebue's *De Neger* (translated by Witsen Geysbeek) and *Vier Schildwachten op eenen Post* (Zuid-Afrikaan, 3 December 1849). This first Dutch evening at the bigger English venue turned out to be a success. The company only performed this one evening at the *Drury Lane Theatre*.

### **From Haupt's Theatre to Drury Lane**

James Lycett, as we have seen, came to South Africa in 1848 and started out in *Haupt's Theatre* in Hope Street where they performed *Richard the Third* and various other plays. After his success at this small venue, he took to *Drury Lane* in the next season (1850). Before opening his season there, he renovated and redecorated the interior of the theatre (Fletcher, 1994:77). The Commercial Advertiser (24 July 1850) reported:

The Amateurs Performers of *Richard the Third* (Shakespeare), having completed the splendid New Scenery and finished the stage decorations and arrangements, so as to give the fullest effect to the piece, will positively enact the above celebrated Tragedy on Friday evening, July 26<sup>th</sup>, in Drury Lane Theatre.

The Lycett Company performed, amongst others, *The Bottle*, *William Tell*, *Pizarro*, or *The Conquest of Mexico*, *The Devil's Elixir*, *Twice Killed* and *Liberty's Champions* (Bosman, 1928:425). An interesting event occurred at the performance of *Pizarro*: One of the actors in his Indian war paint and feathery headgear went outside for a brief moment to get fresh air, on his return he had to enter on stage immediately. He misjudged himself and instead of opening the stage door, he opened the door to the pit and fell onto some of its occupants. From then on the unfortunate actor was known as the "Peruvian in the Pit" (Bosman, 1928:425). By the end of 1850 the Lycett season was played out in the *Drury Lane Theatre*.

### **Drury Lane's last seasons**

In 1851 the *Drury Lane Theatre* had new occupants. Mr. Parker of the *New English Theatrical Company* was back in *Drury Lane Theatre*, after he had played there briefly (without much success) in January 1849. He advertised his occupancy of the theatre early in March 1851 and that the theatre would be opened shortly. The first performance of the season took place on Wednesday 12 March 1851 and consisted of *The King's Command*, an interlude of *Comic and Sentimental Songs* and the farce, *The Middy Ashore* (Cape of Good Hope Exchange Gazette, 8 March 1851). Parker's season

did not last for long and his playbills never had much variety. By May 1851 his time was done in the *Drury Lane Theatre* (Bosman, 1928:420).

Hereafter Parker's season of theatricalities at *Drury Lane* became more and more insignificant. In May 1851, Bosman reported, Mr. Albert French became the manager of the theatre and presented various "concerts". As with the former company that played in *Drury Lane*, he too did not achieve any successes and by the end of the month disappeared from the scene (Bosman, 1928:481).

The second Dutch company to perform in *Drury Lane* was *Door Yver bloeit de Kunst*. In June 1851 they opened their 1851-season at the *Drury Lane Theatre*, thus giving their first performance of the season on Thursday 26 June 1851. They performed that evening *De Kluizenaar op het Eiland Formentera* and *De Deserteur* (Zuid-Afrikaan, 26 June 1851). With this performance they became the second Dutch company to perform in the *Drury Lane Theatre*.

According to Bosman (1928:481), after 1851 the *Drury Lane Theatre's* time had largely run out. In 1852 both English and Dutch companies started to find other venues in which to perform. Also, many complaints were aired about the small size of *Drury Lane*, its ventilation and its out-of-the-way location. Unfortunately, there are no records of further performances at the theatre. Therefore Bosman's statement that the *Drury Lane Theatre* ceased to exist as a theatrical venue at the end of 1851 may well be true. However, Picard (1969:60) reported that the theatre "served stage-loving citizens for fifteen years." It is possible that Picard could be confused with another venue of that time, for other sources (Laidler, 1926; Bosman, 1928; Fletcher, 1994) reported that the *Drury Lane Theatre* had a short history. Fletcher (1994:82) noted that "despite its promising opening the *Drury Lane Theatre* was often dark...". However it may be, from 1848 the *Drury Lane Theatre* became a haven for (mostly) the English play-going community and despite its many inadequacies it was the first proper English theatre since the *African Theatre*. Many years were to pass before the English would again have a theatre of their own.

## 2.5 Other theatrical venues

Apart from the theatrical venues discussed in this chapter, there were also others employed by the various companies during this period. Even though these venues were not as popular or adequate as their better counterparts, they also had an important part to play in the history of the South African theatre. Two other theatres will be discussed briefly.

### 2.5.1 The *Rose Street Theatre*

The *Rose Street Theatre* was, like the *Drury Lane Theatre* and the *Garrison Theatre*, an English theatre (Bosman, 1928:482). Not much has been recorded regarding this theatre. It was in use during the same time as the theatres, dealt with above, but was a less popular theatrical venue and not considered to be very comfortable or spacious. As with so many other theatres of that time, the *Rose Street Theatre* was also fitted up in a former wine store. Laidler (1926:49) reported that it was a neat and clean theatre. Unlike the Dutch *Roeland Street Theatre* (also fitted up in an ex-wine store), the seats towards the back of the auditorium were raised slightly to enable the those at the back to see over the heads of the patrons in the seats in front of them. According to Bosman (1928:413), the English company, *All the World's a Stage* opened the theatre in 1844. Apparently, they were the only company to perform in this theatre. By the end of 1844 the *Rose Street Theatre* was discarded as a theatrical venue and the English company closed its doors for good.

### 2.5.2 The *Bree Street Theatre*

The *Bree Street Theatre* was a Dutch theatre, located on the corner of Bree and Dorp Streets, and established in 1852 by the Dutch company, *Door Yver bloeit de Kunst*. The theatre was, thus, regarded as *their* theatre. They played in this very small venue from 1852 onwards, appearing there for the first time on 10 June 1852. Despite the small

size of the theatre house, it was a well fitted up theatre. By the end of September 1853 the inadequacies and discomfort of the theatre attracted much attention (Fletcher, 1994:79). The *Zuid-Afrikaan* (12 September 1853) reported that the theatre was “unworthy of the efforts of the amateurs”. But the company of amateurs continued to play in this theatre until the end of 1854. The Dutch theatre saw various English amateur companies performing on its stage, such as the *City Amateur Theatrical Society*, who played there from time to time during 1854. At the end of that year, the Dutch company could no longer bear the discomfort of the small space and vacated the house. Hereafter, the theatre was not used again. The loss of the *Bree Street Theatre* – and the lack of a proper theatrical venue – lead to the Dutch company's disbandment (Bosman, 1928:487).



The corner of Bree and Dorp Streets where the *Bree Street Theatre* used to stand. Today the site houses a large corporate building, seen here on the right corner of the photo. The *African Theatre* is visible lower down Bree Street on the left hand side of the road. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

## Chapter 3

### 3.1 English domination on stage

The second half of the nineteenth century saw the dawn of the professional era on the Cape stage. It was also the time when the English theatricals flourished. Unfortunately, Cape Town was not able to establish once again a proper theatre similar in size and scale to that of the *African Theatre* of the early 1800s. As shown in Chapter 2, for a period of almost 20 years, after the loss of the *African Theatre*, various attempts were made to erect a theatre house that Capetonians could be proud of, but these attempts were to no avail. Although, a few theatres sprung up here and there, such as the *Drury Lane Theatre* and the *Roeland Street Theatre*, these could not be regarded as truly successful ventures. Although the present Chapter deals with a more professional theatrical period, the theatres used during this time (and discussed here) cannot be described as proper professional theatrical venues; the more professional venues were only established at a later stage, as will be seen in Chapter 4. A large part of the present Chapter takes a look at the different spaces utilised as theatrical venues: More specifically, the halls that were converted into, or doubled as, theatre houses. Apart from the severe lack of adequate and proper theatre spaces, the theatre-going public were also faced with difficulties in getting to and from venues (cf. also Chapter 1). Public transport was often non-existent and walking also posed problems as there were no sidewalks to the filthy and muddy streets. Racster (1951:47) points out that during the 1850s and 1860s theatre-goers had to be enthusiasts, because the way to theatrical venues was “neither easy nor smooth.” Indeed, there was plenty of room for improvement.

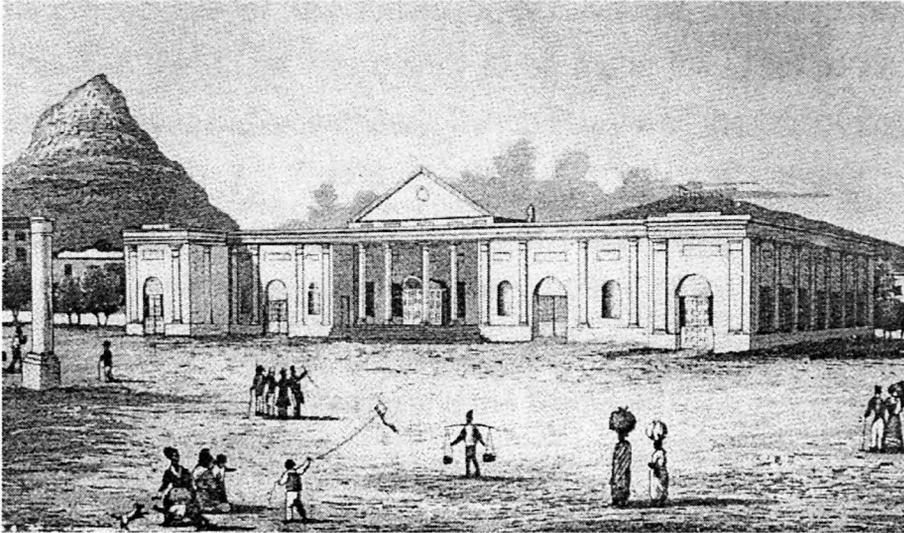
### 3.2 The *Commercial Exchange*

One might find it strange to see the *Commercial Exchange* listed as a place of entertainment. It was definitely not the intention of the relevant organisation when they set out to erect a building of their own. But as so often happens, due to the lack of a theatrical space, the Exchange building's different rooms and hall often doubled as theatrical spaces during the 1830s, 1840s and, especially, during the late 1850s.

The history of the *Commercial Exchange* building started in 1817 when the British mercantile elite of Cape Town founded a Commercial Exchange – this organisation was the forerunner of the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce (De Villiers, 1985:22). Five years later, in 1822, plans were set in motion for the erection of a building. Before this, the organisation used to meet in a coffee shop in Burg Street (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:100). According to Fletcher (1994:57), Lord Charles Somerset, governor of the Cape Colony at the time, laid the first stone of this building. The new building, also called the *Commercial Exchange*, or simply *The Exchange*, was an impressive looking building in the neo-classical style. It was located on the Heerengracht side of the Parade Ground. The majestic building attracted much attention and criticism: "... the Exchange was erected on a scale ridiculous if compared to the required purposes" (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:100, 101).

Nevertheless, the *Exchange* soon became part of everyday life in Cape Town and eventually the "heart of social life" (Picard, 1969:4). By the 1840s it housed a reading room where various overseas newspapers and magazines could be read, also called the receptacle for literary newspapers. On some evenings lectures were given, as well as musical soirées. A certain Mrs Greig was one of the ladies who sang at such occasions. She had quite a talent for singing and always drew a reasonable audience. Dramatic performances were also on offer and Shakespeare readings were given on a regular basis (Picard, 1969:60). Another person who drew large audiences was Mr Jacobs, considered to be one of England's best conjurors. He performed during 1848 in the centre hall of the *Commercial Exchange*. More evenings like these followed and

Capetonians flocked to the *Exchange* at every promise of a bit of drama (Fletcher, 1994:78).



A sketch of the Commercial Exchange by George Thompson. (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:101)

One should remember that this was still the time of amateur theatricals at the Cape. The professional era only dawned in 1855 with the arrival of Mr Sefton Parry. Fortunately, his arrival also led to the reinvention of an old theatrical space. Racster (1951:41) wrote of the mid-1850s and the dawn of the professional era:

The amateur was still the performer ... Then at last, the curtain rose after many imperfections to the command of Mr Sefton Parry, a young English actor. ... Parry's debut created a furore ... He foreshadowed a new era of drama in the city, he was not only exploiting, but adaptable.

Indeed, when Sefton Parry arrived in Cape Town a new dramatic era began. His arrival signaled the establishment of professional theatre in South Africa. One should, however, not forget the important work of the amateurs:

Without the spadework, and determination of the amateurs, their theatres and audiences there would have been no professionals. The amateurs, driven initially by boredom and frustration, had created a theatre world which was rapidly

becoming a vital part of the lifestyle of people living thousands of miles away from European cultural activities. (Fletcher, 1994:82)

This important groundwork of the amateurs did not go unnoticed and when the professionals realised that there was money to be made they flocked to South Africa and started to create theatrical enterprises. Sefton Parry was the first of them.

### Parry in the *Commercial Exchange*

In 1855 Sefton Parry arrived on South African soil. The inadequacy of the available theatres, namely the *Drury Lane Theatre* and the *Garrison Theatre*, caused Parry to find alternative venues. He took a large store-room for literary newspapers in the *Commercial Exchange*, and soon converted it into a theatre. This was the same store-room where musical and drama evenings were presented earlier, as mentioned above. The *Monitor* of 16 June 1855 reported that it was “a complete and elegant little theatre ... much more attractive than the *Barracks Theatre*”. According to Laidler (1926:59) the theatre was a replica of the Reubens Room, a drawing room in Windsor Castle. It had a small, but adequate stage with a drop-curtain. The auditorium had a capacity of 350. Aptly, Parry called it the *Drawing Room Theatre*.



Sefton Parry (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:192)

For Cape Town's social elite this venue was certainly the new place to be seen. According to Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith (1998:93) it was an exclusive theatre and "seat-pricing rather than racial exclusion seems to have been the accepted means of ensuring social exclusivity" at such social venues.

On the opening night, 13 July 1855, the little theatre was packed. For the opening performance were chosen *Used Up, or The Peer and the Plough-boy* and *Family Jars*, two one-act plays by Dion Boucicault. Parry himself played the lead in both plays, he was supported by the *Gentlemen Amateurs* – the best players he could find in Cape Town. The performances were a huge success, and Parry received a generous applause (Racster, 1951:41, 42).

To the delight of the Cape Town audiences, more productions followed. These included, amongst others, *Little Toddlekins* and *Seeing Parry*. On 12 June 1855, in the course of one evening, a more serious play *Monsieur Jacques, A Capital Match* by Morton, and the farce *Cockney in Corsica* were all presented (Fletcher, 1994:83).

By the end of July 1855 Parry's stay in South Africa had come to an end and he returned to England with the promise of coming back soon. The press was full of praise for this talented professional, and eager to welcome him back:

Mr Parry's return will be hailed with gratification, let it occur when it may, and he will always find a welcome from the play-goers at the Cape (Monitor, 28 July 1855).

The little theatre continued to be used for theatrical events, including dramatic readings, since it was the only decent venue available. According to Bosman (1980:175) one major drawback of the *Drawing Room Theatre* was the fact that scenery and other theatrical machinery could only be installed temporarily as the venue was also used by the Commercial Exchange for other purposes. For almost two years it was a lively little theatre, frequented by fashionable crowds. It fell into theatrical disuse as soon as new

venues opened up, such as the *Harrington Street Theatre* (1857). Thereafter, the only entertainments held at this venue were, again, readings and lectures. Sefton Parry returned to Cape Town in 1857, this time accompanied by his equally talented wife. But in the two years until his return, the theatre-going community of Cape Town was left without a proper theatre.

### 3.3 The *Harrington Street Theatre*

#### The quest for a new theatre

The so-called *Harrington Street Theatre* came at a time when the people of Cape Town were desperately yearning for a new theatre that would fulfil their theatrical needs. The man behind this grand new theatre was no other than Mr Sefton Parry, who was also responsible for the previously discussed *Drawing Room Theatre*. The various attempts to erect a new theatre for Capetonian audiences (more specifically the English play-going community) were due to the growing need for a more adequate theatrical space:

The inconvenience of the *Garrison Theatre* having been felt, owing to certain restrictions and its peculiar locality a party of gentlemen have it in contemplation to erect a new one, and are in quest of a suitable site to commence operations. (Bosman, 1928:482)

This notice appeared early in 1854, but even earlier in 1850 a person calling himself "Spectator" made a lengthy plea in the *African Journal* (3 June 1850). The published letter was titled "THEATRE ROYAL, CAPE TOWN. Capital £5,000 – in shares of £10 each." He had the following to say:

Being a spectator of the late talented and successful amateur performances at the Garrison Theatre, and having perceived for a long time with what eagerness every amusement in the shape of dramatic novelty has been attended, and which the wants of the Cape ... would seem to suggest, I have drawn up the outline and skeleton of a prospectus as follows which (if it do nothing more) may call the attention of the theatrical world to a subject which seems ripe for fulfillment, and may also elicit the opinions and suggestions of those who are more conversant in such matters. ... It is proposed to raise the above capital for the erection of a public theatre in Cape Town commensurate with increasing wants of the inhabitants, the accommodation at present afforded being quite inadequate to meet the requirements of a daily increasing population. ... [I]t may be confidently anticipated that from a population of nearly 30,000 in Cape Town and vicinity ...

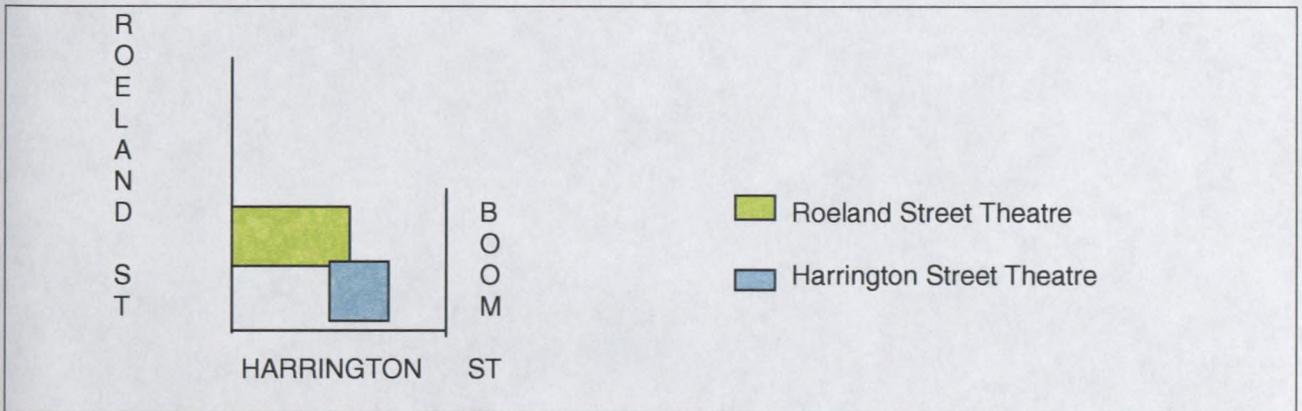
an income will be easily obtained, not only sufficient to meet the ordinary expenses of the proposed building, but to yield a handsome return to the shareholders. ... The public of Cape Town ... have always displayed the greatest interest in such [dramatic] exhibitions, however limited the accommodation afforded, and however unfavourable the circumstances under which they were presented.

It is therefore believed that if proper accommodation were now provided, and an effort made to supply people of Cape Town with theatrical entertainments of a higher and legitimate order than those to which they were accustomed, such an attempt at the present moment could not fail to be attended with deserved success...

Unfortunately this suggestion, as well as others leading up to the above-mentioned plea of 1854, had no real effect and Cape Town was no nearer to a better theatrical space. Interestingly, ten years before, a similar plea was published in the *Commercial Advertiser* in 1841, as shown in Chapter 2. On that occasion the building of a theatre, the *Royal Victoria*, was proposed. The same as with the 1850-plea, 500 shares was set aside and could be obtained for £10 each. Ironically, this attempt was also only realised a few years later with the building of the *Drury Lane Theatre*.

It was only in 1857 when Sefton Parry returned to South Africa that things began to take shape. He designed a theatre and sold off shares. Then he found a suitable location for it in Harrington Street and bought this site from Mr Welsh, a cooper (Racster, 1951:43). The site was situated "just above Boom Street, almost backing into the old *Roeland Street Theatre*" (Fletcher, 1994:83). The building of Parry's wooden theatre was contracted to Mr Francis Dodds (Picard, 1969:61). No time was wasted with the construction of the theatre – a mere two weeks after Parry's arrival the first plank was put in place (Racster, 1951:43). William Groom (1897:549) who was involved with Parry since the beginning of his South African theatrical career (and who was originally responsible for the scenery but later also appeared on Parry's stage), described the *Harrington Street Theatre* as being a "very neat wooden theatre." Parry was clearly not

concerned about his all-wooden theatre house constituting a possible fire hazard. His choice of a timber theatre could also have depended largely on available funds and/or the availability of building materials.



An enhanced view of the possible locations of the Harrington Street Theatre and the Roeland Street Theatre.

Nevertheless, the construction of the new theatre was a much talked-about topic and, according to Racster (1951:43), the “eulogistic paragraphs in the Press” were read with great fervour. The *Cape Argus* (16 September 1857) reported that in only five weeks the entire theatre has been completed, both on the inside and outside. The completed Harrington Street Theatre was 18 feet (5 ½ metres) high and covered an area of 1,800 square feet (roughly 584 m<sup>2</sup>), clearly not a very big theatre (Racster, 1951:43).

The interior consisted of an auditorium which was divided into a pit, boxes and a gallery, and the stage described as being a “most convenient” one (Groom, 1897:549). Mr Bevan was responsible for the theatre’s upholstery. According to Racster (1951:43) the seats were stuffed with horsehair and covered in crimson damask. The walls were decorated with gold and white wallpaper. Poor ventilation, experienced in most Capetonian theatres at the time, was one thing Parry wanted to avoid in his theatre. He took careful consideration of the lingering heat during the summer months, thus ensuring that the theatre will be well ventilated no matter what the season. Enough entrances and exits also contributed to adequate ventilation. Instead of using candles for artificial lighting, gas was used: “A handsome gas chandelier suspended from the ceiling, guaranteed to light the furthest corners of the auditorium” (Racster, 1951:43).

The gas fixture was done by Mr Stanley, and Mr Stanford supplied all the machinery. Parry bought some of the scenery in London, after which it became the responsibility of Mr Groom and Mr Smith. Mr Smith was also the artist responsible for the much talked-about drop curtain. The Monitor of 15 September 1857, one day after the opening performance, gave a detailed description of this curtain:

...the curtain, like most drop curtains, represents a convent, or something of that kind, a piece of water, and two or three boats of a peculiar kind, unlike anything seen in this quarter of the globe, some male and some female figures in different postures and a peculiar-looking gentleman leaning on a staff in the doorway.

The garments for the wardrobe were obtained by Parry, most of it collected on his overseas visits, labels included Cantor of London and Walker of New York. The music was by the acclaimed conductor, Mr Holt (Laidler, 1926:60).

The seating plan, which was divided into a pit, boxes and the gallery, consisted of 318 "first class" and 200 "second class" seats (Fletcher, 1994:83). This meant that the theatre could house a total of 518 spectators. Although, it was still a relatively small theatre in terms of size, it definitely had a bigger audience capacity than Parry's former *Drawing Room Theatre* (capacity 350). The so-called "first class" tickets were sold for five shillings, while the "second class" seats (situated in the gallery) could be obtained for three shillings each (Racster, 1951:44). The distinction between first and second class tickets was a way for the social elite to ensure social exclusivity and to avoid contact with less important citizens or races. Social exclusivity was by no means an uncommon phenomenon in Victorian Cape Town. In this connection see Chapter 1.2, as well as the discussion of the *Drawing Room Theatre* above (Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith, 1998:93). According to Laidler (1926:60), strict rules applied inside Parry's new theatre. No-one was allowed to stand in the passages or smoke in the auditorium during a performance. The new theatre house was simply referred to as the *Harrington Street Theatre*.

## The opening of Parry's theatre

The opening night was a much awaited occasion, on 14 September 1857, a large crowd gathered outside the theatre doors. The crowd was well-dressed with the ladies in evening gowns and the men in "black coats and white vests", careful not to make a bad impression with fellow theatre-goers (Monitor, 15 September 1875). The doors opened at seven o'clock, whereupon the huge crowd made their way to their seats. Subscribers received "five season tickets at reduced prices for a year's performances" (*Cape Argus*, 9 September 1857). With these subscriptions Parry wanted to make sure that the theatre was always filled with a reasonable audience. Unfortunately, on the opening night the house was overcrowded, too many tickets having been sold. Fletcher (1994:83) reported that the builder miscalculated the size of the house which in turn led to an incorrect number of seats on the box plan. Subsequently, on the opening night chairs had to be placed in the passages to accommodate all the patrons. Before the next performance took place Parry published an apology for this mishap, ensuring the public that "such an error would *never occur again*" (Racster, 1951:45).

The opening night was indeed not free of incident: "... at the close of the first piece the drop scene came down by the run" (Fletcher, 1994:83). Furthermore, as a result of hasty construction the roof leaked, making the performance very uncomfortable for some of the audience members as rain dribbled down on them. This problem was attended to and the roof fixed (Fletcher, 1994:83).

On the opening night three pieces were presented. Parry opened his theatre with the comedy *A Kiss in the Dark*. This was followed by an operetta *Why Don't She Marry?*, and finally the evening ended with the farce, *A Thumping Legacy* (Laidler, 1926:51). The company that performed these pieces was a newly formed one. Parry, as before, engaged dedicated amateurs to perform in his productions. Even Mr James Lycett joined Parry's company, together with some members of Lycett's former company. They included, among others, Mr Deveres, Mr Lawson, Mr Mitchell and Mr Gough (Racster, 1951:45). The female cast consisted of, among others, Mrs Loosemore, Mrs Hutchison

and the latter's daughter, as well as Miss Fanny King who joined the company a while later. Parry also placed an advertisement in the *Cape Argus* stating that he needed two or three young ladies for his company, whom he would instruct in the "Dramatic Art and Singing" (*Cape Argus*, 16 September 1857). As was to be expected Mr and Mrs Parry also performed on the opening night and their performances were highly praised: "... with Mr and Mrs Parry's acting [the audience] could not but be satisfied" (Fletcher, 1994:84). Such then was the official opening of the *Harrington Street Theatre*.

Sefton Parry and his company continued to play at the *Harrington Street Theatre* for two more full seasons. They staged one performance per week. Shows commenced strictly at seven o'clock and ended no later than eleven every night (Racster, 1951:45, 46). Parry's performances and programmes were always well put together and thoroughly enjoyed by the audiences. Plays performed during his first season at the *Harrington Street Theatre* included, *Don Ceasar de Balzan*, Kotzebue's *Stranger or Misanthrope* and *Repentance*. *Don Ceasar de Balzan* was performed on such a large scale that Parry closed his theatre for two weeks to prepare for this elaborate production. The preparations proved to be well worth the effort. According to Bosman (1980:62):

Don Ceasar was well put on stage ... [It] deserves great credit, the distribution of parts was, on the whole, very good, it was well dressed, and the scenery was not only pretty, but appropriate ... Mr Parry's portrayal of the frigid Don was a performance of great cleverness and thoroughly appreciated by the audience.

According to Racster (1951:40), the last performance of the season was considered to be the best production presented that entire season. Everybody who was anybody attended – Colonel Hope, under whose patronage they played, was also present. The doors only opened at a quarter past seven (fifteen minutes later than usual) and the programmes started at a quarter to eight that evening. Parry's choice for the evening was *Honeymoon, or How to Rule a Wife* by Tobin, and the hilarious farce, *A Willful Murder*.

It seems, however, from other sources (Fletcher, 1994; *Cape Argus*, 1857) that this was in fact not the last performance of the season. Parry decided to stage *Beauty and the Beast* as his tenth performance of that season and according to the *Cape Argus* (19 December 1857), “positively the last” one. Parry and his company really outdid themselves in this traditional English Christmas pantomime. It was a “magnificent Burlesque Fairy Spectacle in Three Acts and several Tableaux” presented on an enormous scale in the small theatre “with entirely new scenery, songs, choruses, dresses, music, machinery and appointments, which have been some time in preparation” (*Cape Argus*, 19 December 1857). It proved to be a great success with both the public and the critics, who begged for a repeat performance, but to no avail. The Parrys had packed their scenery and moved on to Port Elizabeth for a short while to present their craft there (Fletcher, 1994:85).

### **Mr Murray’s Dramatic Club**

Early in 1858 Parry and his wife returned to Cape Town and the *Harrington Street Theatre*. In this year Mr R.W. Murray organised a Dramatic Club and naturally the Parrys joined it, as did many other talented folk. The Club came to be known, officially as the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*. The *Harrington Street Theatre* became the stage for this newly formed Club, not without due payment to Parry of course. William Groom, a well-known figure on the theatrical front by now, became the Club’s director and stage manager. Thomas Baines was responsible for the scenery. This was the same man who came to be known as one of South Africa’s most famous Victorian artists and explorers. Thomas Baines, born in England, first came to South Africa in 1841. Eventually, after many travels into the interior he settled in South Africa. He died at the age of 55 in his Durban home (Carruthers & Arnold, 1995:10, 12). When in Cape Town, he was often commissioned to paint scenic backdrops for various productions. Theatre managers knew that his work always attracted much attention and, consequently, large audiences. Baines also regaled curious Capetonians with several exhibitions and lectures of his journeys (Wallis, 1976:152).

The *Cape Town Dramatic Club*, with its vast array of talent, managed to fill Parry's theatre with each performance (Fletcher, 1994:85). Meanwhile, Parry began his second season in Harrington Street. His well-established company performed everything from tragedies (*Macbeth*), comedies (*The Flying Dutchman*) to pantomimes. Parry was constantly on the look out for new talent. Thus, when Mr J.E.H. English, from the *Theatre Royal*, Sheffield, stepped ashore, Parry immediately engaged him in his company. However, after a mere two months with Parry this very talented professional comedian decided to organise his own drama group and left Parry's organisation. What followed was English's own company of *Gentlemen Amateurs*. They performed in a hall in Buitenkant Street, known as the *Music Hall*, where quite a number of performances were presented (Fletcher, 1994:86; cf. section 3.4.4 for a discussion of the *Music Hall*). This altered the theatrical scene in Cape Town immensely as the public was now divided between loyalty to Parry and the new talent of English. One should also keep in mind the talents of Murray's *Dramatic Club*, for they also attracted large audiences. Despite the "irresistible attractions" Parry presented at Harrington Street, he only managed to draw small audiences (Racster, 1951:50). Consequently, not far into his new season, Parry announced that he and his wife were returning to England early in August 1858. This was a sad moment for theatricals in Cape Town. The newspapers were full of praise for Sefton Parry and described him as the "first really successful theatrical manager at the Cape" (*Cape Argus*, 31 July 1858). Furthermore, it was largely due to Parry's efforts that Cape Town now had a more appropriate theatrical venue.

On 23 July 1858 the Parrys gave their last performance to Capetonian audiences. Much applause was given for their productions of *Used Up* and *Robert Macaire*. Sefton Parry and his wife thanked everybody "who during eleven months supported this little establishment" (*Cape Argus*, 31 July 1858).

### **To let – Harrington Street Theatre**

But this was not the end of the *Harrington Street Theatre*, for it still had a couple of years to serve the public. Parry sold his theatre to Mr Glynn for £300, who in turn hired it out to Mr English for £100 per year. Thus, English was back in the venue from where he started out. Charles Fraser was appointed as his stage-manager and the theatre opened on 19 August 1858 with *The Merchant of Venice*. During this time the theatre came to be known as the *Cape Theatre* or the *Cape Town Theatre* (Racster, 1951:51). Unfortunately, English's successful run that he enjoyed at the *Music Hall* in Buitenkant Street was slowly coming to an end. He had stiff competition from Mr Murray's Dramatic Club who also performed in the *Harrington Street Theatre*. However, after a dispute in October 1858 between these two companies, the *Dramatic Club* had to be satisfied with the *Music Hall* in Buitenkant Street where English used to perform (Laidler, 1926:72, 74). The strong amateur *Dramatic Club* slowly pushed English out of the picture, and by the end of October he had completely disappeared from the scene (Fletcher, 1994:88).

It is not clear what happened to the *Cape Town Theatre* at this time. It is quite possible that the *Dramatic Club* might have moved back to this theatre, but this is merely a speculation. The theatre was, however, still the possession of Mr Glynn, an ardent theatre lessor.

### Parry returns

A year later in October 1859 Parry, together with his talented wife and Miss Lizzie Powell, a ballet dancer, returned to South Africa, to "resume his self-imposed duties as Cape Town's Theatre King with even greater zeal" (Picard, 1969:61). He immediately bought his *Harrington Street Theatre* back from Glynn and started to make a number of adjustments and renovations to its interior.

The seats have been rearranged, the entrances improved, the ventilation enlarged and the building decorated throughout. The scenery, drop-act, etc. have been painted by artists of well-known ability [most probably Thomas Baines and William Groom], the costumes by Mr May of Bow Street, Covent Garden (*Mercantile Advertiser*, 24 October 1859).

Patrons now paid six shillings for the more comfortable sofa-stalls, five shillings for ordinary stalls seats and two shillings and six pennies for seats in the gallery (Bosman, 1980:176). As mentioned above, the *Harrington Street Theatre* came to be known as the *Cape Town Theatre* during Mr English's lease, and sometimes it was simply referred to as the *Cape Theatre*.

Furthermore, Parry came to an agreement with the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*: the two parties would perform in conjunction with one another. Parry started his new season in November 1859. Again the programmes were put together in true Parry-style, the company performed a number of "immense attractions ... beautiful, pathetic, thrilling", to be followed by "laughing" or "screaming farces" (Fletcher, 1994:88). Certainly, the most talked about production of the season was the Christmas pantomime presented by Parry and members of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* at the end of the year. The pantomime entitled, *Babes in the Wood*, was staged on 27 and 28 December 1859. According to William Groom (1897:582), who was also involved in the show, no effort was spared in preparing for this production:

Innumerable properties were made by the female members of the company. They sewed up and filled with sawdust the fish, sausages, bunches of carrots, turnips, cabbages, etc. to be used in the *mêlée* in Scene 9.

*Babes in the Wood* had a lengthy playbill of two pages. The programme was kept by Groom and reproduced in Fletcher (1994:88). Below is a section thereof:

Mr Parry has much pleasure in being able to announce to the Subscribers and the Public that Christmas will not pass over without an endeavour to keep up the good old English custom of a good old English Pantomime, founded on one of the oldest Ballads in the language. An attempt of this kind on so small a stage, with so many disadvantages to contend against, may seem at first almost impracticable; but Mr Parry trusts to perseverance and determination to secure success.

No expense has been spared in placing it on the stage in a manner far before anything ever witnessed at the Cape. The Scenery, which has been painted expressly for the occasion, is of the most gorgeous description; the stage has been entirely remodeled with traps, machinery etc., the masks, properties and tricks are of unusual excellence, and the dresses all that money and good taste could secure.

The pre-production or curtain raiser was entitled *The Rough Diamond* and began promptly at eight o'clock in the evening, after which the main show commenced, and the final curtain was drawn at eleven. According to Racster (1951:54) the entire production was a complete success, "but it seemed out of proportion to the work and anxiety that it could only run two nights." The reason being that at that point in time Cape Town, unfortunately, did not have a large enough theatre-going community to support, and justify, more than two performances.

After this successful production Parry took a well deserved break. However, he soon opened the doors to his theatre again early in 1860. But this time things did not run that smoothly for Parry. Charles Fraser (formerly also a stage-manager for Parry) occupied English's *Music Hall* in Buitenkant Street which he renamed to the *Cabinet Theatre*. There he had "a successful season of comedies and farces, using members of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*, and the garrison" (Fletcher, 1994:89). The theatres were a mere street-width apart from each other. Moreover, a total of three shows per week were produced between the two venues. This was a lot more than the theatre-going public could handle per week with the result that performances drew only small audiences at both theatre houses as the public could, financially speaking, only render that much support. At some stage during Parry's pre-production preparations of *The Lost Ship*, the *Cape Argus* (13 March 1860) attempted to help the suffering theatres, especially that of Sefton Parry:

Theatricals in Cape Town are not attracting large audiences at either house of entertainments. Mr Parry is making great efforts to fill the Cape Town Theatre,

but nothing seems to take. If the Cape Town people wish to sustain the drama they must be a little more liberal in their support. Mr Parry is unquestionably a very able manager; his performances are always respectable, and never give offence even to the most fastidious. Mrs Parry's acting is one of a very high character indeed; once lost to the Cape Town stages she will not soon be replaced. The scenery at this theatre during the present season [1860] must have been very costly. That portion executed in London surpasses anything of the kind exhibited in Cape Town before and Mr Baines' brush has been turned to excellent account. We recommend our readers to look in at the pieces now on the stage.

This article surely had an effect and drew the audiences in. However, after this production the *Cape Theatre's* auditorium was once again only half full. Parry attempted various productions, at times using players of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*. He even had an attempt at Shakespeare's *Richard The Third*. The *Monitor* (11 April 1860) had the following to say about this production:

We can hardly say the play was produced because ... fully two-thirds of the dialogue was omitted and the remainder travestied. With such machinery as Mr Parry's ... in a small house with a limited company ... we would prefer seeing a little piece well-played than a difficult one murdered.

More productions followed after this, some more successful than others, attracting big and small audiences alike. The last performance the Parrys gave in the *Cape Town Theatre* was a benefit organised by Mrs Parry at the end of May 1860. The *Cape Argus* (31 May 1860) was full of praise for this much adored and admired Cape Town actress and wrote a lengthy article in praise of her (*and as an attempt to attract a large audience to the benefit performance*):

Mrs Sefton Parry is to have a benefit, and there is, we are confident, not one of the frequenters of the theatre but will admit that she deserves it. It is not frequently that we find a lady capable of successfully representing so many characters as Mrs Parry has done upon the Cape Town stage; and we shall be

much disappointed if the admirers of the drama do not evince, by hearty patronage on this occasion, their respect and admiration of their favourite actress. Mrs Parry has done more to sustain the drama here than any one else, and by her correct bearing, amiability of temper, and just conception of the parts assigned to her, she has considerably elevated the tone of the theatrical profession at the Cape of Good Hope. The piece selected for the occasion is "The Green Bushes", and this performance signaled representation of it both Mrs Parry and the Public will appear to greater advantage than ever, – the first in a part she has played before, the latter in its best character of "the Patron of merit".

This performance signaled the end of Parry's season, mainly because the *Cape Town Theatre* could no longer be utilised as an adequate venue. And so the history of the theatre that started out as the *Harrington Street Theatre* came to an end. Sefton Parry returned to England with the intention of recruiting new talent to organise a new company. It is not sure what happened to the theatre during this time. The only further record of this theatre was found in "The annals of the Cape stage" (Laidler, 1926). Laidler (1926:81) wrote that a certain Mr Lewis took over the "Cape Town building" from Mr Parry, whereupon Parry returned to England. He continued that shortly after Parry's departure the building was burnt to the ground. On the other hand, Parry could have simply left the theatre to go to waste since it was "no longer adequate" as a theatrical space, but this seems unlikely. Therefore, the author rests with Laidler's record of the demise of the theatre.



The corner of Harrington Street (to the right) and Roeland Street: The Harrington Street Theatre was located in Harrington Street, close to this corner. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)



Some of the buildings in Harrington Street with Table Mountain in the background. Roeland Street crosses Harrington Street in front of the MTN sign. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

### 3.4 Halls used as theatrical venues

As the heading indicates, this next section focuses on halls that were converted into theatres or that were used as theatrical venues. The discussion deals with the period between 1868 and 1875 and then shifts back to 1858. The eight years that have been skipped will be discussed in Chapter 4 as it deals with the first *Theatre Royal* (1860 – 1868) and consideration of the missing years rather belongs in that chapter.

From 1868, when the *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street was completely destroyed by fire, until 1875, when the new theatre in Burg Street was completed, no new theatres were built in Cape Town. During this time theatre managers had to be content with the various halls and rooms available to them. Many such spaces were converted into small, but quite adequate theatrical venues. These halls included the *Oddfellows Hall*, the *Mutual Hall*, the *Athenaeum Hall*, the *Germania Hall* and the *Drill Hall*. Of all these halls-cum-theatres, the *Oddfellows Hall* was certainly the most prominent theatrical venue.

### 3.4.1 The *Oddfellows Hall*

During this period, 1868 to 1975, the *Oddfellows Hall* in Plein Street was used by many different drama companies, Dutch and English alike. This hall-turned-theatre was of a reasonable size and could house approximately 300 patrons (Bosman, 1980:289). Records state that the *Oddfellows Hall* was initially used by Dutch companies, particularly *Door Yver bloeit de Kunst*. This company, as many other Dutch companies, to a certain extent experienced a small revival in the late 1860s. However, one should keep in mind that English theatricals were the dominant force during the second half of the nineteenth century (Bosman, 1980:440). *Door Yver bloeit de Kunst*, under the able management of Johan Combrink, was resuscitated in 1865 mainly due to political reasons – financial aid for Afrikaners fighting for freedom in the Free State (Bosman, 1980:441). They performed in whatever location, hall or theatre was available. Performances were extremely limited – only an estimated ten performances from August 1865 to October 1867 were reported. Important for us is the company's season in the *Oddfellows Hall*. According to Bosman (1980), they performed there on the following dates:

- 23 July 1868 to 24 August 1868 (4 performances);
- 25 September 1868 to 5 August 1869 (9 performances);
- May 1870 (3 performances);
- Another 3 performances on 23 June, 7 and 21 July 1870;
- 4 July 1871 to 18 September 1873 (7 performances).

This period – 1868 to September 1873 – seems to have been the Dutch period in the *Oddfellows Hall*.

However, for a brief period in 1870 Mr Webster became the lessee of the *Oddfellows Hall* and renamed it the *Royal Lyceum Theatre*. (This was also the time when the Duke of Edinburgh paid his third visit to Cape Town.) On Mr Webster's opening night, 30 June 1870, selections of Shakespeare were successfully performed. The next

performance was given on 5 July 1870 in the presence of the Duke. The old favourites, *All that Glitters is not Gold* and *A Moving Tale*, were performed. Unfortunately, that particular night was a disaster, one player did not pitch up which led to other actors playing double roles. According to Bosman (1980:252), this “spoilt the illusion of the play completely.” After Webster’s unsuccessful venture the *Royal Lyceum Theatre* was again called the *Oddfellows Hall*.

Hereafter, the Dutch company, *Door Yver bloeit de Kunst*, was again performing in the *Oddfellows Hall*, as indicated above. In 1873, with the arrival of Disney Roebuck, the theatrical scene in Cape Town was slightly altered.



Disney Roebuck (Laidler, 1926:36)

Captain Disney Roebuck and his company arrived in Cape Town in November 1873. After Sefton Parry he was considered to be South Africa’s next successful theatre manager of note. Roebuck’s company consisted of Mr W.R. Clifton, Mr E. Palmer, Mr E.V. Sinclair, Mr Brougham, Mr A.B. Saxton, Fanny Enson, Bessie Cranston, Bessie Palmer and Miss Clifton (Bosman, 1980:304, 306). However, on Roebuck’s arrival the *Oddfellows Hall* was not available and he subsequently took over the *Mutual Hall*. It was only in December 1873 that Roebuck could move to the *Oddfellows Hall*. Hence, the *Mutual Hall* will be discussed briefly after which the discussion of the history of the *Oddfellows Hall* is resumed.

### 3.4.2 The *Mutual Hall*

Soon after Roebuck's arrival in November 1873 he held his first performance in the *Mutual Hall* in Darling Street. Important to note here is that this was the first occasion on which the *Mutual Hall* was used as a theatrical venue (Laidler, 1926:87). The Mutual Building was situated on the corner of Darling and Grave Streets, the latter known today as Parliament Street. The building was three stories high and the ground level was reserved for shops. In front of the shops were excessively decorated stoeps. According to Picton-Seymore (1977:58) the stoeps were

frittered away into small meaningless ornamentation, thin rods, like pencils with tape twisted round them, little columns with spreading-out bases and capitals.



The Mutual Building as it looks today, the photo was taken from the corner of Parliament and Plein Street. The Mutual Hall was situated at the back of this building, but no longer exists. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

Roebuck and his company of ten quickly converted the hall into a quaint little theatre. They transformed the platform, to be used as a stage, into a “most presentable form” with a proscenium, side-wings and scenery (Bosman, 1980:306). The hall was reported

to be rather big and had excellent acoustics. The *Mutual Hall* was a popular venue where “all the better class [musical] concerts” were held (Picton-Seymore, 1977:58). According to Bosman (1980:290), some of the first musical performances held in this hall could possibly have been given by the *Cape Town Musical Society* in 1864.

After Roebuck converted the hall into a theatre its popularity grew considerably, although, the *Oddfellows Hall* was still a slightly better theatrical venue. Roebuck opened the new theatre on 26 November 1873 with one of his favourite pieces, entitled *David Garrick*. For the afterpiece was chosen *Perfection* (Racster, 1951:69). The Roebuck company overwhelmed the public with their level of professionalism. Even the Capetonian Dutch community praised Roebuck. *Het Volksblad* and the *Cape Argus* were equal in their praises:

Speaking as colonial born men, who never saw ... Europe, this company is the best that ever visited these shores (*Het Volksblad*, November 1873).

Roebuck’s stay in the *Mutual Hall* was a short one. The rest of his season there comprised the following performances (Bosman, 1980:309):

26 November 1873	Opening night: <i>David Garrick</i> ; afterpiece <i>Perfection, or the Lady of Munster</i>
27, 28 & 29 November 1872	Same as above
1 December 1873	<i>Still Waters Run Deep; Turn Him Out</i>
2 December 1873	<i>David Garrick; Turn Him Out</i>
3 December 1873	<i>Still Waters Run Deep; A Rough Diamond</i>
5 December 1873	<i>David Garrick; A Rough Diamond</i>

After these few performances the inadequacy of the small *Mutual Hall* was felt and Roebuck grabbed every opportunity he could find to play at the *Oddfellows Hall* in Plein Street. Years later, in 1886, Benjamin Wheeler and his *Wheeler Comedy Company* also performed in this venue for a short while.



**MUTUAL HALL.**

Under the Distinguished Patronage of Her  
Excellency Lady BARKLY, and their Excel-  
lencies the Lieut.-Governor, Sir ARTHUR  
CURYNORAME, K.C.B., and Lady CURYNORAME.

First Time of Opera de Camera.

**THE GRAND DUCHESS**  
OF GEROLSTEIN, BY OFFENBACH,  
AND

**GRAND CONCERT,**  
Produced under the direction of  
**MR. CHARLES LASCELLES.**

To-morrow (Wednesday) Evening,  
OCTOBER 13,

**MADAME ANNA BISHOP**

Will be kindly assisted by the following  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

MRS. PRESTWICH,  
MISS MCINTIRE,  
MR. G. DARTER,  
MR. DRUMMOND,  
MR. PRESTWICH,  
MR. WALLACE,  
MR. STEPHENSON,  
MR. G. MILLS,  
MR. B. MILL

AND

**MR. CHARLES LASCELLES.**

**LAST NIGHT**  
FRIDAY, 15th INSTANT.

Places may be secured at Messrs. CARTER  
Music Warehouse.

Admission:—Reserved Seats, Five Shillings  
(body of the Hall); Balcony, Three Shillings.  
Doors open at 7-30, commencing at 8 o'clock.  
Carriages may be ordered at 9-45.  
Entire change of Programme each Concert.

On Friday Evening MADAME BISHOP will  
sing HANDEL's Celebrated Trumpet Song from  
the ORATORIO of SAMSON, "Let the Bright  
Seraphim."

**Left:** An advertisement of entertainments presented at the *Mutual Hall* (Cape Argus, 12 October 1875).

### 3.4.3 Roebuck in the *Oddfellows Hall*

After Roebuck's final performance at the *Mutual Hall* he immediately moved to the *Oddfellows Hall*. It was a somewhat better venue than the *Mutual Hall*. The stage was slightly bigger which made it more convenient for the use of extensive scenery. However, the *Oddfellows Hall* had its disadvantages too, its orchestra consisted of only one instrument – a piano (Laidler, 1926:87). On Saturday 6 December 1873 he presented "the great moral drama" entitled *The Ticket of Leave Man*, and as afterpiece, *Turn Him Out* (Bosman, 1980:309).

During Roebuck's first season, taken from 26 November 1873 in the *Mutual Hall*, he held 72 performances of which 37 were individual pieces (Bosman, 1980:309). He

performed to full houses and his first season was reported to be a “long and prosperous” one (Bennett, 1885:19). Roebuck’s season ended on 7 February 1874. It should be noted that Roebuck performed at both halls during this season, though more time was spent in the *Mutual Hall*. A mere eight performances were given in the better venue. According to Bosman (1980:309-312), apart from the opening night, performances were given at the *Oddfellows Hall* on the following dates:

13 December 1873	<i>The Lady of Lyons; The Spitalfields Weaver</i>
27 December 1873	<i>The Ticket of Leave Man; Creatures of Impulse</i>
13 February 1874	<i>All that Glitters is not Gold; The Lottery Ticket</i>
19 February 1874	<i>Caste; The Lone of a Lover</i>
20 February 1874	<i>All that Glitters is not Gold</i>
21 February 1874	<i>Caste; The Lone of a Lover</i>
2 March 1874	<i>London Assurance</i>

The rest of the performances were held at the *Mutual Hall*. A list of the remainder of the productions staged at the *Mutual Hall* is given in List A on pages 148 and 149 (Bosman, 1980:309-312).

From these performance lists it is clear that productions were staged almost daily. At the beginning of the season performances were held every day of the week, except on Sundays. The reason behind this was a financial one, to be able to keep on performing in the small venues, money had to be made to pay for productions, cast and expenses. Interestingly, this is still very much the case with modern-day South African theatre, Bain and Hauptfleisch (2001:10) point out that independent companies “must rely primarily on ticket sales in order to survive.” This inevitably has a direct effect on all aspects of the company’s work – duration of production, genre, size of the cast, sophistication of sets, props, costumes and technical requirements. Roebuck received criticism for his grueling programmes. The *Cape Argus* (13 January 1874) reported that he was “working a Cape Town public and his Company to utter exhaustion six nights a week.” This was indeed the case. Some members of his company fell ill, while others fainted

on stage. Roebuck then (slightly) reduced his performances to five per week, with Thursdays and Sundays being mostly performance-free evenings (Fletcher, 1994:97). Furthermore, subscribers paid £5.5s for 30 performances within a given period. This ensured Roebuck of regular audience support (Bosman, 1980:308). At the end of his season the Roebuck company left for the Eastern Cape. They were only to return a year later.

With each performance presented in the *Oddfellows Hall*, and especially in the smaller *Mutual Hall*, the need for a new theatre was felt ever more. Thus plans were made for the building of a new theatre. Construction began in 1874, but immense problems arose and the theatre was only completed in October 1875 (see Chapter 4, *Theatre Royal*, Burg Street). Thus, with Roebuck's return to Cape Town in March 1875 his plans to move into the new theatre were placed on hold. He therefore had to be satisfied with the *Oddfellows Hall* once again, as even the *Mutual Hall* was now largely in a state of neglect. Roebuck renovated and redecorated the old hall and called it the *Bijou Theatre*.

Actor Sutton Vane, who recently joined the company, was appointed as Roebuck's stage-manager. (His real name was Vane Bennett. He became a close friend and biographer of Roebuck.) This *new* theatrical venue was given a brand new backdrop painted by Thomas Baines. The backdrop received much attention and was an illustration of the "Discovery of S.A. Goldfields" (*Cape Argus*, 6 March 1875). Elegant new scenery was provided by Mr R.S. Cooper (Fletcher, 1994:99).

As before, tickets for an entire season could be purchased. Special scheduled trains or trams were arranged to take theatre-goers to and from performances. The new company of actors initially included, Mr Roebuck, Mr S. Vane, Mr Tom Paulton, Mr Harry Miller, Mr J. Rogers, and the women were Mrs Borenger, Emmeline Montague, Mrs Palmer, Mrs Cranston, Maggie Duggan, and Flora Miller (Bosman, 1980:321).

The season began on Thursday 4 March 1875, and lasted for seven months. The last performance, a benefit for Mr Roebuck, was given on Saturday 2 October 1875. During this season the company staged a total of 140 productions in the *Bijou Theatre*. The variety of the programmes ensured satisfied audiences and critics (Fletcher, 1994:99). On 2 June 1875 the *Cape Argus* reported:

By a judicious and frequent change of programmes Capt. Roebuck continues to hit the public taste and afford an unusual amount and variety of entertainment to the Cape Town Public.

Praise for Roebuck's variety in performances continued. Again the *Cape Argus* reported in his favour on 7 August 1875:

Novelty succeeds novelty. ... the pieces are changed more frequently than in any other English town.

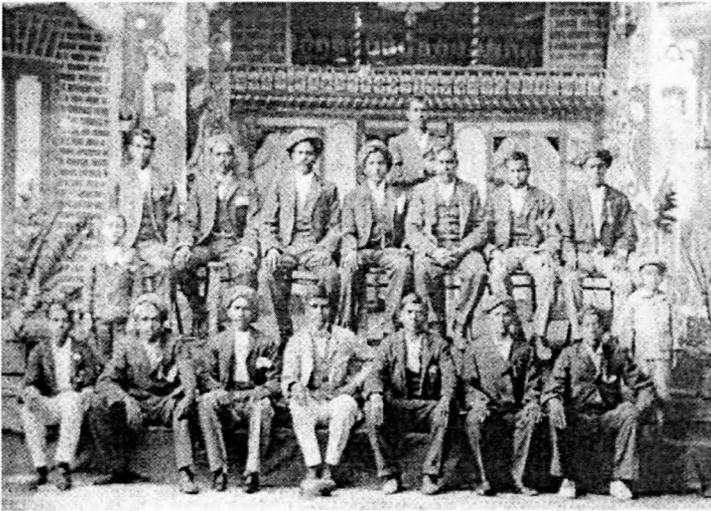
Bosman (1980:327) states that this season (1875) was definitely more successful for Roebuck than the previous one: the staging had improved, a greater variety of pieces had been produced and the company as such was certainly a more professional one. ~~Roebuck concentrated a lot on scenery and tried to make the most of the limited possibilities the *Bijou Theatre* had to offer.~~ Mr W. Thorne from England was appointed as the new scenic painter (to replace Mr Cooper). Performances such as *Christmas Eve*, *Lost in London*, *Nobody's Child* and *The Streets of London* were praised for their wonderfully realistic scenes. One weakness of the theatre that posed particular problems was the limited size of the stage. This caused a few directional problems as the actors had to be careful not to step on each other's toes (Bosman, 1980:328).

Due to its length, the performance list for the 1875 season has been relegated to List B, on pages 150 to 153.

One of the performances that attracted much attention was that of *Brown and the Brahmins* performed on 24 July 1875. Roebuck employed a coloured boys' band for this

occasion. According to Worden, Van Heyningen and Bickford-Smith (1998:193) this was the first time that “coloured folk” were seen on the Cape stage. The *Cape Argus* (27 July 1875) reported as follows:

The afterpiece on Saturday was an extravagant burlesque, entitled *Brown and the Brahmins*. The part of “Brown” was taken by Mr Eton. ... The manager deserves credit for the way *Brown and the Brahmins* was put on stage. It will draw well, if we are not mistaken. The Ashantee dance and song, in which Mr Elton leads a band of coloured boys, will prove attractive to many...



The cast of *Brown and the Brahmins* on the steps in front of the *Bijou Theatre*. (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:193)

At the end of this elaborate season (October 1875) a number of Roebuck’s valuable players left the company. Roebuck (and what remained of his company) set off for Natal (Bosman, 1980:337). At this stage the new *Theatre Royal* in Burg Street had been opened and the prominent English professional companies no longer regarded the *Oddfellows Hall / Bijou Theatre* as being an adequate theatrical venue. After Roebuck’s departure the *Bijou Theatre* was again named the *Oddfellows Hall*.

After Roebuck’s departure, Mr Palmer and his wife, now ex-members of the Roebuck company, started their own “Popular Musical Entertainments” in the *Oddfellows Hall*.

They performed a series of sketches combined with music and song. These performances, entitled *Begone, Dull Care* were performed for three consecutive evenings (Bosman, 1980:337). Thereafter, the *Oddfellows Hall* was used by various smaller companies, including the Dutch company, *Aurora*. Interestingly, this company's first female actress appeared on stage for the first time in the *Oddfellows Hall* on 11 July 1876. *Aurora*, who never had a theatre of their own, continued to use whatever theatrical venue was available, and used the *Oddfellows Hall* whenever possible. From time to time the Dutch company even had the privilege of important spectators attending: Prince Alexander of Orange attended a performance of *Siegfried van Hohenhart* and *Een Nacht op Straat* at the *Oddfellows Hall* on 20 April 1882. For his visit the venue was decorated with the Prince's coat of arms. Even President Kruger attended a performance here on 11 October 1883. On this evening J. Broekhoff's *Speculeren* and *De Onbekende* were staged. According to Fletcher (1994:109), the *Oddfellows Hall* was "for this occasion ... decorated with English, Dutch, Transvaal and Free State flags; *Aurora* wasn't taking any chances."

Clearly, the *Oddfellows Hall* was a popular Dutch venue from 1875 to ±1899. Apart from these mostly Dutch theatricals, occasional balls and musical performances were also presented at the *Oddfellows Hall*. During this time renovations had certainly to be made to at least the hall's interior.

What eventually became of the building is not certain. Desiré Picton-Seymour (1977:58) reported in her study of eighteenth century South African buildings that the *Oddfellows Hall* was still standing:

... entered through an archway, is the Oddfellows Hall, ... once a popular venue for dances and concerts.

### 3.5 Other halls-cum-theatres

Although the focus has largely been on the *Oddfellows Hall*, this was by no means the only hall used as a theatrical venue. Others included the previously mentioned *Mutual Hall* in Darling Street, the *Athenaeum Hall* in Nieuw Street, the *Drill Hall* in Loop Street and the *Germania Hall* on the corner of Loop and Hout Streets. All four of these halls were, apart from their normal functions, also used as theatrical venues during the same period as the *Oddfellows Hall*. All of the above venues were principally used by the Dutch company, *Aurora*, from the year 1866 to 1887. The *Aurora* management produced a total of 103 performances during this time in the above-mentioned halls (Bosman, 1980:462-3, 470, 473-4).

#### 3.5.1 The *Athenaeum Hall*

The *Athenaeum Hall*, situated in Nieuw Street, was owned by a certain Mr Hutchison (*Zuid-Afrikaan*, 8 April 1875). During the 1850s the Capetonian public buildings were built largely in a Victorian style. Young and eager architects came from Europe and had a large impact on the existing indigenous architecture. One such architect was Anthony M. de Witt. His architecture was a mixture of Cape Dutch, Victorian and German styles. He designed many buildings in Cape Town, amongst others the *Drill Hall* in Loop Street (Picton-Seymore, 1977:5, 41, 57).

#### 3.5.2 The *Drill Hall*

The *Drill Hall*, in Loop Street, was another hall that doubled as a theatrical venue. It was especially the Dutch companies that used this venue. In later years, ±1888, the *Drill Hall* was slightly modified and renamed the *Vaudeville Theatre* (Rosenthal, 1977:73). After the destruction of the second *Theatre Royal* in Burg Street in 1888, the *Vaudeville Theatre* was one of only two theatres available to drama companies. The other theatre-

house was the *Exhibition Theatre* that was situated in the Good Hope Gardens (cf. Chapter 4). Although neither theatre was considered to be an adequate theatrical venue, the *Vaudeville Theatre* was even less popular than the *Exhibition Theatre*. According to Boonzaier (1980:438) the *Vaudeville's* roof was so low over the stage area that entire sets for outdoor scenes had to be worked on rollers. Such inadequacies could have been expected as the building was not intended for theatrical productions.

### 3.5.3 The *Music Hall*

The halls mentioned here were by no means the only ones utilised as theatrical venues by drama companies. Another hall-turned-theatre was the *Music Hall* in Buitenkant Street mentioned before. This hall was used as a theatre from 1858 to 1860. Although this period falls prior to the period discussed in the present chapter, it is more logical to discuss the theatrical venue here, since it also falls under the halls-cum-theatre section. Therefore the focus will now move back briefly to the pre-1860 era.

In 1858 a certain Mr J.E.H. English arrived in Cape Town. According to the *Cape Argus* (24 February 1858), he was a “celebrated comic vocalist” and a “professional comedian, very talented.” As shown earlier in this chapter, English was immediately engaged by Sefton Parry and played in his company at the *Harrington Street Theatre*. The play-going community simply adored this new-found talent. English’s engagement with Parry was a short one. After a mere two months he left the company and formed his own dramatic group, namely the *Gentlemen Amateurs* (Racster, 1951:49).

He took the *Music Hall* in Buitenkant Street, close to Church Square, and turned it into a small theatre. This theatrical venue came to be known as the *Music Hall* in the Buitenkant. English went to great costs to turn the hall into an adequate theatre, but it was well worth the expense. It proved to be a more suitable theatre than the *Harrington Street Theatre* as far as lighting and location were concerned. Although Buitenkant Street was merely a street apart from Harrington Street, it was considered a more

central venue for many residents and also considered to be a more sociably desirable area (Racster, 1951:49). The theatre was artificially illuminated with gas, and was also well-ventilated. The auditorium had a smaller capacity (430 seats in total) than that of the *Harrington Street / Cape Town Theatre*, but it was, nevertheless, described as being a “fresh, airy locale” with “plenty of space for every member of the audience” (Fletcher, 1994:86; Racster, 1951:50). The auditorium was divided into 280 stall seats (that could be reserved by the purchase of a ticket) and a gallery that could accommodate 150 spectators. To each of these sections there were separate entrances. Each also had its own refreshment room, as well as a covered passage entrance to the theatre. Moreover, English made it easy for patrons to find their reserved seats by marking the numbers of the rows on the wall (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:193).

On the opening night, 30 April 1858, English presented *The Portfolio of Oddities*. It was advertised as being an “entirely new and original Mimical Musical, Pictorial, Polygraphic, and Panoramic Entertainment, profusely illustrated by sketches of Character from Life” (*Cape Argus*, 29 April 1858). It was a huge success and thoroughly enjoyed by the audience who seemed to have been in constant stitches of laughter.

English continued to present humorous sketches and impersonations of Cape Town institutions, well-known personalities and Cape Town events at his *Music Hall* venue. This recipe proved to be very successful and he always attracted large audiences – to the detriment of Sefton Parry. The *Music Hall* seemed to flourish during May, June and July of 1858. By the end of this successful season English secured a lease for the *Harrington Street Theatre* (Parry’s theatre) and presented his theatricals there (Laidler, 1926:60). By the end of 1858 English was no longer *the* attraction of the day, mainly due to the rise of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*. English disappeared from the scene. Meanwhile, the *Music Hall* was used for other purposes, such as music concerts. In October 1858 the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* found themselves in the *Buitenkant* venue where they played for a long time. The year 1859 was a quiet one for the *Music Hall*.

## From *Music Hall* to *Cabinet Theatre*

The new year, 1860, brought many exciting events to Cape Town. In the middle of the year the Royal Prince Alfred paid a visit to the city. This caused a lot of excitement in itself and led to the decorating of the whole city, including some of the theatrical venues. January 1860 saw the Buitenkant *Music Hall* with a new manager and proprietor. Charles Fraser, formerly a stage-manager of Parry's at the *Harrington Street Theatre* became the new owner of English's theatre. He quickly revamped and reorganised the theatre that he renamed the *Cabinet Theatre* (Racster, 1951:56). According to Laidler (1926:75) the theatre, though small, was

neat and clean, and tastefully decorated, it had a refreshment department where the drinks supplied were of the most recherché description.

Apart from the décor, the interior did not undergo any further serious changes: The interior was divided into a stage area and auditorium; the auditorium, in turn, still consisted of only stalls and a gallery; and there were no boxes. The cheaper gallery seats, where most of the lower classes, including the Cape Malays sat, had its own entrance at the side of the theatre. This was advertised in bold letters at the bottom of one of the *Cape Argus* advertisement, see below.

**Cabinet Theatre.**  
 Proprietor and Manager - Mr. CHARLES FRASER.  
**GREAT SUCCESS!!!**  
 On Saturday next, Jan. 21.  
**HOPELESS PASSION!!!**  
 VOCAL INTERLUDE.  
**Wilkins and his Dinah!!!**  
 Stalls, 4s. Reserved Seats, 2s. Gallery, 1s. Season Tickets to Stalls (guaranteeing 20 Performances), £2 2s. Families will be treated with on liberal terms for Seats.  
 Plans of Stalls and Season Tickets to be secured at Mr. Fraser's, 13, Water-street, Corner of Long-street. Tickets may be had at the Doors on the Nights of Performance.  
 Doors open at 7 o'clock. To commence at 8 precisely.  
 The Entrance to the Gallery is by the side of the Theatre.

Advertisement for the *Cabinet Theatre* in the *Cape Argus*, 19 January 1860.

The *Cabinet Theatre* was opened on 16 January 1860. The opening performance was a comedy by Madison Morton entitled *A Hopeless Passion!*, this was followed by John Oxenford's popular farce, *£5 Reward* (Bosman, 1980:126). The tickets could be bought at Fraser's residence in Wale Street. Season tickets were also available, and for families reduced season tickets could be had for two guineas (Racster, 1951:56).

The January season ended smoothly. During February 1860 Fraser continued to present a variety of comedies and farces. He used members of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*, and sometimes also players of the Garrison theatricals, in his performances (Fletcher, 1994:89; cf. Performance List C on p. 143). His productions were successfully staged and thoroughly enjoyed by the audiences. The only upset during performances was caused by the behaviour of the patrons seated in the gallery. It became such an annoyance for the other people in the auditorium, as well as the actors, that the *Cape Argus* (2 February 1860) published the following notice in the "Local and District News" section:

The Cabinet Theatre will be opened on Saturday evening. *The "gods" have lately acted in an ungodly way*, and Mr Fraser threatens to deprive them of cheap performances if they do not behave better [emphasis added].

The *Cape Argus* (4 February 1860) followed this article with another:

Cabinet Theatre – Mr Fraser assures us that the performances this evening are to be more spirited than ever, and *the gods more godly* [emphasis added].

This bad behaviour of the so-called "gods" was certainly not a new phenomenon. Theatres all over experienced unruly behaviour from the "gods" at some point in time. Schauffer (1978:26) explains:

The history of the colonial stage is also a history of complaint against the behaviour of the "Gods" and, universally, it was accepted that the occupants of

the “Gods” were likely to be the least socially desired members of the community and it was quite common to have a separate entrance to this part of the house.

But the “gods” were not the only thing to worry about at this time: Sefton Parry returned to Cape Town’s theatrical scene in October 1859, which meant stiff competition for Fraser. This was also the time in which theatres were not very well supported and theatre managers did everything in their power to attract the crowds. Although Fraser had not intended to stage “heavy dramas”, he was forced to in an attempt to attract more theatre-goers. In a further attempt to attract large audiences Fraser engaged Miss Annie Rowlands, a child performer, to perform on his stage. Fraser produced *The Child of the Regiment*, with Rowlands in the title role, at the *Cabinet Theatre*. This won him a considerable number of patrons, but the theatre was by no means bursting out of its seams (Laidler, 1926:76). Not even charging patrons half-price for performances that commenced at half past nine in the evening helped to bring the much needed money to the box office. According to Racster (1951:57) theatres were all doing badly during that time.

At the end of March 1860 Charles Fraser took his company to Simonstown in an effort to attract other audiences. There he performed in a tent. The *Cabinet Theatre* remained closed while Fraser performed in Simonstown. Meanwhile, the *Cape Argus* (1 March 1860) announced that the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* was in a treaty for the *Cabinet Theatre*. The same newspaper confirmed this, almost two weeks later, by stating that the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* had succeeded in securing the *Cabinet Theatre* for one season to commence in June 1860 (*Cape Argus*, 10 March 1860).

### **A new name**

And so it came about that Fraser moved out of the *Cabinet Theatre* and the popular *Cape Town Dramatic Club* moved in. Thus, the competition that Fraser presented for Parry was now taken over by the very competent players of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*. They immediately rid the house of all its former Fraser-flair and renovated and

redecorated it. As mentioned above Mr English was the first to turn the hall into a theatrical venue, but according to some sources it was the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* who really turned it into a theatre as such (Racster, 1951:60). The *Cape Argus* of 7 June 1860 reported:

UNDER DISTINGUISHED PATRONAGE – The members of the CAPE TOWN DRAMATIC CLUB have the honour to announce that they have engaged the THEATRE in BUITENKANT, formerly known as the MUSIC HALL, which will be opened for a series of Dramatic Entertainments during the Winter Months. The Building has been entirely re-arranged and re-decorated. The scenery by Mr T. Baines, the dresses by Mr I.R. Taylor, and the appointments by the most skilled artists in Cape Town, will be entirely new, and of the most *recherché* description. No pains or expense have been spared to render the Theatre the most complete in the Colony. The pieces which the Committee of Management intend producing are such as, it is hoped, will ensure the approbation and patronage of the Cape Town Public. The Building will, in future, be known as the DRAMATIC CLUB THEATRE, and the first performance will take place on Friday, 15<sup>th</sup> June, when will be produced Tom Taylor's original drama, in two acts, entitled PAYABLE ON DEMAND! To be followed by Buckstone's Farce of SHOCKING EVENTS! Stalls 5s. 6d. Tickets and Box Plan at I.R. Taylor's, Heerengracht. By kind permission of Lieutenant-Col. Burmester and Officers of her Majesty's 50<sup>th</sup> Regiment, their band will attend.

A follow-up report appeared on 12 June 1860:

The Cabinet Theatre, which is to change its name to that of the Cape Town Dramatic Club Theatre, is to be opened on Friday evening next. It is fitted up very tastefully ... The new decorations are very tastefully done, and the arrangements are altogether good.

Consequently, under the patronage of Lieutenant-Governor and Mrs Wynyard, the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* opened the old *Cabinet Theatre* as the *Cape Town Dramatic Club Theatre* on Friday evening, 15 June 1860. They started their first "independent" season

with Tom Taylor's *Payable on Demand* and Buckstone's farce *Shocking Events* (Bosman, 1980:153). At this opening night the band of the 50<sup>th</sup> Regiment also performed a variety of pieces. According to Laidler (1926:77), some of the members of the company must have had "undoubted histrionic powers", because they attracted "large and fashionable audiences" to their performances.

Below is a list of the performances the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* staged in their theatre in Buitenkant Street (Bosman, 1980:153-154):

15 June 1860	<i>Payable on Demand</i> and the farce <i>Shocking Events</i>
29 June 1860	A repeat of <i>Payable on Demand</i> ; <i>Those Plagues of Children</i>
17 July 1860	<i>Power and Principle</i> ; <i>Two Heads are better than One</i>
1 October 1860	<i>The Man of Many Friends</i> by Coyne; <i>Railway Overture</i> ; repeat of <i>Two Heads are better than One</i>

After the performance on 1 October 1860 the relatively small stage of the old *Cabinet Theatre* proved to be insufficient for the production of plays on a larger scale. Thus, the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* moved to the newly built *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street (Bosman, 1980:156). Here they performed for only four more evenings until their season came to a close on 12 November 1860. It is also significant to note that no productions were performed between 17 July 1860 and 1 October 1860. This could perhaps be ascribed to the *Dramatic Club's* rivals, namely the *Alfred Dramatic Club*, who also secured the services as well as new theatre of Sefton Parry. (A discussion of Parry's new theatre built in 1860, as well as a more detailed account of the *Alfred Dramatic Club* appear in Chapter 4 under the heading "*Theatre Royal, Harrington Street.*")

This was not the end of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*. They continued in the new year with a new season, but this only lasted until 18 February 1861 and consisted of a mere two performances (Bosman, 1980:154). It was, however, the end of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club Theatre* or *Cabinet Theatre*. After the company's last performance on 1

October 1860 the theatre was no longer considered to be an adequate venue. This was mainly due to the opening of the entirely new *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street. Thus, the theatre that started out as the *Music Hall* in Buitenkant Street, saw the end of its career of almost two years. It is not clear what finally happened to the venue. No further theatricals were reported to have taken place in it from this date on. It can be said with confidence that the theatre had a rich history, with no fewer than three companies to grace its stage. First, Mr English, who started it all; then the short-lived company of Charles Fraser; and finally the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*. The loss of this small and intimate theatre was compensated for by the theatrical entertainments presented in the new and impressive *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street.

## Chapter 4

### 4.1 The return of real theatre-houses

After many years of playing in halls and other venues, the want for a proper theatre house kept growing. The Capetonians longed for a theatre that could become the pride of their town. Although, Parry's wooden *Harrington Street Theatre* (built in 1857) and the *Drury Lane Theatre* (1846) did not reach the heights hoped for, they formed the stepping-stones towards the building of bigger and better theatre houses. In the 1860s professional theatre was well-established and amateur theatre was almost a thing of the past. Moreover, the English stages became the focal point and Dutch theatricals moved into their shadow. In the present chapter the focus falls on the first and second *Theatre Royal*. The first one was built in Harrington Street in 1860, and the second in Burg Street in 1875, rebuilt in 1883. Another theatre that will be discussed here is the *Exhibition Theatre*. Although it was not originally constructed as a theatre, it also provided a stage for the theatre enthusiast during this time. The *Exhibition Theatre* is discussed here because it was used during the same period as the second *Theatre Royal* in Burg Street. Interestingly, the *Exhibition Theatre* was built on almost the identical spot where the *Good Hope Theatre* once stood. Thus, a short description of the *Good Hope Theatre* is also given due to its significant location with regard to the *Exhibition Theatre*.

## 4.2 The first *Theatre Royal*, Harrington Street

By the middle of 1860 Cape Town was once again without an adequate theatre space. The *Harrington Street Theatre*, and the former *Music Hall*, were no longer considered to be the best venues around. Therefore it was important for the English play-going community to find a new venue to meet all their theatrical needs. Mr W. Glynn realised this need for an adequate theatrical space and set about to erect a brand new theatre for Cape Town performers. Mr Glynn, who was a theatre lessor, drew up plans for a new and carefully designed theatre. He found a suitable location for the new theatre on the corner of Harrington Street and Caledon Square (Racster, 1951:57, 59). The actual construction of the building commenced early in April 1860 and by the end of the month the roof was fixed in its place. It seemed like the theatre would be up and running by early June, but unfortunately the construction was delayed and the building was only entirely finished by the beginning of August 1860 (Bosman, 1980:9).

One has to remember that July 1860 was also the date stipulated for the visit of Prince Alfred. Thus, apart from Glynn building a brand new theatre to coincide with the arrival of the Royal Prince, the whole city of Cape Town was fervently redecorating itself during this time – cleaning up abandoned waste-sites and pavements alike (Racster, 1951:59).

As may be expected the new theatre attracted much attention and elaborate paragraphs were written in the press to keep the public informed. The *Cape Argus* of 14 July 1860 reported:

The New Theatre – Mr Glynn's new theatre, at the foot of Harrington Street, will be completed in a day or two more. Workmen are now engaged in fitting up the internal decorations, and we understand that when they are completed, the building will be thrown open for a couple of days, to afford the public an opportunity of inspecting it...

Unlike Parry's wooden *Harrington Street Theatre*, the new theatre was, according to Racster (1951:57), a more sturdy construction, built with proper bricks. However, the

exterior of the building could not be described as a theatre *per se*. Glynn took careful consideration of the economic conditions and designed the theatre in such a way that it could be readily converted into cottages should the theatre prove not to be financially viable. Although some people thought this to be a preposterous idea, Fletcher (1994:90) explains that “this had been the practical approach to theatre for a long time, and in poor economic times had proven its worth.” This was certainly not an uncommon trend when building theatre houses. As was shown in Chapter 2, the *Drury Lane Theatre* (opened in 1848) was another theatre that could also be converted into dwellings.

The interior of the new theatre (as if to make up for the exterior) was well-designed. It was calculated that the house could accommodate 1,000 patrons; a much greater capacity than any other Capetonian theatre could boast. Moreover, the *Cape Argus* (14 July 1860) reported that the auditorium was divided into four different areas, namely stalls, boxes, an amphitheatre and a gallery. Thus, it provided seating for four different classes. The best description of the theatre’s ground-plan, and interior in general, was given by the *Monitor* of 21 April 1860:

A pit, divided into stalls, neatly and comfortably cushioned; a circle of boxes behind and slightly elevated above the pit, separated from each other by damask curtains; an amphitheatre, behind, and above the boxes, and above it again, a gallery, supported on pillars, and extending as far forward as the boxes ... The fronts of the boxes, pillars and ceiling will be painted and gilt. The centre box, a double one, for the Governor, will be surmounted by the royal arms and splendidly decorated. The grand entrance, to the boxes only, will be from Caledon Street, and adjoining it, will be cloak and refreshment rooms. The other entrances – a separate one to the stalls and a double one for the amphitheatre and gallery – will be from Harrington Street; into which another door opens in order to afford speedy egress at the conclusion of performances. The refreshment-room for these parts of the house will be underneath the pit-stalls.

As far as the stage was concerned it was, according to Groom (1897:584), a “most convenient and well constructed” stage, and also much larger than any other stage in Cape Town at the time. The actors’ dressing rooms were also better fitted up and more spacious than those in other theatres. Gas was used as artificial lighting, as candlelight had become an old fashioned phenomenon inside theatre buildings. Fletcher (1994) recorded that close attention was paid to the ventilation to ensure that the auditorium and stage area were, at all times, well ventilated. According to the *Cape Argus* (2 August 1860), the new theatre was “commodious and elegant, far superior to anything ever yet seen in the Colony and equal to any Theatre out of London for comfort and convenience.” Racster (1951:59) agreed with this newspaper and stated that it was “altogether more like a theatre than any in Cape Town at the time.”

### The opening of the new theatre

As soon as it became known that Glynn was about to build a new theatre, Sefton Parry jumped at the opportunity to play a season in this theatre. He well realised that his own theatre, the *Harrington Street Theatre*, had seen better times and he was beginning to loose support from the public. Parry was so eager to perform in the new theater that he signed a contract with Glynn to become the first lessee, even before the building was erected. Parry named the theatre, the *Theatre Royal*, and dedicated it to Prince Alfred. Subsequently, Parry left for London to organise a new company to open his *Theatre Royal* (Fletcher, 1994).

On 2 August 1860 it was announced in the *Cape Argus*:

NEW THEATRE ROYAL – LESSEE AND MANAGER, MR SEFTON PARRY. ... [The theatre] will open on Thursday evening, August 9, 1860... The size and appliances of the Stage will enable the Management to place before the Public and the Subscribers the Dramatic Gems of the English language in a far more perfected state than has been possible heretofore. Several new engagements have been made, and new properties, plays and appointments have arrived from

England. ... The Band has been specially organised for the Theatre, and will be under the able direction of Mr Ireson.

After the opening night's performance, a season of theatrical bliss followed. In the same article of the *Cape Argus* (2 August 1860), it was announced that theatre-goers could subscribe for Parry's last season that would consist of, between, fifteen and twenty performance nights. The seats were priced as follows: three pounds three shillings for the stalls; two pounds two shillings for seats in the amphitheatre; eighteen pounds eighteen shillings for private boxes of six – the price of seats in the gallery was not stated. These prices, however, were not fixed and almost each new performance had new prices.

Meanwhile, another dramatic club had formed at Cape Town. It started with a dispute within the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*, the club sided into a Parry- and an anti-Parry faction. Soon the Parry faction organised themselves into a dramatic group and gave themselves the name of the *Cape Alfred Dramatic Club*, later simply known as the *Alfred Club* (Laidler, 1926:78). This club enjoyed the support of Sefton Parry that enabled them to perform in the newly erected *Theatre Royal*. Subsequently, the *Cape Argus* (21 August 1860) stated:

The Alfred Club beg to announce that they will give their first dramatic entertainment on To-morrow evening (Wednesday) [22 August 1860], assisted (on this occasion) by Mr and Mrs Sefton Parry and Miss Lizzie Powell, when will be presented the very laughable farce of "The Irish Tutor, or New Lights". To be followed by a musical interlude, new dance [by] Miss Lizzie Powell...

Parry and the *Alfred Club* reached a new level of excellence when Prince Alfred attended their performance of *The Irish Tutor* on 15 September 1860. The young prince was so taken by the performance that he bestowed his name upon the club. Henceforth, the club was known as the *Royal Alfred Club* (Bosman, 1980:157).

At the end of August 1860 Parry's season drew to a close, on 22 October 1860 he set off to England to organise a new and larger dramatic company (Bosman, 1980:95). Mrs Parry and Miss Lizzie Powell stayed behind to manage the *Theatre Royal* (Fletcher, 1994:90). During Parry's absence the *Royal Alfred Club* staged various productions in the theatre. Their independence from Parry during this time signaled a new phase in the company's career (Bosman, 1980:157). Since, the *Cabinet Theatre* (the former *Music Hall*) could no longer be used as an adequate performance venue, the *Cape Town Dramatic Club* also produced some of their performances in the *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street.

Below is a list of performances held by the two different dramatic groups in the *Theatre Royal* during Parry's absence:

*Royal Alfred Dramatic Club*

**1860:**

26 November	<i>Dido, the Queen of Carthage</i> ; repeat of <i>The Irish Tutor</i>
3 December	Repeat of <i>Dido</i> and <i>Who do you take me for</i>
17 December	<i>The Little Theatre</i> and a comical interlude, <i>The Hundred Pound Note</i>
20 December	A repeat of the performances of 17 December
27 December	<i>The Happy Man</i> ; repeat of <i>Dido</i> on request

**1861:**

10 January	<i>Fra Diavolo or The Beauty and the Brigands</i> ; <i>A Night at Notting Hill</i>
23 February	Grand Gala Night: repeats of <i>Dido</i> and <i>The Irish Tutor</i>

(Bosman, 1980:157-158)

Cape Town Dramatic Club**1860:**

9 October                    *The Man with Many Friends* and a musical interlude *Lord Loyal*

29 October                  *The Rivals* (Sheridan) and the farce *The Spectre Bridegroom*

5 November                Repeat of *The Rivals*; *Guilty or Not-Guilty*; and a performance by the brass band *Cape Royal Rifles*

12 November              A benefit performance for Miss Annie Rowlands

**1861:**

15 January                 *Gale Breezy or The Tale of a Tar* and a burlesque, *The Bride of Abydos or The Prince, the Pearl, and the Pirate*

(Bosman, 1980:153-154)

It is interesting to note that on 18 February 1861 the two dramatic clubs joined forces and presented a “farewell performance” for the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*. They performed *Duchess or Nothing*, *The Plagued Professor*, *The Unfinished Gentleman*, as well as, character sketches given by the *Royal Alfred Club* (Bosman, 1980:154). This was the end of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*’s season, however, the two companies decided to amalgamate. Jointly they used the name, *Cape Town and Royal Alfred Dramatic Club*. They held three more performances on 7, 11 and 14 March 1861 and a fourth performance was given on 1 August 1861 (Bosman, 1980:160). The reason for the performance drought between middle March and August can be ascribed to the return of Sefton Parry and his all-new all-professional company.

**Professional theatre in the *Theatre Royal***

Parry returned to Cape Town in March 1861, his new company, however, only arrived in May. (Fletcher, 1994:90) Meanwhile, Parry renovated and altered the *Theatre Royal*’s stage slightly, to be ready for his new season. After the arrival of his company on 7 May

1861, Parry proudly announced that the *Theatre Royal* would soon be opened for a new season. The article published in the *Cape Argus* (4 April 1861) read as follows:

THEATRE ROYAL – Under the Management of Mr Sefton Parry, Will shortly open, renovated and improved with the following Professional Artists, selected from the principle English Theatres, expressly for the Cape Town Theatre:

Mrs Clara Tellett, from the Royal Olympic, London.

Mrs Shuter Bland, from the Theatres of Bath, Bristol and Newcastle.

Miss Louisa Bland, from the Theatre Royal, Newcastle.

Miss Marie Tellett, Miss Lizzie Powell & Mrs Sefton Parry.

Mr John Howard, Royal Strand, London.

Mr Thomas Brazier, Royal Princess, London.

Mr James Leffler, Royal English Opera, Covent Garden.

Mr Shuter Bland, Bath, Bristol and Newcastle Theatres.

Mr Richard Cooper, Royal Britannia Theatre.

Mr Northouse, Theatre Royal, Exeter.

Mr Sefton Parry, together with numerous efficient assistants.

The new and elegant costumes by May of Bow Street.

The scenery by Cooper. The Crystal Chandelier by Defries & Sons, London.

Moreover, the theatre house would be open for two performance nights per week, on Monday and Thursday evenings. The costs of tickets increased to five pounds per person for stalls, box and amphitheatre seats (*Cape Argus*, 4 April 1861).

It was clear that Parry's days with amateur companies were over. He commenced with his first entirely professional season. Evidently, he staged a staggering fifty productions between 13 May and 14 November 1861 (Fletcher, 1994:91).

On the opening night (13 May 1861) was presented *All That Glitters is not Gold*. According to Groom (1897:584) the Parry Company performed to a full house on the opening night, and for the rest of the season shows were regularly sold out. The pieces performed were done in a satisfactory manner and no complaints could be found against the new professionals. The *Cape Argus* (13 July 1861) reported:

Mr Parry and his audience remain upon the best terms with each other. The subscribers thoroughly appreciate the efforts made to amuse them and Mr Parry leaves no stone unturned to vary the attractions of his stage, and add to the reputation which he has so well earned. His new company is well skilled in their professions and evidently as desirous to please as the manager himself. In the provincial cities of Europe of the size of Cape Town, it is seldom that the theatrical performances are as good as at our *Theatre Royal*. The scenery is equal to that in several of the London theatres. Everything is of course on smaller scale, but equally well-executed.

Some of Parry's productions at the *Theatre Royal* were advertised in the *Cape Argus* (1861) and included: *The Stranger, The Hunchback, Mr and Mrs White, The Lady of Lyons, Star-struck, Cricket on the Hearth, Green Bushes, London Assurance, Flowers of the Forest, Nipped in the Bud, and Victorine*. The advertisement for the production of *Victorine* stated that the doors opened at seven o'clock and the production started at half-past seven. This was the normal time for shows to commence, notably later than a few years before. On this occasion, 22 June 1861, the stalls were five shillings, the amphitheatre three shillings and the gallery one shilling and six pennies (*Cape Argus*, 22 June 1861). According to the *Cape Argus* (July 1861) Parry's company produced during the month of July, *Rob Roy, Ici on parle francais*, the hugely successful pantomime entitled *Little Bo-peep* (repeated several times), *Loan of a Lover, Time Tries All, Money*, and *Box and Cox*. On 30 July 1861 the *Cape Argus* advertised:

THEATRE ROYAL. Under management of Mr S. Parry. Thursday evening, August 1, 1861. The *Cape Town Dramatic Club* have the honour to announce that, through the kindness of Mr Sefton Parry, the entertainment on the above occasion will be for the benefit of the Funds of the Club. The performance will commence with the beautiful Five-act Comedy of "The Rivals, or A Trip to Bath". Dancing by Miss Lizzie Powell. To conclude with (by universal desire) the very laughable farce of "The Bonefisher's Wife"...

After this performance, to help the financial state of the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*, Parry continued his reign in the *Theatre Royal*. A list of performances held during August, September and October 1861 appears on page 155, see List D.





**Theatre Royal.**

Under the Management of **Mr. SEFTON PARRY.**

**This Day, Saturday,**  
20<sup>TH</sup> JULY.

Under the Immediate Patronage of His Excellency  
**Sir GEORGE GREY, Governor.**

**GRAND MORNING PERFORMANCE**  
OF THE  
**Gorgeous Comic Pantomime**  
OF  
**LITTLE BO-PEEP!**

Doors open at half-past 2; commence at 3; Carriages  
at 5 o'clock.

**ADMISSION FOR CHILDREN UNDER 12 YEARS.**  
Stalls, 3s.; Amphitheatre, 2s.; Gallery, 1s.

**On Monday Evening,**  
JULY 22,  
**A NEW DOMESTIC DRAMA,**  
IN TWO ACTS, ENTITLED,  
**Time tries all!!!**  
CONCLUDING WITH THE  
**PANTOMIME**  
FOR THE LAST TIME.

An advertisement for *Little Bo-peep* and *Time Tries All* at the *Theatre Royal*. (Cape Argus, 20 July 1861)

The last performance of the season was advertised for 31 October 1861. The *Cape Argus* (29 October 1861) stated that the evening of 31 October “will be the last night of the season.” On this occasion the company produced the drama, *The Dream at Sea* and the farce, *The Eton Boy*. However, two weeks later, on 14 November 1861, the *Cape Argus* announced: “Grand Extra Night. This evening (Thursday)...”. *The Momentous Question* and *Dominique, the Deserter* were performed on this evening. The following day Parry and his company left by boat to host a season in Port Elizabeth (Bosman, 1980:110). During his absence theatricals in Cape Town came to a virtual standstill, or so it seemed to the theatre lovers in Cape Town.

Parry returned to Cape Town on 14 January 1862. He presented a three-month season at the *Theatre Royal* (Bosman, 1980:111). This season had already been advertised in the *Cape Argus* in November the previous year and it stated that it would be “a last, short and brilliant one” (*Cape Argus*, 16 November 1861). Indeed, it was. The season started on 20 January 1862 with *Macbeth, King of Scotland* and ended on 10 May 1862. The season was well attended and Parry presented a variety of shows. Noteworthy is the production of the pantomime *Jack the Giant Killer, or King Arthur and the Queen of the Fairy Bees*, performed for the first time on 12 March 1862. The *Theatre Royal* was closed between 3 and 11 March in preparation for this large-scale production. The pantomime enjoyed an extended run of two weeks and eleven performances. Parry described it as “The most Xquisite, Xcellent, Xpensive, Xtensive, Xemplary and Xtraordinary Xhibition ever witnessed” (*Cape Argus*, 15 March 1862). After this very successful production the remaining performances were all farewell benefits for the members of Parry’s company, except for the premiere of *The Colleen Bawn, or The Brides of Garryowen* staged on 15 April 1862 (Bosman, 1980:111-112, 114). *Robert L. L.*

### Mrs Clara Tellet

Parry's contract at the *Theatre Royal* had ended, and once more he left with a few of his members for Port Elizabeth. The *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street was now under the new management of Mrs Tellet, a former member of Parry's company (Fletcher, 1994:93). She became the lessee for a period of six months. Her season started on 16 June 1862 and, as before, performances were given on Monday and Thursday evenings. According to Bosman (1980:133), Mrs Tellet's actual season ended on 18 August 1862. Up to this date she presented nineteen performance evenings at the *Theatre Royal*. Although at times she performed in conjunction with the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*, she experienced competition from the Club, as well as from the *Christy Minstrels*. As lessee, Mrs Tellet sometimes sub-let the theatre to other companies: The *Theatre Royal* was occupied on 18 July and 4 August by the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*; on 20 to 31 August it was the stage for the *Christy Minstrels*; on 2, 9, 23 and 30 September and again on 2 and 6 October it was used by the *Cape Town Dramatic Club*.

Mr Alfred Bell

Theatre Royal  
Le Roy, Queen  
Theatre Royal

From 15 November to 23 December 1862 the theatre was sub-let to professor Hansen who used it on a few evenings. Mrs Tellet, herself, gave performances again on 14 October and 28 November, thus, one show per month. Her last four performances were held on 11, 15 and 29 December 1862 and 5 January 1863. All of these were benefit performances (Bosman, 1980:131-133).

Unfortunately, Mrs Tellet did not receive much support from the public. Attendance throughout her season was low. Even pleas from the press did not do much to attract larger audiences to the *Theatre Royal*. The *Cape Argus* (19 June 1862) boldly proclaimed that "Mrs Tellet deserves support...". The *Cape Town Dramatic Club* came to her rescue and offered their talents. Even members of the old *Royal Alfred Club* came to her assistance. For a short while this was Mrs Tellet's only company. However, it did not last long. According to Bosman (1980:161) the success of the *Christy Minstrels* overshadowed all theatricals during this time. Thus the end of Mrs Tellet's season could not have come at a better time. When her contract was up in January 1863, she left Cape Town (Bosman, 1980: 138). Mrs Tellet should be praised for her efforts and the fact that she managed successfully to operate a company consisting of amateurs as well as professionals – an achievement Parry never matched (Bosman, 1980:161).

Tellet's departure meant that Glynn's *Theatre Royal* was now for the first time, since its opening in 1860, without a tenant. According to Bosman (1980) the period 1863 to 1872 was a difficult one for theatricals at the Cape. From 1863 (after Mrs Tellet's departure) to 1864 there was no regular professional company at Cape Town. This meant that the doors of the *Theatre Royal* were seldom opened during these years. It is not suggested that no productions were staged, but merely that these were so few and of such insignificance that they do not merit discussion here. It should be noted that it was not only theatricals in the *Theatre Royal* that experienced a bad time. The same applies to the entire theatrical scene in Cape Town.

## Ray and Cooper

The passive state of the theatre lasted until the last trimester of 1865. Mr Ray and Mr Cooper arrived in Cape Town in the second half of 1865, they came from Port Elizabeth where theatricals were not doing too well either. Mr Alfred Ray either saw new possibilities, or he was simply adventurous, for he signed a contract to become the lessee of the *Theatre Royal* for three months. Mr Ray and his company soon became the most important players at the Cape, and once again the *Theatre Royal* enjoyed full houses. The company consisted of members of Parry's former Port Elizabeth company and included, among others, Mr Cooper, Mrs Cooper, Mrs Ray, Mr Leffler and Mr Spencer. The new company was under joint management of Mr Ray and Mr Cooper. Performances were held mostly on Monday evenings and sometimes repeater shows were performed on the following Thursday evenings (Bosman, 1980:191,195).

The opening performance was given on 23 October 1865 with a production of *Jessy Vere, or The Return of the Wanderer*. Also on the playbill that evening was a ballad performed by Mrs Ray, and lastly *The Area Bell* was performed with the help of the *Gentleman Amateurs*. The critics were divided about this opening performance, but it seems that the theatre-going public, in general, enjoyed the performance and a repeat was given on Thursday 26 October (Bosman, 1980:191, 193).

Ray and Cooper's season ran from 23 October 1865 until the final benefit performance on 15 January 1866. They performed an estimated fourteen productions in this season, including repeaters. One of their most significant productions was the Christmas pantomime entitled *Little Jack Horner, or Harlequin A.B.C.* This large-scale production was staged on 26 and 27 December 1865, plus an extra two bonus performances (Bosman, 1980:192-193). A facsimile of the programme appears in Bosman (1980:195). It reads as follows:

*Theatre Royal, C.T.*  
Under Management of Messrs. Ray and Cooper  
Will be produced  
On Tuesday, the 26<sup>th</sup> of December 1865  
The Christmas Pantomime  
of  
*Little Jack Horner,*  
or  
*Harlequin A.B.C.*

The Scenery, which is of a perfectly dazzling and resplendent description, has been specially designed and painted by Mr R.S. Cooper, from Sketches taken by him during his recent visit in Fairyland. The elaborate Machinery and Mechanical changes by Mr J. Adams. The dresses by Mrs May and Mrs Cooper. The properties, Masks, etc., invented and modeled by Mr Der. F. la Yar [Pseudonym for Mr Ray] – the ‘Dykwynekyn’ of the Cape. The new Overture and Music composed expressly for the occasion by Mr W.G. Browne. The Ballets and Tableaux arranged and superintended by Mrs R.I. Cooper. The Harlequinade and Pantomimic business, which is of a most excruciating and side-splitting character, concocted by Mr Alfred Ray, in conjunction with Herr Luin, the Comic Scenes being painted by Mr C.J.M. Smith. The whole of this Grand and Gorgeous Christmas Pantomime being arranged and produced, regardless of expense, under the joint direction and supervision of the Lessees, Messrs. Ray and Cooper.

William Groom (1897:414) wrote of this spectacle:

Cooper and Ray produced an original pantomime, written for the occasion by Mr B. Mollan of Cape Town entitled “Little Jack Horner, or Harlequin A.B.C.”; which proved a great success. This was the second pantomime in Cape Town which contained much of local interest and touched on the various political and social questions of the day.

Overall, Ray and Cooper's season, mainly of comedies, at the *Theatre Royal* was well-supported and they managed to uphold a certain quality of professionalism that the Cape Town audiences had become accustomed to during Parry's reign. Late in January 1866 their contract expired and they gave their last performance on 16 January 1866.

### Signs of decline

At the end of 1865 the five-year old *Theatre Royal* building started to show signs of deterioration, and in the following year complaints were made about the structure of the building (Fletcher, 1994). It was decided that renovations were urgently needed and the new lessors, Mr Le Roy and Madame Duret, insisted that before they moved into the theatre it had to be renovated. Immediately renovations to the theatre began in all seriousness. Almost the entire interior was transformed. The *Cape Argus* (13 February 1866) reported:

As we hinted in a previous issue, most important alterations are in progress in both the interior and exterior of our *Theatre Royal*, a building long distinguished for the unsightliness of its aspects, and the deficiency of its interior arrangements... A glance at the admirable design prepared by Messrs. Tuppen and Stonestreet, the architects, satisfied us of the marked improvement that will be effected by these alterations. In its present oblong shape the theatre is peculiarly ill-adapted for the display of perfect elocution. The sound of the speaker's voice is invariably exhausted ere it reaches the most distant parts of the auditorium, and the din of the shuffling and shoating in the gallery overhead has deterred many from occupying the private boxes. The stage too, was built on an incline so precipitous as to frequently convey the idea of the back scenes toppling over into the orchestra, and it has been simply impossible to execute anything like a good dance upon its rickety and uneven surface. Now, however, a new *régime* will be inaugurated...

On 10 March 1866 the *Cape Argus* reported on the progress of the theatre's transformation:

The building, heretofore of an oblong shape, with stalls where should exist a pit, and with a gallery immediately over the amphitheatre or pit, has now assumed the orthodox horse-shoe shape of European and American playhouses, with boxes, dress-circle, stalls, pit, and gallery so situated as that no one compartment will in the least degree detract from the comfort of the others. ... We can but say here that the transformation of the old, cumbrous, "barn"-like interior into the elegant form of a *bijou* modern theatre is most complete.

The renovations and rebuilding were contracted to Mr Baskett, the architects were Mr Tuppen and Mr Stonestreet. The interior decorations were done by Mr R.S. Cooper who turned the theatre inside out. It was now larger and more impressive than before. They even improved the ventilation. After the renovations the *Theatre Royal* was described as being a "handsome and comfortable" venue (Bosman, 1980:207).

As soon as the renovations were complete, Mr Le Roy and Madame Duret moved back in. They arrived in Cape Town at the end of Ray and Cooper's season and quickly organised a "scratch" company that consisted mostly of members from Ray and Cooper's former company (Groom, 1897:641). Some of these actors included Mr and Mrs Brazier, Mr Ray (who was an important comical actor), Mrs Ray, Mr Leffler, Mr Spencer, Mr Devere and Mrs Cooper. Mr Le Roy and Mrs Duret had no new artist form Europe in their company (Bosman, 1980:210-211). Their first performance was given as early as 29 January 1866 in the pre-transformed *Theatre Royal*. They performed on this occasion under the patronage of Governor Sir Philip Wodehouse. The dramas presented were *Lucretia Borgia* and Stirling Coyne's *A Duel in the Dark*. It was after this performance that Mr Le Roy insisted that renovations be made to the somewhat dilapidated building. Therefore, their season restarted in March (Bosman, 1980:202-203).

The first season officially commenced on Monday 12 March 1866. First on the programme was the National Anthem sung by the members of the company, followed by the drama *The Soldier's Daughter*. The evening ended with the farce entitled *Hunting a*

*Turtle* (*Cape Argus*, 10 March 1866). Spectators had to pay five shillings for the dress circle, four shillings for pit stalls, three shillings for the pit and one shilling and six pennies for admission to the gallery. Private boxes with six seats could be obtained for £1 16s. The doors opened at half-past seven and the show commenced at eight o'clock (*Cape Argus*, 13 March 1866).

After the successful opening night, the *Cape Argus* (15 March 1866) reported on the transformation of the theatre:

So great is the alteration which has been made that the people could scarcely believe themselves to be within the same four walls as of old, and could only wonder that the judicious expenditure of a few hundred pounds should have so thoroughly transmogrified the building. Cape Town ... has long been in advance of the remainder of the Colony, and it is now an additional feather in its cap to be able to say it has as pretty and commodious a theatre as could be found in any town of an equal size in the United Kingdom. ... Comfort, too, has not been sacrificed to appearance, for although we are now in the hottest season, and Monday was far from cool, the matter of ventilation has received so much attention that the thickly-packed audience did not sustain the slightest inconvenience in this respect.

The company was operated under the joint management of Le Roy and Duret, who also both acted in the productions. Performances were given on Monday and Thursday evenings. Sometimes performances were also given on Wednesday or Friday evenings, but this was an exception to the rule. The Le Roy-Duret management alternated new dramas with old ones. Some of the melodramas they staged included, *The French Spy*, *Traviata* and *The Octoroon*. The most successful of these was *The Octoroon*, which received much praise from audiences and critics alike. Mr Cooper was responsible for the excellent scenery, décor and costumes throughout the season. The company was known for its wonderful special effects used in sensational dramas, such as *The Green Bushes* and *The Octoroon*. The season ended with a benefit

performance for the much praised Mrs Duret on 24 May 1866. Artistically speaking, this season was considered to be a successful one (Bosman, 1980:203-207, 210).

At the end of this season (May 1866) the company took a well-deserved break of two weeks before starting with a new season. Le Roy and Duret's second season was twice as long as their first one, almost two and a half months longer. The season started on 18 June 1866 and ended on 12 November 1866. The company, however, was a much weaker one. Some of its members and key-actors joined Mr Santanna's *Grand Olympic Circus*. Thus, the Le Roy-Duret Company was now a much smaller company and their productions, overall, of a lower quality. Unfortunately their second season could not reach the same levels as the first (Bosman, 1980:211, 213, 214).

At the end of this season Mr Cooper, former lessee of the *Theatre Royal*, made a brief comeback to the theatre in Harrington Street. He appointed Mr Leffler as his manager and gathered some of his old members into a small company. Accordingly, Cooper presented a short season at the *Theatre Royal*. This interim season lasted from 19 November 1866 until 20 December 1866. Even Mr Le Roy and Mrs Duret also performed in some of Cooper's productions (Bosman, 1980:219, 220).

After Cooper's brief venture, Le Roy and Duret resumed their *Theatre Royal* occupation. They opened on 3 January 1867 and ended the season on 28 May 1867. Meanwhile, the company of the *Grand Olympic Circus* was disbanded and former members of the Le Roy-Duret Company rejoined them. Thus, the original company of the successful first season was again in full swing. This meant that the third season was ultimately a better one than the previous season – the company of the third season had more professional players. However, despite the better quality of productions overall, attendance was low. According to Bosman (1980:223), there were three main reasons for the slump in theatre attendance at the *Theatre Royal*. Firstly, he blamed the bad weather of the Cape that kept people indoors; secondly, during this time many successful musical troupes were touring the country. Lastly and most importantly, the theatre-going public had become tired of watching the same shows over and over. Even

if new productions were staged, it was still in the same style as the old ones. Thus, going to the theatre had become a stale routine. Audiences wanted to see a change in theatrical productions.

At the end of the season Le Roy realised that something had to be done, he planned to go to England to find new talent for his company in an attempt to attract audiences. The *Cape Argus* (19 March 1967) published an article on the poor financial state of the theatre, and Le Roy's plans:

The *Theatre Royal* has been supported, at a loss, by Mr Le Roy and Madame Duret for a period extending over twelve months... An attempt is about to be made to introduce a company of actors from England. ... If a sufficient number of guarantors be found to support such a proposal, Mr Le Roy would proceed without delay to England, in order to select actors to support Madame Duret in her histrionic powers. We believe that the necessary aid will be given...

It seems from this that the company was in need of new professional players. Le Roy subsequently left the company and returned to England to search for new professional players. Thus, Mrs Duret became the sole manager of the *Theatre Royal*. Her season lasted from 10 June to 17 September 1867. Overall, she staged very few productions in this time, an estimated one show per week, mostly on Monday evenings. Initially, her season was a fairly successful one. Improvements had to be made to the theatre building midway through her season, partly for the second visit of the Duke of Edinburgh, but also because it was highly necessary. Strangely, after the theatre had been renovated Mrs Duret's initial success started to wane. Laidler recorded (1926:84) that the reason was, mainly, due to her incompetent actors, as well as her declining health.

Meanwhile, Le Roy returned with a brand new company of professionals from England. At the end of Duret's season in late September 1867, some of her members joined Le Roy's new company, including Duret herself. Thus, a fourth season for the Le Roy-Duret management started on 25 September 1867 (Bosman, 1980). After a prominent

career of almost two years, on 13 November 1867 a weakening Madame Marie Duret left the cast and management of the *Theatre Royal* Company. Mr Le Roy was now the sole manager. In December he appointed Mr Brazier as his stage manager (Laidler, 1926:86).

### **The end of the *Theatre Royal***

Four months into Le Roy's season disaster struck. On the evening of 16 January 1868 the *Theatre Royal* with its entire contents burnt to the ground. Even the company's wardrobe was lost in the blaze – they used to store it in baskets in the dressing-rooms. According to Laidler (1926:86), Le Roy continued his season at the *Commercial Exchange*, possible in what was once the *Drawing Room Theatre* (cf. Chapter 2). Unfortunately, the rest of Le Roy's season there was poorly supported.

Sadly, the *Theatre Royal* could not sustain life into the 1870s. Nevertheless, it remained the centre of theatricals in Cape Town for almost eight years – from its beginning in 1860 with Sefton Parry, until it burned to the ground in January 1868. For a period of almost eight years no new theatre was built in Cape Town. According to Bosman (1980:289) “what happened as a result was the re-renovation of various halls.” Evidently, that is what happened as shown in Chapter 3 with the many examples of halls that were converted into, or doubled as theatre-houses.

### 4.3 The second *Theatre Royal*, Burg Street

A large part of the previous chapter (Chapter 3) was devoted to a discussion of the halls that were used as theatrical venues from the time that the *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street burnt to the ground until the rise of new theatres, more specifically the time between 1868 and 1875. During 1875 Cape Town saw the rise of two brand-new theatre buildings. The professional companies, as well as the theatre-goers, certainly welcomed this as Cape Town was without a proper theatre for almost seven years. The absence of a proper theatrical venue certainly contributed to the poor support experienced by the drama companies. Also, a great many middle-class citizens moved to the suburbs in the late 1860s and early 1870s, and the lack of evening trains between these suburbs and the city centre certainly did not help matters. It was only in the late 1870s, after the new theatre in Burg Street had been erected, that trains started running to D'Urban – now Bellville (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:241).

The story of the new *Theatre Royal* in Burg Street began as early as 1872. The *Cape Town Institute and Club* had their own building in Burg Street, called the *Mechanics' Institute*. According to Groom (1897:642) the building contained a large concert room:

[Here] vocal and amateur concerts were nightly given, and stump speeches, recitations, and other amusements drew large audiences, both of the members, and of the general public ... A pianist was always present to accompany any volunteer singer, and many an amusing evening I can recall, when I visited this mushroom Music Hall.

However, the building did not prove to be economically viable. So at the end of 1872 the Club decided to transform their building into a theatre and concert hall. The Directors placed the following notice in the *Cape Argus* (21 December 1872):

Notice is hereby given that a special GENERAL MEETING OF SHAREHOLDERS of the [*Cape Town Institute and Club*] will be held on Monday, the 23<sup>rd</sup> instant, at 8pm precisely, in the Hall of the Institute, Burg-street, for the purpose of altering,

amending, or adding to Sections 7, 8, and 9 of the Trust Deed, so as to increase the Capital Stock of said Company from £600 to £4000, for the purpose of altering and enlarging the present Premises, so as to erect a Theatre, Concert and Lecture Room, as suggested by the Directors...

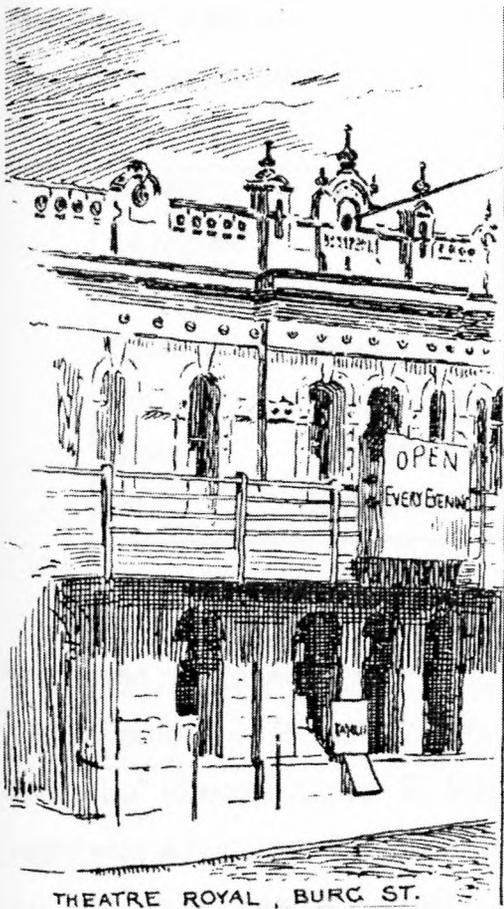
The final plans were drawn up at the end of June 1873. The alterations were estimated to cost £3 480, and the construction to the building was completed over a nine-month period (Bosman, 1980:319). The well-known architect, Mr Charles Freeman, who also designed the Parliament Building, was appointed as the architect (Picton-Seymour, 1977:61). The actual building process, however, experienced several setbacks, so that after 12 months the project was still not completed (Bosman, 1980:319). It seems that a section of the back wall collapsed. This resulted in a shareholders' meeting where concerns about the general safety of the building were discussed. In turn, the town council deemed it necessary to have the building inspected by one of their own experts. Indeed, the builder miscalculated the actual cost of the building with the result that the directors decided to take the matter into their own hands. Apart from that, the safety of the building was intact. The new estimated cost amounted to £4 980 plus an added £600 to £700 set aside for the interior decoration of the theatre-house (Bosman, 1980:320). By the end of January 1875 the theatre had yet to be completed. At this stage the roof had been secured, but the end was not yet in sight. Also, more financial difficulties arose, and, according to Bosman (1980:320), Roebuck even offered to help. It was only in October 1875 that an advertisement appeared in the *Cape Argus* (12 October 1875) for the lease of the new theatre.

THE CAPE TOWN THEATRE. The Directors of the Cape Town Institute and Club Company (Limited), hereby give notice that they are prepared to entertain proposals for the Lease of the Cape Town Theatre. The Building will probably be ready for occupation by the 1<sup>st</sup> of January, 1876. It has been constructed under the personal superintendence and accordance with the Plans of Mr Freeman, the Architect of the New Houses of Parliament. ... No expense has been spared to make the Theatre a credit to the Metropolis of South Africa. It is situated in one of the widest and best Streets of Cape Town, and for beauty of design and

perfection of finish, is unequalled by any Public Building in this quarter of the Globe.

The measurements of the building were as follows: 45 feet wide, 75 feet long and 34 feet tall. The interior was divided into the usual acting area and the auditorium. The stage was a comfortable size and very spacious too: 45 feet wide, "with an opening of 25 feet" and a depth field of 27 feet (Bosman, 1980:321). The dressing rooms, green room and wardrobe were located beneath the stage, whereas the painting room/workshop was located in the large space above the stage (Fletcher, 1994:99). This workshop measured 45 feet by 27 feet, the same as the stage's measurements, and had a height of 35 feet. Moreover, the auditorium was reasonably large with measurements of 56 by 45 feet (Bosman, 1980:321). The auditorium was divided into stalls, boxes, dress circle and a gallery, and there was "a well for the orchestra" (Racster, 1951:71). The pit, boxes and gallery each had its own separate entrance; moreover, the boxes and the gallery each had its own staircase. The boxes were located at the back and sides of the auditorium. Conveniently, the gallery had been built with a pitch to ensure that the stage was in full view from all angles. Sounding tubes had been inserted in the ceiling to maximise the quality of the acoustics. The whole auditorium could accommodate 1,500 people (*Cape Argus*, 12 October 1875) which was 500 more than the previous *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street could.

Quite to the surprise of the Directors, the new theatre was completed within that month and available for lease early in November 1875. Unfortunately Disney Roebuck, who had greatly anticipated the completion of the theatre, had set off for Natal earlier that month.



An artist's sketch of the *Theatre Royal* in Burg Street (Fletcher, 1994:98).

### Cagli in the new theatre

With Roebuck away, Mr Cagli and his Italian Opera Company jumped at the opportunity to play in front of Cape Town audiences for the first time in the newly built theatre (Laidler, 1926:89). On 6 November 1875 the opening of the new theatre was advertised in the *Cape Argus*:

ITALIAN OPERA. Royal Theatre, Burg-street. Director, Signor A. Cagli. Grand opening night of the Opera Season. The Director has much pleasure in announcing to the Public of Cape Town and its environs, that he has secured, at great expense, an Opera Troupe, whose Performances will equal if not surpass any Troupe out of Europe and the United States. The Opera will consist of both Serious and Comic... The season will commence on MONDAY, 1<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER, 1875.

The terms of subscription for the Italian season in the new theatre were also stated in the same advertisement. (*Cape Argus*, 6 November 1875) Subscriptions were calculated as follows:

24 Nights,	Dress Circle	£5 5s	Reserved
24 Nights,	Stalls	£5 5s	Reserved
24 Nights,	Stalls	£4 4s	Unreserved
Dress Circle,	Single Nights	5s	Reserved
Stalls,	Single Nights	5s	Reserved
Stalls,	Single Nights	4s	Unreserved
Pit	Single Nights	2s 6d.	

*Opera.*

Cagli and his Italian Opera Company opened the new theatre in Burg Street on Monday 15 November 1875 with Verdi's *Il Trovatore*. Signor Cagli was the director and the "maestro" director Signor E. Maggie (*Cape Argus*, 11 November 1875). The opening night was a huge success. Productions for the rest of the month included, *Don Pascale*, *Lucie & Lamermoor*, *Il Barbiere of Siviglia*, *Lucrezia Borgia*, *Un Ballo in Maschera* and *Il Campanello*. The season continued until the end of December 1875 with productions of *Norma*, *Erani*, *La Somnambula*, *The Porter of Paris* and *Pipelle* (*Cape Argus*, November, December 1875). *Faust* was the last performance of the season, and was presented on 23 December 1875 (*Cape Argus*, 23 December 1875). After this season Cagli and his company went to Port Elizabeth, but announced that they would return to Cape Town in a month's time for a second season (*Cape Argus*, 25 December 1875).

Cagli's second season in the Burg Street Theatre commenced on 3 February 1876 with a repeater production of Faust. After two weeks he organised a ballet company to join his company. The theatre was closed for a couple of days for this purpose. The *Cape Argus* (17 February 1876) reported that Cagli's farewell season commenced on 17 February 1876 with the production of *Martha*. Cagli now attracted audiences to the theatre by means of his imported ballet dancers. The *Cape Argus* (26 February 1876) reported:

The ballet has come, and it draws. On Thursday evening there was a capital house, and last night, in spite of the fierce south-easter, there was a good one. The costume is scant and the dancing excellent...

### Disney Roebuck, second lessee

Cagli's farewell season continued through March and April. In April 1876 Captain Disney Roebuck returned to Cape Town, and he hoped to move into the new theatre. Cagli, however, had other plans. He offered the sub-lease to Roebuck with a large bonus. After much consideration, Roebuck accepted and subsequently moved into the theatre that he promptly named the *Theatre Royal* (Fletcher, 1994:99).

Roebuck opened in the *Theatre Royal* on 6 May 1876 with the production of *The Octoroon*. One has to remember that Cagli and Roebuck both performed in the *Theater Royal* during this time. On 13 May 1876 it was announced in the *Cape Argus* that the *Italian Opera Company* would be performing their last six nights before leaving South Africa on 6 June 1876. Cagli also used the opportunity to thank the Cape Town public for their support:

Signor Cagli has the honour, on behalf of himself and Company, to sincerely thank the Cape Town Public and his Patrons for their kind and liberal support during the two seasons of the Italian Opera, and begs to assure them that his Artists will long kindly remember their visit here.

The Italian Company gave their last performance on 17 May 1876, but an extra evening was organised for Wednesday 31 May. On this evening Don Giovanni was staged. Thereafter Roebuck became the sole lessee. According to Fletcher (1994:99), Roebuck brought the renowned tragedian Boothroyd Fairclough from England, and presented Shakespearean plays for most of the season. This proved to be very popular with the Capetonian play-going public. Roebuck's season started as early as 15 April 1876, when he opened in the *Athenaeum Hall*, and ended on 9 November 1876.

However, on 21 July 1876 Roebuck left for England for a holiday and the management was left in the hands of Mr C. Wilstone (Bosman, 1980:338). The large company at this time comprised Mr Sutton Vane, Mr Elton, Mr Foulis, Mr Thorne, Mr Harper, Mr Leffler, Mr Hersee, Mrs H. Temple, Mrs B. Cranston, Mrs G. Robertson, Mrs F. Lewis, Mrs H. Harper, Mrs M. Duggan, Miss Hilda Temple and Miss Georgina Robertson (Bosman, 1980:338). It was advertised in the *Cape Argus* (8 April 1876) that the company "has of late been considerably augmented and is now *The Largest and Most Talented* which has ever appeared in South Africa."

Before Roebuck's departure in June 1876, the theatre was open six days a week. After that, the company was not doing too well. Successes were few, complaints were made about the stage not being used to its fullest potential, especially regarding the scenery and sets (Bosman, 1980:344, 345). What followed was an almost six-year uninterrupted Roebuck reign in the *Theatre Royal*. On some occasions Roebuck returned to England to gather new artists for his company. During his absence he left his company in the capable hands of Mr C. Wilstone.

Interesting incidents at the *Theatre Royal* during this time involved the regular Malay audience. The *Cape Argus* (3 August 1877) reports:

An interesting feature at the Theatre is the Malay audience to be seen every evening in the gallery, and sometimes in the pit, keenly attentive as they are to the proceedings on the stage and interested in the action of the play. It would hardly be expected that these Asiatic-Africans, who rarely use the English language as their vernacular, and who have ideas and sympathies of their own, would be so completely absorbed in the passion, the sorrow, the bliss of an English heroine, or so responsive to the drolleries of an English low comedian. But one touch of nature makes the whole world kin, and somehow that touch in this case of our Malay friends is strong enough to prove our cousinship.

In October 1877 Hadjie Mohamet Dollie and Jongie Siers asked Roebuck for a benefit performance in aid of the injured Moslems of the Turkish army. Roebuck could not

resist, and the benefit was granted (Fletcher, 1994:99). Again the *Cape Argus* (3 September 1877) reported on the occasion:

The *Theatre Royal* on Friday evening last had a picturesque appearance. The occasion was the benefit in aid of the sick and wounded of the Turkish army. The pit was filled with gaily dressed Malays, men and women, among whom the turbaned priests were conspicuous. The gallery was packed with Malays and they seemed thoroughly impressed with the beauties of "The Lady of Lyons" and enjoyed the humour of Terry O'Rourke in "The Irish Tutor".

Malays on the gallery. Drawing by V.R. Glynn, 21 June 1878 (Worden, Van Heyningen & Bickford-Smith, 1998:192).

At the end of December 1877 Roebuck presented the pantomime *Ali Baba, or The Forty Thieves*. This ended the long and successful season (Fletcher, 1994:109). It seems that this pantomime was a huge hit:

The crowd outside the Theatre on New Year's evening reminded one of Boxing night in England, and inside the resemblance was perfect. Every part of the house was full, the gallery teeming with a vociferous but good humoured representation of Olympus, and private boxes showing the pleasing spectacle of

pater-familias with his olive branches all around him... (*Cape Argus*, 3 January 1878).

The 1878 season began on 3 January 1878 and ended on 20 December 1878. According to Vane Bennet, Captain Roebuck and his wife once again opened the doors to their Burg Street theatre in December 1879 (Bosman, 1980:354). The company was “perhaps the strongest Dramatic Company ever introduced into South Africa” and included among others Miss Mabel Hayes, Miss Bella Murdoch, Miss Julia Sydney, Mr Wilfred Bayley and Mr Sidney Beltram. What followed was an extremely extensive season, namely two years and eight months. The season came to an end on 7 August 1882 (Bosman, 1980:355). With this last season Roebuck’s time in the *Theatre Royal* was up, but only for one short season, after which he returned to England. According to Racster (1951:70):

Capt. Roebuck never failed to give the public what nobody else had quite achieved – the art of finish acting. ... Roebuck’s theatre was a world of speech, diction, impersonation. His was a chapter of achievement not to be minimized. Undoubtedly the whole progress of the theatre in South Africa was affected by it, the pattern for the future was set.

### Miss Mabel Hayes

After Roebuck left, the *Theatre Royal* was taken over by Miss Mabel Hayes. Mabel Hayes was in fact the stage-name for Mrs R.J. Hall. She was formerly part of the Roebuck Company and came to South Africa with Roebuck in 1879. Miss Hayes was considered to be “one of the very, very few capable manageresses” in the business (Laidler, 1926:92). She reorganised Roebuck’s old company and opened her theatre on Wednesday evening 29 November 1882 with *East Lynne*. Two evenings later she held a special Scotch night. The particular production chosen for this night was quite fittingly that of *Rob Roy*. The evening took place under the patronage of the *Cape Caledon Society*. The members of the Duke of Edingburgh’s *Volunteer Rifles* also gave a special performance (Laidler, 1926:92). Hayes’s company consisted of twelve players,

including Miss Dora French, Miss Augusta Stuart, Miss Georgie Leighford, Miss Rose Brandram, Miss Jennie Elliston, Mrs Eburne, Mr Veovide, Mr W.F. Clitherow, Mr Walter J. Brooks, Mr Robert Bolder and Mrs Brittain Booth. Later, Mr Henry Harper, Mr Tom Morton, Mr Harry Sniddons, Mr H. Harries and Miss Gertrude Wynne also joined the company. They performed mostly comedies, although more serious pieces were also presented from time to time, as well as light operas. Productions included among others *The World, The Lights of London, The Squire, Manteaux Noirs, Olivette, Little Emily, and Queen's Evidence*. Miss Mabel continued a successful season in the *Theatre Royal* until July 1883, whereupon she left for Port Elizabeth (Boonzaier, 1980:375-376).

### **Destruction by fire**

After Miss Mabel's departure at the beginning of July 1883, the *Theatre Royal*, at this point in time the "only ... properly equipped theatre in Cape Town", was leased to a variety company (Boonzaier, 1980:375-376). However, their time in the theatre was cut short. On the evening of 9 July 1883 around midnight a fire broke out and destroyed the entire building. Fortunately, there was no one inside the building at the time. According to Groom (1897:643) it was the work of an incendiary. However, other sources (Boonzaier, 1980; Laidler, 1926) do not agree with this opinion and regard it as mere speculation. Thus, once again, Cape Town was without a proper theatre. According to Rosenthal (1977:72), the Cape Town citizens were "stirred up to such patriotism, a mixture of civic and theatrical" that they raised the staggering amount of £7,000 for the rebuilding of the theatre. Construction started in August 1883 to rebuild the *Theatre Royal* on the same site as before. It was a long process and by Christmas the theatre had not yet been completed. Meanwhile drama companies had to content themselves with the less adequate *Exhibition Theatre* on Stal Plein (Boonzaier, 1980:376).

The construction of the new *Theatre Royal* was only completed during the middle of 1884. In the meantime Mr Henry Harper (former member of the Hayes Company) secured the lease for the yet to be completed theatre. He decided that it would be most appropriate to open the new theatre with a company of brand new artistes, and left for

England towards the end of 1883 to engage new actors to open his season at the new *Theatre Royal*.

### **The opening of the rebuilt *Theatre Royal***

In Burg Street the construction of the new theatre was coming to an end. The theatre opened towards the end of June 1884. The *S.A. Illustrated News* (21 June 1884) reported that:

The new theatre which has been opened this week in Cape Town is a very convenient and well-arranged building, and all things considered, is well worthy of the place. It may be compared very favourably with such London theatres as the Prince of Wales, and the people of the city will not support any company which is not a first rate one.

The doors to the rebuilt *Theatre Royal* opened on Wednesday evening, 18 June 1884, under Mr Henry Harper's management. The productions chosen for the evening were *Faces in the Fire*, "an original comedy in three acts", and a farce, entitled *The Two Gregories*. The company included, among others, Mr H.C. Sidney, Mr Fred Ferrani, Mr J. Fox Turner, Miss Lilian Francis and Miss Moxon (Boonzaier, 1980:376, 377).

After this glorious opening night, Mr Harper embarked on a successful season. According to Boonzaier (1980:377):

Mr Harper's season at the *Theatre Royal* may be recorded as one of the most eventful in the history of our local stage. Possessed of sound judgement and ripe experience in things theatrical, he had exercised the greatest care in selecting his artistes ... they could flit from drama to comedy, and from comedy to light opera and achieve success in each department to which their talents were directed.

Mr Harper's lease came to an end, and in February 1885 Captain Disney Roebuck returned to South Africa. He organised the actors of Mr Harper's company and

appeared on the *Theatre Royal* stage on 3 February 1885 in the comic drama *The Marquis and the Cobbler*. Next, he presented *Delicate Ground*, *My Awful Dad* and *A Regular Fix*. On 14 March 1885 Roebuck was manager once again of the *Theatre Royal*, and performed *Called Back* (Boonzaier, 1980:380). The audience was full of praise for this performance. According to Bennett (1885:30) Roebuck's acting that evening was "perhaps the best he ever put before the Cape Town public." Roebuck continued his reign in the Burg Street theatre. Sadly, on 21 March 1885 the 64 year-old Roebuck died in his sleep at his house in Sea Point (Laidler, 1926:93). The events that lead up to his sudden death are given here by Groom (1897:643):

It appears that the Captain was performing in a piece, at the close of which, while crossing a bridge, he is supposed to be shot, and being in his dressing room up to the very last moment, very hurriedly descended, and appeared just in time for the act of shooting. When shot, he falls off the bridge, which was somewhat elevated, on to a mattress placed for the purpose, and it was supposed by his medical attendants, that in the hurried fall, a small artery was burst, as they gave it as their opinion that he was bleeding fatally, internally, when brought on, in the action of the piece, to utter his dying address.

Roebuck's death caused a stir in the theatrical community. Fletcher (1994:104) remarked that

South Africa had lost a major theatrical personality, whose talent and code of behaviour had lifted theatre firmly into the realms of respectability.

Subsequently, the lesseeship of the *Theatre Royal* was taken over by Mr H.C. Sidney and his partner, Mr H.J. Fiedler. They opened with *The Silver King* on 4 May 1885 (Laidler, 1926:94). Mr Sidney was from Henry Harper's old company, while Mr Fiedler was a news-agent with offices in Church Street. It was here that reservations for performances could be made. Apart from *The Silver King*, they presented a great many other plays, including *The Romany Rye*, *Black-Eyed Susan*, *Flowers in the Forest*, *The Black Flag* and *Bamboozling* (Boonzaier, 1980:381). The Sidney-Fiedler management

enjoyed a successful run, but at the end of the year the company's lease was up and it was disbanded. It seems that Mr Sidney died many years later in Australia (Boonzaier, 1980:379).

Hereafter the light of the *Theatre Royal* shone brightly on some occasions, and at other times weeks went by without anything happening in it. In January 1886 the *Theatre Royal* fell into the hands of Mr Bomon. He secured the lease from January to the end of April 1886. Bomon appointed Mr E.B. Harris as his manager and together they presented a great variety of productions at the *Theatre Royal* (Laidler, 1926:96, 97). According to the press, 1886 proved to be a highlight on the theatrical calendar. The reason was that Mr Bomon's introduction of comic opera at the *Theatre Royal* proved well worth the effort (Laidler, 1926:96). At the end of Bomon's season, Mr Brittain Booth secured a short lease of the theatre. His season ran from 26 April to 1 May 1886 and he produced *New Babylon* for the entire week (*Cape Argus*, 26 April 1886, 30 April 1886).

### The Wheelers

Mr Benjamin Wheeler arrived in Cape Town in May 1886 along with his company, known as the *Wheeler Comedy Company*. At first they performed in the *Mutual Hall* until Mr Wheeler could secure a lease for the *Theatre Royal*. Mr Wheeler took over the lease of the *Theatre Royal* from Mr Booth and opened there on Monday 3 May 1886 with *Aladdin*. The doors opened at half-past seven and the show commenced at eight o'clock (*Cape Argus*, 1 May 1886). Boonzaier (1980:381) was of the opinion that the Wheelers were at the forefront of the theatrical scene during the second half of the nineteenth century. The company comprised Benjamin and Frank Wheeler (father and son – the latter playing almost all the leading roles) as well as Miss Emily Seyton, Mr George Thorne, Mr G. Hall and again Henry Harper. It was this company that performed Gilbert and Sullivan's comic opera *The Mikado* for the first time in front of a South African audience. This historical event took place on 3 July 1886, and the play became a runaway success. It was only Mr Hall of the entire cast who had previously seen a performance of *The Mikado* in London, so that the performances given by Frank,

Wheeler, Henry Harper, Emily Seyton and the rest of the cast could be considered to be entirely original (Boonzaier, 1980:381, 382).

As Benjamin Wheeler's lease was only of a temporary nature, Madame Pearmain secured the *Theatre Royal* for a short season. She opened in the *Theatre Royal* on 22 November 1886 with a new company that she brought out from England. On her opening night she presented Dion Boucicault's play entitled *The Jilt*. The Pearmain season quickly became very popular with the theatrical community. Madame Pearmain, as she was always called, presented a large number of new plays. The list included: *Black Berries*, *The Ironmaster*, *The Queen's Shillings*, *Dandy Dick* and *Nita's First* (Boonzaier, 1930:383). At the end of 1886 Madame Pearmain's contract expired.

Next, the Wheelers once again occupied the *Theatre Royal*. On 15 February 1887 they staged *Pygmalion and Galatea*. This was the last production that Mr H.C. Sidney (a former lessee) played in before he left for Australia. At this stage Mr Frank Weston acted as the Wheelers' manager. He was sent back to England to recruit "a properly equipped theatrical company" (Boonzaier, 1980:384). From April to May 1887 the *Theatre Royal* was filled with a highly talented company, credited for their excellence at all levels of production. It was during this time that Mr Sutton Vane, friend and member of Disney Roebuck's company, joined the Wheelers. He deserved much of the praise lavished on the company, as he was mainly responsible for the staging of the productions. The rest of the company comprised Miss Annie Baldwin, Mr E.A. Elton, the leading actor Mr J.A. Rosier, and Brittain Booth, formerly a member of the Hayes Company. The following are some of the performances staged by the company: *Dandy Dick*, *The Harbour Lights*, *The Schoolmistress*, *Two Orphans*, *Lady of Lyons*, *Confusion*, and *Peril* (Boonzaier, 1980:384).

### **The arrival of the Searelle Company**

In June 1887 the company's popularity received a further boost with the arrival of Mr Luscombe Searelle. While in Australia he heard about the success of the Wheelers and

decided to come to Cape Town. He brought with him his wife, Miss Blanche Fenton, her sister Miss Amy Fenton, Mr Vernon Reid, and Mr Paul D'Arcy (Fletcher, 1994:113). The Press raved about the arrival of the Searelle Company:

Searelle's English and Comic Opera Company will open at the Theatre Royal on Monday. The following significant fact will serve to show the magnitude of the enterprise in which Mr Wheeler is engaged. The Company is one of exceptional talent, such as is seldom seen out of London and the huge towns of America and the principle cities of Australia. Misses Amy and Blanche Fenton are the Prima Donnas. These ladies are most accomplished songstresses and actresses, having studied in the best Italian schools. Mr Vernon Reid, the leading tenor of Australia, is acknowledged to be an artist of superior excellence and Mr Paul D'Arcy, a very superior baritone. Mr Luscombe Searelle, whose opera "Estrella" ran 200 nights at the Gaiety and Novelty Theatres in London, is musical director and manager. The chorus will consist of twenty-five ladies and gentlemen, the orchestra of fifteen instrumentalists. The opening opera is "Maritana", which will be played for six nights only. The repertoire of the Company consists of nearly 20 operas, which will be produced in rapid succession. No expense will be spared. The wardrobe is imported direct from London and the performance will in every detail be complete (*Excalibur*, 10 June 1887).

And so the Searelle Company opened, under Wheeler management, at the *Theatre Royal* on 13 June 1887. They presented the one opera after the other, uninterruptedly, for six months. According to Fletcher (1994:113) this achievement is still an unbroken record. Searelle performed almost every night, and rehearsed every day and after the night's performance. Some of the operas staged by the Searelle Company were *The Bohemian Girl*, *La Mascotte*, *Trovatore*, *The Pirates of Penzance*, *The Grand Duchess*, *La Fille de Madame Angot*, and Searelle's own operas entitled, *Isadora*, *Estrella* and *Bobadil* (Boonzaier, 1980:385). These last three operas became the favourites of the play-going community. The Searelle operas caused a revival on the Cape Town theatrical scene: "Playgoing became the fashion and few people who could afford it missed a new production" (Boonzaier, 1980:385).

On 11 November 1887 Luscombe Searelle ended his contract with Benjamin Wheeler, who was at this stage the sole lessee of the *Theatre Royal*. Searelle signed a new contract and became the sub-lessee and director of the theatre (Fletcher, 1994:115). For the rest of November and December 1887 Searelle and his Opera Company continued to enchant audiences. On 17 December 1887 the company performed its last opera in the *Theatre Royal* (Boonzaier, 1980:386) after which the company embarked on a tour of the Eastern Cape and received equal attention and praise at Port Elizabeth.

### **Curtains ablaze**

After Searelle's departure the *Theatre Royal* was never again occupied by a professional company (Boonzaier, 1980:386). Benjamin Wheeler's contract also expired by the end of December 1887. In the new year, 1888, Capetonians were lured to the theatre by all sorts of entertainments. On 18 February 1888 the *Cape Town Highlanders* staged *Rob Roy*. Then on 4 March 1888 disaster struck for the second time at the *Theatre Royal*. As with the first *Theatre Royal* in Harrington Street, this one too was entirely destroyed by fire. Apparently, the fire was caused by the "concentration of sun rays from a plateglass window in the dôme upon certain of the scenic stock-in-trade" (Picard, 1969:62). However, D.C. Boonzaier (in Fletcher, 1994:117) had the following to say about the incident:

The circumstances connected with this second conflagration are so mysterious, that I am able to give some particulars of the fire from the lips of an eyewitness, now residing in Cape Town, who was in the habit of taking minor parts in Roebuck's and other company's performances. ... It was the custom to leave the key of the premises at the Police Station nearly opposite. On the Thursday before the fire, my friend had occasion to visit the theatre to get some of his property out (there were no performances going on at the time) and after taking out his property he deposited the key at the Police Station as usual. When the fire broke out on the next Sunday afternoon, strange to relate no key could be found, and no one recollected its being returned in due course, consequently the door had to be broken open, but the interior, from its inflammable contents, was a

mass of fire, and nothing could be done, except playing upon the ruins to prevent the adjoining properties being destroyed. To this day the cause of the fire on each occasion remains a mystery.

It was decided, mainly because of financial reasons, that this time the *Theatre Royal* would not be rebuilt. Indeed, the loss of the *Theatre Royal* represented a serious blow to the theatrical scene. The only theatres now available to drama companies were the *Exhibition Theatre* in the Good Hope Gardens and the *Vaudeville Theatre* formerly known as the *Drill Hall* in Loop Street (cf. Chapter 3.5.1). Unfortunately, both these theatres were quite inadequate venues, to say the least.

By 1891 the ruins of the former *Theatre Royal* had still not been removed. According to Picard (1969:62) the 1891 Guide for Cape Town described the sight as an eyesore. Interestingly enough, years later the headquarters of the Metropolitan Fire Brigade was built on this very site. Also, most of the front of the burnt-out theatre-house was still intact and changed little with the building of the new Fire Brigade (Boonzaier, 1980:386). In 1897 the *Cape Times* building was erected slightly behind the site where the theatre once stood (Fletcher, 1994:99). The *Cape Times* building today known as Newspaper House, can still be found in St. George's Street and also houses the *Cape Argus* offices. Below is the main entrance to the building in St. George's Street (photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001).



**Above:** The corner of Burg and Church Streets: The *Theatre Royal* fronted on Burg Street.

**Left:** The Newspaper House is on the corner of Church and St. George's Streets at the back of the building shown in the top photograph. (Photos: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

#### 4.4 The rise and fall of theatres

After the *Theatre Royal* (Burg Street) had been destroyed by fire in 1888 no new theatres were built for a period of five years. Therefore the drama companies had to resort to the only available theatres left. As mentioned above, by 1888 there were only two other theatres in use, namely the *Exhibition Theatre* and the *Vaudeville Theatre*. Neither of these theatres was particularly suitable as a theatrical venue (for a brief description of the *Vaudeville Theatre*, cf. 3.5.1 above).

The history of the *Exhibition Theatre* started around 1875, and should be told alongside that of the *Masonic Lodge de Goede Hoop*. The *Exhibition Theatre* will be discussed first and thereafter linked to the history of the *Masonic Lodge*. The reason for discussing these theatres together, is their significant location.

#### 4.4.1 The *Exhibition Theatre*

The *Good Hope Exhibition Hall* (hereafter referred to as the *Exhibition Hall*) was situated in the Good Hope Gardens, on the site called Stal Plein. It was erected very near to the current National Art Gallery. As the name indicates, the *Exhibition Hall* played host to a range of agricultural and industrial exhibitions. In 1876 Mr Cagli, from the *Italian Opera Company*, became the leading figure in the organisation of the International Exhibition held at the *Exhibition Hall* (Bosman, 1980:304). Also during this time (1875) the Hall was slightly modified to double as a theatre, after which it became known as the *Good Hope Exhibition Hall and Theatre*. According to Laidler (1926:89) the theatre belonged to the Cagli Opera Company, who had it built. However, this is the only source that states this. It is possible that Laidler meant that Cagli's company was the first to perform in the *Exhibition Theatre*, and, therefore, assumed that Cagli owned the theatre.



The South African National Art Gallery: the *Exhibition Theatre* possibly stood more to the left and back of the Art Gallery. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

#### **Not a pretty theatre**

The building was not an attractive one. At one exhibition held in 1884 a young representative from the Native Industrial Institution of Lovedale in the Eastern Cape, described the building as

a large iron shed, hardly as graceful in shape as one would expect to be exhibited for a model. Irrespective of the daylight correctly pouring through the windows, a good deal more was otherwise let into the edifice. The building was beautifully lighted up by electricity. The electric light is as near sunlight as can be, and only wants the steady brilliancy and the naturalness which the Ruler of the Day gives to everything around (Picard, 1969:55).

Other sources also referred to the theatre as being less than attractive: Boonzaier (1980:376) described it as being a large building constructed mostly of corrugated-iron in a ghastly fashion. A bookseller from Liberty Hall described it as being "large and rambling" (Boonzaier, 1980:387). Also, the great tragic actress Genevieve Ward, brought to South Africa by the Searelle Company, thought the theatre to be "most extraordinary" in the non-extraordinary sense of the word (Racster, 1951:75).

Despite its unattractive features, many companies -- among them frequent touring companies - used the *Exhibition Theatre*. It was a venue to which companies went back when other more appropriate venues were not available. In 1883 with the destruction of the *Theatre Royal* in Burg Street, the companies had no other choice than to be satisfied with this theatre until the new *Theatre Royal* was completed in 1884. The same thing happened when the *Theatre Royal* was again destroyed by fire in 1888 and no new theatre was built until the *Opera House* was completed in 1893. Boonzaier (1980:386) remarked that during 1888, with the second destruction of the *Theatre Royal*, neither the *Exhibition Theatre* nor the *Vaudeville Theatre* could be compared to up-to-date theatres, and neither proved to be very adaptable for staging theatrical productions. Nor did the interior of this ill-constructed galvanised theatre prove to be anything special either: The stage was built somewhat awkwardly; extending outwards onto the auditorium. The actors had to know their way about this odd stage: One evening one of Mr Cagli's cast members, not all that sober, fell from the stage right into the audience! (Laidler, 1926:89). According to Fletcher (1994:117) comfort was definitely nowhere to be found in this "uninviting" theatre, where both the stage area and the auditorium proved most uncomfortable.

## Another first for Cagli

The first company to use the *Exhibition Hall* as the new *Theatre* was Signor Cagli and his *Italian Opera Company* who, as mentioned above, also had the pleasure of opening the *Theatre Royal* in Burg Street in 1875. When the transformation of the *Exhibition Theatre* was completed in June 1876, Cagli presented a season of grand opera, or what he called “General Italian Opera” (Laidler, 1926:89). It was during this season that Cagli shocked the conservative public with his ballet dancers’ scanty costumes. The Company’s orchestra consisted of only one instrument, that of a combined piano and harmonium. They performed music from Mozart, Gounod, Verdi and Donizetti. The company with Mr Cagli as manager included the singers Mr Neri, Mr Cracco, Mrs Setrani and Mrs Brambilla, as well as three female ballet dancers (Laidler, 1926:89).

After the Cagli season a number of so-called “scratch companies” performed at the *Exhibition Theatre* (Boonzaier, 1980:376). As mentioned above, when the rebuilding of the *Theatre Royal* took place (1883–1884) some of the prominent companies were compelled to perform in the *Exhibition Theatre* since, with the exception of the smaller *Vaudeville Theatre*, it was the only theatre available at that time. The same thing happened in 1888. In June 1888 a Mr Hirshfield began a season at the *Exhibition Theatre*. His company had been selected in England by the actor Mr J.A. Rosier and included Mr Joseph Ashman and Mr Albert Lucas. They presented plays such as *Sweet Lavender*, *The Arabian Nights* and *In His Power*. By July 1888 their season was over. According to Boonzaier (1980:387) theatricals at Cape Town reached an all-time low during this year. The situation was slightly relieved the following year, with the promise of the Searelle Company returning to Cape Town. The *Cape Argus* (18 May 1889) printed a letter from Luscombe Searelle who was in Kimberley at that time:

Since my opening here I have been inundated with letters from Cape Town asking for information when the Searelle Company will come to Cape Town to perform. Nothing would give me greater pleasure than to play a season in the metropolis, remembering the cordial support we received on our first visit and the many kindnesses showered upon us. But at that time there was a theatre to play

in, while now there is no temple of Thespis worthy of the name. I fell sure, if I played a season at the Exhibition Theatre, it would mean a serious pecuniary loss to me unless there was a sufficient guarantee of support. I am perfectly willing to come to Cape Town for six weeks provided that a sufficient number of season tickets were sold to lessen my chance of losing money. To put it into figures, if 100 books of 50 transferable tickets at £15 each were sold, I would play a six weeks' season, guaranteeing to play 20 operas during that time, that is changing the programme more than three times a week.

Thus, Luscombe Searelle returned to Cape Town and brought along the acclaimed comedian, Mr Lionel Brough, to appear before South African audiences for the first time. Searelle opened in the *Exhibition Theatre* on 26 August 1889 with *The Paper Chase* (Fletcher, 1994:117). The show proved to be most enjoyable. However, this was not enough to attract audiences to the ill-suited theatre house. According to Boonzaier (1980:388) "Mr Searelle's enterprise had met with but scanty encouragement". The theatre-going community of Cape Town regarded Searelle's productions in the *Exhibition Theatre* as being below his usual high standards, and could not be persuaded to attend. For the rest of this poorly supported season productions of *She Stoops to Conquer*, *Paul Pry*, *The Paper Chase*, *Modern Lives*, *Retiring*, *Miriam's Crime*, *Off Duty*, *No. 1 Round the Corner*, and *Well Matched* were staged (Boonzaier, 1980:388).

At the beginning of January 1890 the *Exhibition Theatre* was occupied by Mr Edgar Perkins from the Transvaal. Mr Perkins brought his opera company and produced a couple of performances such as *Dorothy*, *Falka*, *Pepita*, *Erminie*, *Yeoman of the Guard*, *The Mikado*, and *Patience*. Mr Perkins, the manager of the company, was praised for his elaborate scenery, delightful costumes and artistic direction. His company was made up of talented individuals including, among others, Mr Frank Wheeler and his wife, known on stage as Harriet Wood (Boonzaier, 1980:388). After this successful short visiting season the Perkins Company returned to the Transvaal.

For the rest of the year (1890) various insignificant companies hosted an array of short seasons at the *Exhibition Theatre*. It was only at the end of 1891 that the Searelle

Company once more presented noteworthy productions. Mr Searelle continued to visit England in order to lure new artistes to South Africa and to bring back new productions. In December 1891 he brought with him Genevieve Ward, the first actress to be awarded the Order of the British Empire. This highly renowned opera singer and actress toured all over the world with her production of *Forget-Me-Not* (Hartnoll, 1972:588). According to Racster (1951:74) this actress was Luscombe Searelle's "boldest importation" ever. Along with Miss Ward came another acclaimed actor, namely Mr W.H. Vernon. The 54-year-old Genevieve Ward and her company opened in the *Exhibition Theatre* on 10 December 1891 with the to-be-expected production of *Forget-Me-Not*. Admission was six shillings for stalls, three shillings for seats in the parquet and two shillings for the gallery (*Cape Argus*, 8 December 1891).

For this production Arthur Elliot was commissioned to paint the scenery. He received £18 15s for his work, and was subsequently appointed as the company's scenic painter. He was a born American, but settled in Cape Town. Later he became famous as one of South Africa's great historic photographers (Rosenthal, 1977:75). Mr Elliot reportedly worked on scenes during the day, but never left the *Exhibition Theatre* later than five o'clock in the afternoon. He said that he was always aware of an evil presence in the theatre, especially after six in the evening. Apparently, others that worked on set in the building experienced the same ominous feeling (Fletcher, 1994:118).

The Ward Company, contracted by Mr Searelle, delivered a further nine productions at the *Exhibition Theatre* before embarking on a nine-month tour of South Africa. A number of their productions at the *Exhibition Theatre* included old and new productions, among others *Married Life*, *A Scrap of Paper*, *Mammon*, *The Queen's Favourite*, *Still Waters Run Deep* and *Guy Mannering* (Laidler, 1926:102).

In 1892 Searelle, who was still the lessee of the *Exhibition Theatre*, brought two new stars to Cape Town. They were Mr Kyrle Bellew and his wife Mrs Brown-Potter. Mrs Brown-Potter was a distinguished actress who started as an amateur in America, moved to London in 1886, and later performed all over the world. Of Mr Kyrle Bellew,

Boonzaier (1980:393) wrote that he was a “striking handsome man, [who] was for many years regarded as the best romantic lover on the stage”. On their opening night, 26 January 1892, the bad Cape weather dampened the spirits ever so slightly. Their portrayals of Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* were regarded as a success. This was despite some disturbances caused by the weather and compounded by the ill-constructed theatre:

The wind and rain created such a hullabaloo that Romeo and Juliet had to shout at one another, the scenery sagged from the roof, and the Worth dresses tended to produce contortions of the Javanese dancer. Yet, there was also praise when Mrs Potter came to the closing tragic scene (Racster, 1951:76, 77).

The Potter-Bellew Company continued to perform in the *Exhibition Theatre* for almost a month. They staged productions of *Hamlet*, *Frou-Frou*, *La Tosca*, *Camille*, *She Stoops to Conquer* and *David Garrick*. With every performance this company staged, the admiration of the Cape audiences increased.

### **Fire! Fire!**

Without planning it, the Potter-Bellew Company gave their last performance in the *Exhibition Theatre* on Saturday 20 February 1892 when they staged *Hamlet*. Their next performance, *As You Like It*, was meant to take place on the Monday evening of 22 February. But, unfortunately for Searelle and the Potter-Bellew Company, on Sunday 21 February 1892 the *Exhibition Theatre* was destroyed in a ferocious blaze (Boonzaier, 1980:394). According to Picard (1969:92-93) it was, until that day, one of the biggest and most destructive fires experienced in South Africa. The city engineer reported that it all happened very quickly:

Within a few minutes the Exhibition Theatre burnt to the ground, and soon afterwards the offices of Native Affairs and the Good Hope Masonic Lodge were also smoldering ruins. The sparks even set fire to a laundry in Plein Street and threatened Claridge’s Hotel (Picard, 1969:93).

According to Picard (1969:92) the city council, and many other Cape Town residents, were not particularly upset at the loss of the *Exhibition Theatre*. This was mainly due to the building's unsightly features. However, it was a great loss for the Potter-Bellew Company. All their belongings were destroyed in the fire – costumes, scenery, and scripts. Even the stage jewels melted away with the safe, and nothing was insured. The company lost an estimated £1 500 in the blaze (Racster, 1951:77, 78). According to Groom (1897:671):

There were a lot of people busy in the building at the time, preparing new scenery etcetera for the next night's performance, and such was the extreme fierceness of the fire, confined as it was within four iron walls, that it was impossible to approach the burning building with any appliance to assist in its extinction.

Like so many times before, the actual cause of the fire was never discovered. Groom (1897:671) speculated that it could have been caused by carpenter's shavings piling up close to a very large gas-metre.

As Fletcher (1994:119) puts it: "The destruction of the *Exhibition Theatre* left Cape Town theatrically homeless." The only theatre left in Cape Town at that stage was the unpopular *Vaudeville Theatre*. It was only in 1893 that two new theatres were added to the list. Laidler (1926:103) described that year (1893) as "the greatest milestone in the progress of the Cape stage." The two theatres were the *Opera House* and the *Good Hope Theatre*. However, for reasons stated in Chapter 5, the *Opera House* does not fall within the scope of this study.

#### 4.4.2 The *Good Hope Theatre*

Coincidentally the *Good Hope Theatre*, opened in 1893, was erected virtually on the same site where the *Exhibition Theatre* once stood. Although this theatre did not evolve from the former *Exhibition Theatre*, it will be discussed here due to the significant location of both theatres.

#### The Good Hope Masonic Lodge

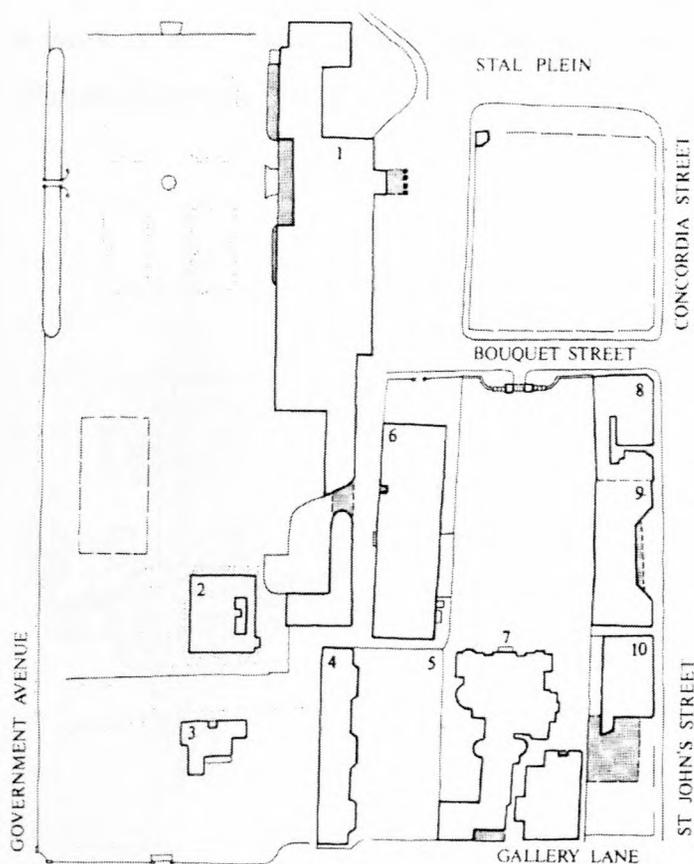


The *Good Hope Masonic Lodge* on Stal Plein. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

The history of the *Good Hope Theatre* is an interesting one. It can not be discussed without mentioning the *Good Hope Masonic Lodge* that existed for more than a hundred years. The *Good Hope Lodge*, also called *Lodge de Goede Hoop*, was founded in 1772. In 1802 the Freemasons bought a site at Stal Plein, at the top of Grave Street (later renamed Parliament Street) and Plein Street (Picton-Seymore, 1989:14). The building was designed by Louis Michel Thibault who, according to Picton-Seymore (1989:19), designed “most of the major buildings at the Cape for the extravagant Governor van de Graaff.”

On Thibault as architect, and his new building, Greig (1971:91) commented as follows:

This large building was Thibault's most ambitious project where, far from the source, he evolved his own version of the French classicism of his early training. It was a fascinating study in an arbitrary classical treatment – the columns, the use of half-round apses to terminate wings on the main façade and other off-beat forms which became his personal architectural idiom...

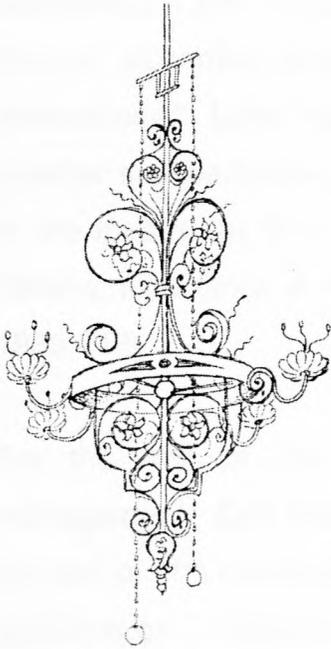


The ground plan of the Company's Garden and Stal Plein. No. 7 marks the *Good Hope Masonic Lodge* and No. 6 the *Good Hope Hall and Theatre* that houses the President's Offices today. Just below Gallery Lane is the National Art Gallery – the site of the former *Exhibition Theatre*. (Rennie, 1978:300)

### From banquet hall to theatre

The Lodge was the exclusive property of the Freemasons throughout the entire 1800s. Many years later in 1892 the Lodge was completely destroyed by fire. This was the same ferocious fire that destroyed the *Exhibition Theatre*. Fortunately it was decided to restore the *Masonic Lodge* to its former glory. However, in place of the former adjoining banqueting hall the *Good Hope Hall* was now built. This new Hall was located on almost

the exact same spot where the *Exhibition Theatre* once stood. Although the initial purpose of the hall was to serve as a venue for banquets and concerts, it later also doubled as a theatre and was called the *Good Hope Theatre*. It was quite a sizable hall with a seating capacity of 1,200. The interior was tastefully decorated in blue, white and gold. The theatre was illuminated with gas chandeliers. It had “curly iron and brass” fittings with chains attached for turning the gas on and off. The wooden ceiling was also a work of art. Neat little insets made of iron contributed to optimising the ventilation (Picton-Seymore, 1977:61).



A sketch of one of the many gaseliers that hang from the decorated ceiling of *the Good Hope Theatre* (Picton-Seymore, 1977:59). Unfortunately, no unauthorised persons are allowed inside the building today.

### Many companies and stars

The *Good Hope Theatre* soon became a very popular venue for festivities and theatricals alike. The *Hawtreys Comedy Company's* production of *Charley's Aunt* was one of the first theatrical performances staged in the theatre. (The *Hawtreys Comedy Company* was under Wheeler management; Boonzaier, 1980:398). Another company that performed at the *Good Hope Theatre* were that of Luscombe Searelle. In May 1895 he brought his 12<sup>th</sup> *Star Variety Company* to perform in the *Good Hope Theatre* to the delight of the Cape Town public (Boonzaier, 1980:401). Searelle continued to bring

productions and overseas stars to the *Good Hope Theatre*, mainly because the *Opera House* on the Parade Ground was occupied by the Wheelers most of the time. According to Boonzaier (1980:404) the Searelle Comedy Company had great success with the production of *Sweet Lavender* in 1896. Two years later in 1898, the great female singer Madame Albani performed in the theatre. From 1896 to 1902 there was a continuous stream of theatrical activities presented at both the *Good Hope Theatre* and the *Opera House*. In 1902 the *D'Oyly Carte Opera Company* presented two seasons at the *Good Hope Theatre*. Among the operas they produced were, *The Mikado*, *Patience*, *Yeoman of the Guard*, *Iolanthe* and *Rose of Persia*. Both these seasons were very successful. The company's orchestra was directed by the South African, Mr Harry Burton. According to Boonzaier (1980:410) he "formed a distinguishing feature in all the productions." Later that year, in August 1902, the Wheeler management engaged yet another star performer, namely Mr Wilson Barrett. And they presented a short season at the theatre on Stal Plein. Hereafter, a Gaiety Company staged productions of *The Geisha*, *Kitty Grey*, *A Runaway Girl*, *Florodora*, *San Toy* and *The Shop Girl* (Boonzaier, 1980:412).

For the rest of the year productions were mostly staged under the Wheeler management. One of the highlights of the Wheeler management of 1903 and 1904 was the visit of Mrs Lewis Waller, who performed for the first time in front of a South African audience on 2 March 1903. She was a fine actress and opened with the production of *Zaza*. Mrs Waller "had reached the zenith of her career, and not only looked but acted the parts she was called upon to play to perfection" (Boonzaier, 1980:413). On 4 May 1903 the *Royal Australian Opera Company* amused Cape Town audiences with a Japanese fairy-tale, entitled *Dijn-Dijn*. According to Boonzaier (1980:414) it was a mix between a pantomime and a musical comedy. But what really caused a stir, and attracted large audiences, was the company's ladies chorus "with their pretty faces and extremely shapely limbs" (Boonzaier, 1980:414). Some of the other productions staged by this company included *The Gay Parisienne*, *The Casino Girl* and *La Mascotte*. In July Auguste van Biene was "welcomed in Cape Town by one of the biggest audiences ever assembled in the *Good Hope Theatre*" (Boonzaier, 1980:415). Van Biene was a

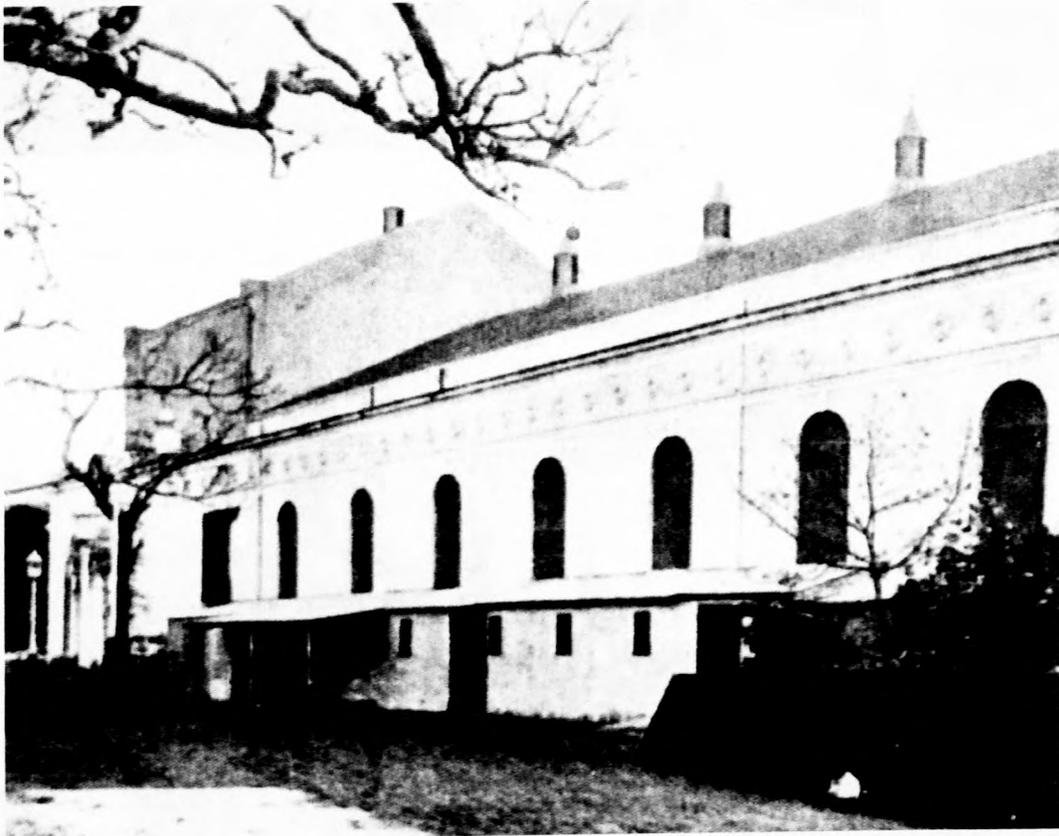
highly acclaimed musician, as well as an exceptional actor. He opened on 13 July 1903 with *The Broken Melody*. In October 1903 the Wheelers engaged an Italian Opera Company which presented the operas *La Traviata*, *The Barber of Seville* and *La Boheme* (Boonzaier, 1980:417). The Wheeler management's success in the *Good Hope Theatre* continued throughout 1904. They brought performers from all over the world to stage productions on the Cape stage. Among the long list were Mr George Giddens who opened on 4 April 1904 with *Are you a Mason?* and the *Frawley Company* who opened with *Madame Sans Gene* in August 1904 (Boonzaier, 1980:420, 421).

On 19 November 1904 the Wheeler reign at the *Good Hope Theatre* came to an end. They secured a sub-lease at the highly popular *Opera House* and immediately continued their operations there (Boonzaier, 1980:421). This was not a good move from the *Good Hope Theatre's* point of view. The popularity of the better-equipped *Opera House* resulted in all major productions now being staged there, and the *Good Hope Theatre* had to make do with whatever came its way. Minor performances by lesser-known companies were staged at the *Good Hope Theatre*, but the departure of the Wheelers dealt the theatre's popularity a serious blow. The year 1906 marked the final turning point for the *Good Hope Theatre*. Boonzaier (1980:424-425) records the following:

The *Good Hope Theatre* practically remained closed throughout the year 1906; indeed it may be said to have ceased to exist as a playhouse from that time up to the present day. It certainly cannot be contended that ill-luck always waited on the manager who ventured within its walls, for have I not spoken of the phenomenal success achieved by the Wheelers over their musical comedies? Still, the *Good Hope Theatre* became a thing of the past in 1906 – this theatre in which we had welcomed so many world-famous actors and actresses.

Sadly, the *Good Hope Theatre's* time was up. From 1906 to 1916 banquets were still held there and the odd production here and there. On 4 June 1910 Mr J. Combrink and his Dutch company produced *Het Geheim* at the *Good Hope Theatre*. However, the building slowly degenerated through the years. Finally, in 1916, it was decided to use

this once delightful theatre-house as a storage facility for the Government Stationary Office. Huge stacks of paper were piled up beneath the chandeliers. In the late 1980s a decision was made to restore and redecorate the theatre/banqueting hall to its former glory, after which it was used by the President's Council (Picton-Seymore, 1989:14). Today the building is still used by the President's Council, unfortunately unauthorised persons are not allowed inside the building.



An old photograph of the side of the *Good Hope Hall* (Fletcher, 1994:116)



The *Good Hope Hall* today, from the front (above) and side (below).



(Photos: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

## Chapter 5

### 5.1 Conclusion

In the previous chapters the history of the Western theatre tradition in South Africa was traced from its early beginnings in the *Garrison Theatre* to the end of the nineteenth century. Over the span of a century the South African theatre building evolved considerably. Not only did it become bigger, but also more functional and adaptable to provide in a variety of theatrical needs. The evolution of the theatrical venue was a direct result of the development and changes that occurred within the society. Athanasopoulos (1983:ix) argues that changes in any society will, inevitably, lead to a change in its theatre –

Theatre reflects the history of man himself... Its evolution follows that of the human race, from its beginnings ... the two have advanced side by side, and theatre adjusts its development to that of the human spirit.

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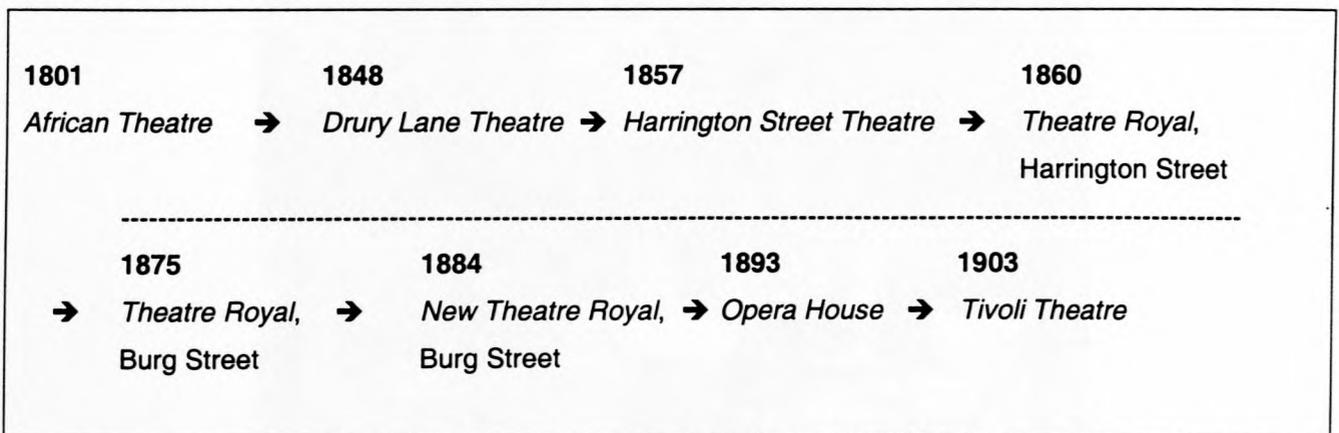
In other words, if there is a change in society, so too will there be a change in theatre. This change or evolution is traceable in all aspects of the theatre: Hauptfleisch (1984:10) points out that "...theatre is 'made' by a large number of people, influenced by, involved in and passing through many processes along the way." Thus, a more sophisticated society requires a more sophisticated theatre house. Towards the end of the nineteenth century Cape Town was the leading city in Southern Africa, its society had become more advanced and sophisticated (cf. Chapter 1). Initially the evolution within the theatrical venue was a slow process; in the pre-1850 period the venues used by the different drama companies were small and often inadequate. This is particularly true if one considers the venues first used by the Dutch and English amateurs discussed in Chapter 2. Hereafter, when the British introduced a professional theatre tradition at the Cape, the theatrical venues improved considerably both in style and quality. This was evident with the establishment of theatre houses such as the *Theatre Royal* (1860) in

Harrington Street and the new one in Burg Street (1883). These paved the way to yet better future venues.

One of the key issues addressed by this thesis is the quest for permanence within the early Cape theatre tradition. Throughout the nineteenth century there existed among Capetonian theatre-lovers an almost constant need and desire for a permanent theatre building. This was evident since the early theatricals presented in the *Garrison Theatre*. The need was fulfilled with the establishment of the *African Theatre*. But as soon as this theatre was taken away from performers and turned into a mission church the community was, once again, left without a proper theatre. Various attempts were made to establish a theatre building that could be used for theatrical events only. As is evident from Chapter 2 a permanent theatre had only been established by 1848 with the building of the *Drury Lane Theatre*. Although there was definitely a progression in style and convenience throughout the 1800s, only a small number of the theatres discussed in chapters 2, 3 and 4 were considered to be comfortable and adequate as theatrical venues. It was only towards the end of the nineteenth century with the establishment of the *Opera House* and later also the *Tivoli Theatre*, that theatres became more adequate venues for theatrical events. (See Figure 5.1 for permanent theatres erected from 1800 to 1903.)

**Figure 5.1:**

**Permanent\* theatre structures erected throughout the nineteenth century.**



\* "Permanent" indicates that the building was erected for the sole purpose of functioning as a theatrical venue, and was not converted into a theatrical venue.

By the end of the nineteenth century, a great many things had changed in South Africa. The main reason, or cause, for this change was the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War (1899 – 1901). The war inevitably led to a complete re-arrangement of the political structure of the country, and this in turn destroyed to a large extent the so-called colonial thinking of the nineteenth century. Cape Town was turned into a military city and had to deal with vast numbers of refugees that streamed in from the Transvaal and Orange Free State (Bickford-Smith, Van Heyningen & Worden, 1999). The end of the war signaled a time of renewal and change, also on the theatrical front. Professional theatre flourished in plush theatre houses, such as the *Opera House* and the *Tivoli Theatre*. Although the *Opera House* was built in 1893, it rather belongs to the new theatrical movement that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century. The *Opera House*, together with the *Tivoli Theatre* (1903), were symbols of a new professional era that marked the evolution from old to new.



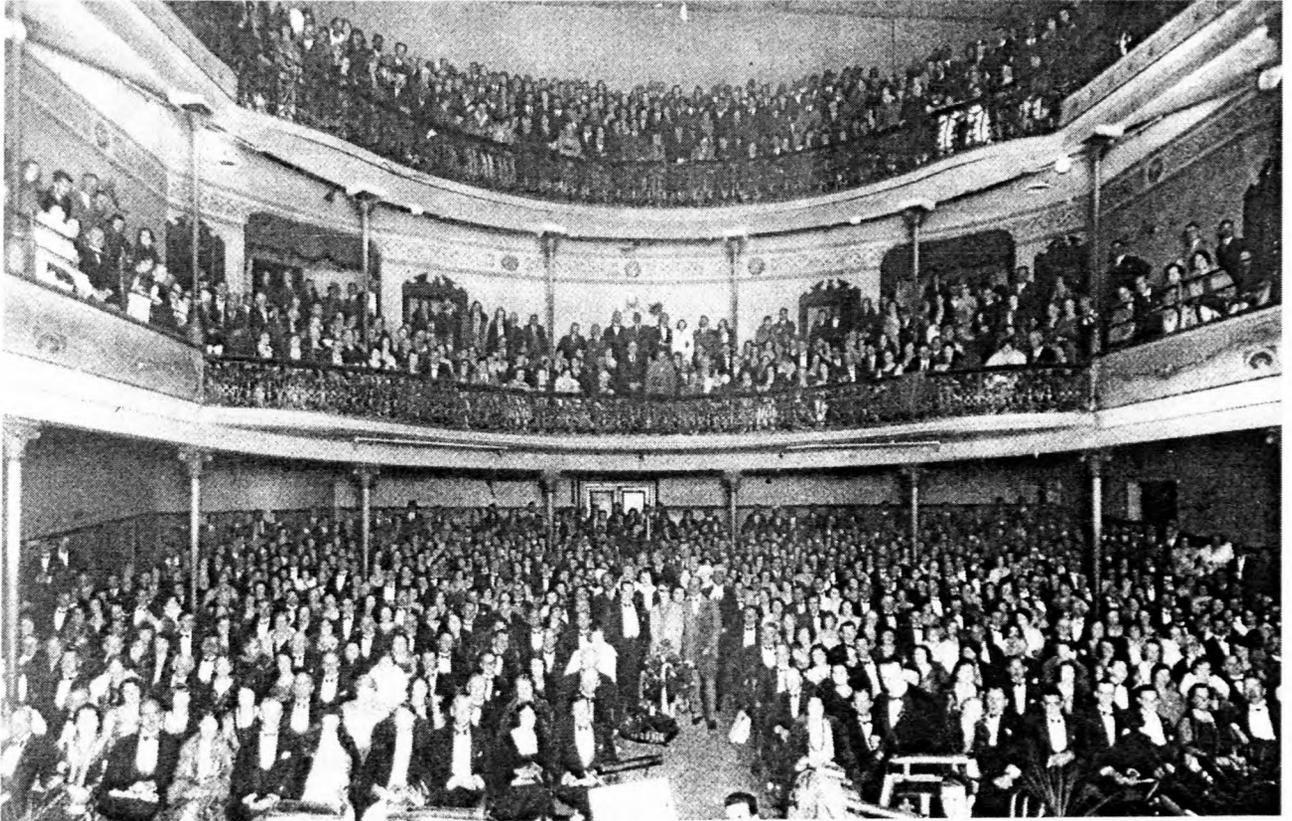
The *Tivoli Theatre* as seen from Darling Street (Fletcher, 1994:127).

The contrast between the old and the new theatres becomes apparent when one places the *African Theatre* and the *Opera House* next to each other. It is also a wonderful example of the evolution that took place within the theatre. As far as appearances alone go, there is a remarkable disparity between the two theatres. The *African Theatre*, opened in 1801, covered an area of 167 feet by 47 feet (Bosman, 1928:64) while the measurements of the *Opera House* were 171 by 131 feet (Rosenthal, 1977:74). Although, the *African Theatre* was a much smaller theatre house in size and scale, it was regarded as an adequate space for nineteenth century theatrical purposes. The *Opera House* was centered around operatic and large-scale dramatic productions. Thus, it was a far more advanced venue, fully equipped for huge spectacles. It goes without saying that professionalism was visible in all aspects of the *Opera House* – production styles, theatrical forms, etc. – while presentations at the *African Theatre* were rather small and comprised the work of amateurs. Also, in the 1800s scripts were hard to come by and full-length productions were the exception rather than the norm. Therefore entire plays were seldom staged. Furthermore, the early nineteenth century audiences were less concerned with what they saw in terms of quality and style; all they wanted was an evening filled with entertainment. Due to the high standard of the various touring companies twentieth century audiences were far more educated ‘critics’, not at all impressed with inferior productions (Bosman, 1951:7).

Professional theatre, introduced in the 1850s, received a serious boost at the start of the twentieth century with the already mentioned establishment of the *Opera House* and the *Tivoli Theatre*. The *Opera House* and *Tivoli Theatre* were situated opposite one another (see map), and presented two very different forms of entertainment. The *Opera House* was concerned with the preservation of the classical arts, i.e. drama, opera and ballet, much the same as with the former *Nico Malan Theatre Centre* of the 1960s. The *Nico Malan Theatre Centre* was built by the Cape Performing Arts Board (CAPAB) and subsidised by the government in 1963. It strived for

the establishment of a full-time and permanent professional theatre, a theatre that would provide a reasonably secure and civilised livelihood for the best

professional talent that could be found and the best conditions for creative work that could be afforded (Cloete, 1974).



The auditorium of the *Opera House* in 1930 (Fletcher, 1994:149).

Interestingly, the *Nico Malan Theatre* (today known as the *Nico*, and lately also as *Artscape*) was one of the last theatre houses built in Cape Town. Each of the former provinces had its own arts council and each had its own theatre complex built. All of these were centered around an opera house and strived to promote the classical arts – the same as with the former *Opera House* of 1893. By the late 1980s this attitude had largely been abolished, with the arts becoming more representative of the country's inhabitants and focusing on all forms of theatrical entertainments.



The old site of the *Opera House* on the corner of Darling and Plein Streets, today the Cape Town Post Office is situated on the site. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

Across the road from the *Opera House* stood the *Tivoli Theatre*. Its main goal was entertainment for the masses, i.e. popular theatre. Initially, the theatre was not doing too well and often remained closed. It was only in 1910 when Harry Stodel bought the theatre that it came into its own. Stodel managed the *Tivoli* as a music hall and attracted large audiences by showcasing imported British and American music hall and vaudeville artists. The *Tivoli* was built in true entertainment style – there were no fewer than five bars inside the building that served alcoholic drinks during intervals. Again, comparisons can be drawn with contemporary entertainment houses, such as Pieter Toerien's theatres that appeared all over the country, usually housed in large shopping malls, for example in Cezar's Palace in Kempton Park and Fourways in Johannesburg. In Cape Town today there are a large number of theatres that could be regarded as the *Tivoli Theatre's* equivalent, such as, again, Pieter Toerien's *Theatre on the Bay* in Camps Bay. At this theatre patrons can enjoy meals in the upstairs restaurant or drinks in the foyer bar before shows. For the convenience of patrons the auditorium seats are all equipped with little cup/glass holders where they can place their drinks once inside the theatre. Moreover, the *Theatre on the Bay* is similar to the former *Tivoli Theatre* in

showcasing popular, often comical and musical entertainments. This is by no means the only theatre of its kind in the Cape Town environs. There are many others to be found, for example, *On Broadway* in Green Point and the *High Street Theatre* in Bellville.



The site of the *Tivoli Theatre* on the (other) corner of Plein and Darling Streets. The photo was taken from where the *Opera House* used to stand. (Photo: M. Neethling, 15 November 2001)

Apart from the comparisons that can be drawn with modern-day theatres in terms of style and form, the *Opera House* and the *Tivoli Theatre*, together with the contributions of various individuals such as Leonard Rayne, Harry Stodel and Stephen Black, all played important roles in establishing a new theatre tradition in post-1899 South Africa – the so-called new wave. However, without the basis that the amateurs and early professionals of the nineteenth century had established, the evolution to this new theatrical era would have been impossible. Moreover, this study represents an effort to establish the fact that South African theatre history after the middle of the nineteenth century falls into a separate category. It differs from that of the twentieth century, and should be regarded as a unique period in its own right.

## Lists of performances

### List A:

Disney Roebuck's season in the *Mutual Hall* (November 1873 – March 1874):

<b>1873:</b>			
26-Nov	Wednesday	"David Garrick";	"Perfection"
27-Nov	Thursday	Id.	
28-Nov	Friday	Id.	
29-Nov	Saturday	Id.	
01-Dec	Monday	"Still Waters Run Deep";	"Turn Him Out"
02-Dec	Tuesday	"David Garrick";	"Turn Him Out"
03-Dec	Wednesday	"Still Waters Run Deep";	"A Rough Diamond"
05-Dec	Friday	"David Garrick";	"A Rough Diamond"
09-Dec	Tuesday	"Pygmalion and Galatea";	"To Oblige Benson"
10-Dec	Wednesday	Id.	
11-Dec	Thursday	"Pygmalion and Galatea";	"Perfection"
12-Dec	Friday	"Pygmalion and Galatea";	"The Spitalfields Weaver"
15-Dec	Monday	"Pygmalion and Galatea";	"Sarah's Young Man"
16-Dec	Tuesday	Id.	
17-Dec	Wednesday	Id.	
19-Dec	Friday	"Pygmalion and Galatea";	"Whitebait at Greenwich"
22-Dec	Monday	"New Men and Old Acres"	
23-Dec	Tuesday	"Pygmalion and Galatea";	"The Spitalfields Weaver"
24-Dec	Wednesday	"New Men and Old Acres"	
26-Dec	Friday	"Pygmalion and Galatea";	"Creatures of Impulse"
29-Dec	Monday	"Meg's Diversion"	"Creatures of Impulse"
30-Dec	Tuesday	"Meg's Diversion"	"A Rough Diamond"
31-Dec	Wednesday	"Pygmalion and Galatea"	
<b>1874</b>			
01-Jan	Thursday	"Plot and Passion";	"Mr and Mrs White"
05-Jan	Monday	"David Garrick";	"Alladin"
06-Jan	Tuesday	"Meg's Diversion"	"Alladin"
07-Jan	Wednesday	"David Garrick";	"Alladin"
08-Jan	Thursday	"Plot and Passion";	"Alladin"
09-Jan	Friday	"Meg's Diversion"	"Alladin"
10-Jan	Saturday	Id.	
12-Jan	Monday	"Plot and Passion";	"Alladin"
13-Jan	Tuesday	Id.	
14-Jan	Wednesday	"To Oblige Benson";	"Alladin"
16-Jan	Friday	"Pygmalion & Galatea";	"Alladin"
17-Jan	Saturday	"Creatures of Impulse";	"Alladin"
19-Jan	Monday	"Good-for-Nothing Nan";	"A Regular Fix" & "Alladin"
20-Jan	Tuesday	Id.	

21-Jan	Wednesday	Id.	
23-Jan	Friday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"The Loan of a Lover"
26-Jan	Monday	Id.	
27-Jan	Tuesday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"The Day after the Wedding"
28-Jan	Wednesday	"The Serious Family";	"The Loan of a Lover"
29-Jan	Thursday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"The Loan of a Lover"
31-Jan	Saturday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"The Whites and Browns"
02-Feb	Monday	"The Serious Family";	"A Phenomenon in a Smock Frock"
04-Feb	Wednesday	"Used Up";	"Little Toddleskins"
06-Feb	Friday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"The Day after the Wedding"
07-Feb	Saturday	"Milky White";	"Whitebait at Greenwich"
09-Feb	Monday	"Milky White";	"Little Toddleskins"
10-Feb	Tuesday	Id.	
11-Feb	Wednesday	"Still Waters Run Deep";	"A Morning Call"
14-Feb	Saturday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"The Lottery Ticket"
16-Feb	Monday	"Caste";	"The Lottery Ticket"
17-Feb	Tuesday	Id.	
23-Feb	Monday	"Don Ceasar de Balzan";	"The Laughing Hyena"
24-Feb	Tuesday	Id.	
25-Feb	Wednesday	"Caste"	
27-Feb	Friday	"Caste";	"A Morning Call"
28-Feb	Saturday	"Our Wife";	"Black Eyed-Susan"
03-Mar	Tuesday	"London Assurance"	
04-Mar	Wednesday	"David Garrick"	
06-Mar	Friday	"Caste";	"The Area Belle"
07-Mar	Saturday	"The Ticket of Leave Man";	"The Area Belle"

(Bosman, 1980:309-312)

**List B**Disney Roebuck's season in the *Bijou Theatre (Oddfellows Hall)*, 1875:

04-Mar	Thursday	"The Marble Heart";	"The Bonnie Fishwife"
05-Mar	Friday	"Black Sheep";	"The Bonnie Fishwife"
06-Mar	Saturday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"The Two Gregories"
08-Mar	Monday	"David Garrick"	
10-Mar	Wednesday	"The Marble Heart"	
11-Mar	Thursday	"Woodcock's Little Game";	"The Pilgrim's Love"
13-Mar	Saturday	"Catherine Howard";	"The Pilgrim's Love"
15-Mar	Monday	Id.	
17-Mar	Wednesday	"East Lynne"	
18-Mar	Thursday	"East Lynne";	"Perfection"
20-Mar	Saturday	"A Happy Pair";	"Black Eyed-Susan"
22-Mar	Monday	"Who Speaks First";	"Black Eyed-Susan"
24-Mar	Wednesday	"East Lynne";	"The Loan of a Lover"
25-Mar	Thursday	"David Garrick";	"The Rows of Castille"
27-Mar	Saturday	"The Ticket of Leave Man";	"The Wandering Minstrel"
29-Mar	Monday	"The Octoroon"	
30-Mar	Tuesday	"The Octoroon"	
01-Apr	Thursday	"East Lynne";	"The Rows of Castille"
02-Apr	Friday	"Woodcock's Little Game";	"The Rows of Castille"
03-Apr	Saturday	"Leah";	"The Rows of Castille"
05-Apr	Monday	"Leah";	"The Illustrious Stranger"
07-Apr	Wednesday	"The Cricket on the Hearth";	"Little Toddleskins"
08-Apr	Thursday	"East Lynne";	"The Old Man's Darling"
09-Apr	Friday	"The Cricket on the Hearth";	"Aunt Charlotte's Maid"
10-Apr	Saturday	"Aurora Floyd";	"Black Eyed-Susan"
12-Apr	Monday	"Aurora Floyd";	"Black Eyed-Susan"
13-Apr	Tuesday	"Black Sheep";	"Black Eyed-Susan"
14-Apr	Wednesday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"Poor Pillicoddy"
15-Apr	Thursday	"East Lynne";	"The Pilgrim's Love"
16-Apr	Friday	"Leah";	"Poor Pillicoddy"
17-Apr	Saturday	"The Serious Family";	"The Pilgrim's Love"
19-Apr	Monday	"The Rivals";	"Sarah's Young Man"
21-Apr	Wednesday	"The School for Scandal";	"Slasher and Crasher"
22-Apr	Thursday	"London Assurance";	"The Limerick Boy"
24-Apr	Saturday	"The Colleen Bawn"	
26-Apr	Monday	"The Colleen Bawn"	
28-Apr	Wednesday	"The Colleen Bawn"	
29-Apr	Thursday	"East Lynne";	"A Quiet Family"
30-Apr	Friday	"The School for Scandal"	
01-May	Saturday	"Lost in London";	"A Morning Call"
03-May	Monday	"A Happy Pair";	"Lost in London"
05-May	Wednesday	"Money"	

06-May	Thursday	"Society"	
07-May	Friday	"Frou-Frou";	"Stage-struck"
08-May	Saturday	"The Flowers of the Forest"	
10-May	Monday	"Society"	
11-May	Tuesday	"The Flowers of the Forest"	
12-May	Wednesday	"The Colleen Bawn"	
13-May	Thursday	"Pygmalion & Galatea";	"A Quiet Family"
14-May	Friday	"New Men and Old Acres"	
15-May	Saturday	"The Green Bushes"	
17-May	Monday	"The Green Bushes"	
19-May	Wednesday	"Caste";	Balcony scene: "Romeo & Juliet"
20-May	Thursday	"The Lady of Lyons";	"Poor Pillicoddy"
21-May	Friday	"The Colleen Bawn"	
22-May	Saturday	"The Duck in the Snow";	"La Somnambula"
24-May	Monday	"The Waterman";	"La Somnambula"
25-May	Tuesday	Id.	
27-May	Thursday	"Pygmalion & Galatea";	"La Somnambula"
28-May	Friday	"The School for Scandal";	"Hercules, the King of Clubs"
29-May	Saturday	"The Duke's Motto"	
31-May	Monday	"The Colleen Bawn"	
02-Jun	Wednesday	"A Happy Pair";	"Rob Roy"
04-Jun	Friday	"East Lynne";	"The Rough Diamond"
05-Jun	Saturday	"Don Ceasar de Balzan";	"Richard III" (fifth act)
07-Jun	Monday	"The Morning Call";	"The Duke's Motto"
09-Jun	Wednesday	"The Octoroon"	
10-Jun	Thursday	"Pygmalion & Galatea";	"The Pilgrim's Love"
12-Jun	Saturday	"Macbeth"	
14-Jun	Monday	"Macbeth"	
16-Jun	Wednesday	"Macbeth"	
17-Jun	Thursday	"Macbeth"	
18-Jun	Friday	"The Ticket of Leave Man"	
19-Jun	Saturday	"The Happy Pair"; "Boots at the Swan"; "The Corsican Brothers"	
21-Jun	Monday	"Catherine Howard";	"Boots at the Swan"
22-Jun	Tuesday	"David Garrick";	"La Somnambula"
23-Jun	Wednesday	"The Daughter of the Regiment";	"The Day after the Wedding"; "Princess Pocahontas"
25-Jun	Friday	"Still Water Run Deep"	Recital: "May Queen"
26-Jun	Saturday	"The Daughter of the Regiment";	Recital: "The Charge of the Light Brigade"
28-Jun	Monday	"Leah";	"Perfection"; Recital: "The Raven"
30-Jun	Wednesday	"The Marble Heart"	
01-Jul	Thursday	"Aurora Floyd";	"To Oblige Benson"
02-Jul	Friday	Afternoon presentation: Sketches, song & comic impersonations	
03-Jul	Saturday	"Life's Revenge";	"Ben Bolt"
05-Jul	Monday	"Miriam's Crime";	"The Daughter of the Regiment"
06-Jul	Tuesday	"Frou-Frou";	"The Swiss Cottage"
08-Jul	Thursday	"Meg's Diversion";	"Bombastes Furioso"
10-Jul	Saturday	"Nobody's Child";	"Hercules, the King of Clubs"
13-Jul	Tuesday	"Ruin"; "Royalists and Republicans" & "Betsy Baker"	
14-Jul	Wednesday	"Faint Heart never Won Fair Lady";	"The Streets of London"

15-Jul	Thursday	"Nobody's Child"	
17-Jul	Saturday	"Faust & Marguerite"	"The Area Belle"
19-Jul	Monday	Id.	
21-Jul	Wednesday	"The Irish Lion";	"The Streets of London"
22-Jul	Thursday	Id.	
24-Jul	Saturday	"Leah";	"Brown and the Brahmins"
26-Jul	Monday	"Lady Audley's Secret";	"Brown and the Brahmins"
28-Jul	Wednesday	"Black Eyed-Susan";	"Brown and the Brahmins"
29-Jul	Thursday	"The Honeymoon";	"Brown and the Brahmins"
31-Jul	Saturday	Afternoon presentation:	"Brown and the Brahmins"
		Evening: "The Streets of London";	"The Kiss in the Dark"
02-Aug	Monday	"London Assurance"	
04-Aug	Wednesday	"The Old Post Boy";	"Alladin"
05-Aug	Thursday	"East Lynne";	"Alladin"
07-Aug	Saturday	"The Colleen Bawn"	"Alladin"
09-Aug	Monday	"The Chimney Corner";	"Patridge and Bread Sauce"; "Alladin"
11-Aug	Wednesday	"Plot and Passion";	"Brown and the Brahmins"
12-Aug	Thursday	"The Palace of Truth";	"Nurse Chickweed"
14-Aug	Saturday	"The Palace of Truth";	"Brown and the Brahmins"
16-Aug	Monday	"The Palace of Truth";	"Nurse Chickweed"
18-Aug	Wednesday	"Miss Eily O'Connor";	"Catherine Howard"
19-Aug	Thursday	"David Garrick";	"Miss Eily O'Connor"
21-Aug	Saturday	"Henry Dunbar";	"Miss Eily O'Connor"
25-Aug	Wednesday	"The Chimney Corner";	"Brown and the Brahmins"
26-Aug	Thursday	"Still Waters Run Deep"	
28-Aug	Saturday	"Little Em'ly"	
30-Aug	Monday	"Little Em'ly"	
01-Sep	Wednesday	"Little Em'ly"	"Whitebait at Greenwich"
02-Sep	Thursday	"The Palace of Truth";	"Nurse Chickweed"
03-Sep	Friday	"Henry Dunbar";	"Whitebait at Greenwich"
04-Sep	Saturday	"The Morning Call";	"Little Em'ly"
06-Sep	Monday	"Frou-Frou";	"The Swiss Cottage"
07-Sep	Tuesday	"The School for Scandal";	"The Kiss in the Dark"
08-Sep	Wednesday	"Henry Dunbar";	"Brown and the Brahmins"
09-Sep	Thursday	"Lost in London";	"The Daughter of the Regiment"
11-Sep	Saturday	"Arrah-Na-Pogue"	
13-Sep	Monday	Id.	
14-Sep	Tuesday	"Plot and Passion"; Recital: "Charge of the Light Brigade"; "The Bonnie Fishwife"	
15-Sep	Wednesday	"Arrah-Na-Pogue"	
16-Sep	Thursday	"Arrah-Na-Pogue";	"The Loan of a Lover"
17-Sep	Friday	"Arrah-Na-Pogue";	"The Loan of a Lover"
18-Sep	Saturday	"Little Em'ly"	
20-Sep	Monday	"The Peep o' Day";	"The Whites and the Browns"
22-Sep	Wednesday	"The Peep o' Day";	"The Whites and the Browns"
23-Sep	Thursday	"Belphegor"	"A Regular Fix"
25-Sep	Saturday	"Belphegor"	"Jessie Vere"
27-Sep	Monday	"Little Em'ly"	"Turn Him Out"
29-Sep	Wednesday	"The Steeplechase";	"La Somnambula"
30-Sep	Thursday	"The Ticket of Leave Man";	"Turn Him Out"

01-Oct	Friday	"La Somnambula"; choir song; "Ashantee Dance"	
02-Oct	Saturday	"David Garrick"	"La Somnambula"

(Bosman, 1980:322-327)

**List C:**

Charles Fraser's season in the *Cabinet Theatre (Music Hall)*, 1860:

17-Jan	Tuesday	"A Hopeless Passion"	"Five Pound Reward"
21-Jan	Saturday	"A Hopeless Passion"	"Vilikins and his Dinah"
26-Jan	Thursday	"Slasher and Crasher";	"Vilikins and his Dinah"
30-Jan	Monday	"Shirkington"	
02-Feb	Thursday	"Poor Cousin Walter"	
07-Feb	Tuesday	"The Irish Tiger";	"Vilikins and his Dinah"
11-Feb	Saturday	"Doin' the Hansom";	"Done on both Sides"
16-Feb	Thursday	"A Hopeless Passion"	"The Irish Tiger"
22-Feb	Wednesday	"My 'Son' Diana";	"Caught by the Ears"
27-Feb	Monday	"John Jones";	"Caught by the Ears"
05-Mar	Monday	"The Initials";	"The Child of the Regiment"
10-Mar	Saturday	"My Friend from Leatherhead";	"The Child of the Regiment"
21-Mar	Wednesday	"The Fast Coach";	"A Wonderful Woman"
29-Mar	Thursday	"A Wonderful Woman";	"Every Man's House is his Castle"

(Bosman, 1980:126-127)

**List D:**

Sefton Parry's season in the *Theatre Royal*, Harrington Street (August, September & October 1861), as advertised in the Cape Argus of those months:

05-Aug	Monday	"The Lonely Man of the Ocean";	"The Kiss in the Dark"
15-Aug	Thursday	"Our Old House at Home";	"The Middy Ashore"
26-Aug	Monday	"Robinson Crusoe"	
27-Aug	Tuesday	"Robinson Crusoe"	
29-Aug	Thursday	"The Post Boy"	
05-Sep	Thursday	"The Stranger";	"Betsy Barker"
09-Sep	Monday	"Othello";	"Good for Nothing"
12-Sep	Thursday	"Othello";	"The Fox and the Wolf"
16-Sep	Monday	"Robinson Crusoe"	
23-Sep	Monday	"A Duel in the Snow";	"The Spectre Bridegroom"
26-Sep	Thursday	"The Wreck Ashore";	and a farce, title not given
30-Sep	Monday	"The Wreck Ashore";	"Raising the Wind"
03-Oct	Thursday	"The Love-chase";	"An Object of Interest"
07-Oct	Monday	"Guy Mannering";	"A Wilful Murder"
10-Oct	Thursday	"Rose of Ettrick Vale";	"Family Jars"
17-Oct	Thursday	"Alladin";	"Family Jars"
24-Oct	Thursday	"Alladin";	"Your Life's in Danger"
31-Oct	Thursday	"The Dream at Sea";	"The Eton Boy"

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## Newspapers

### *African Journal:*

14 July 1843

5 June 1845

26 February 1846

11 June 1846

22 June 1846

25 June 1846

16 July 1846

3 June 1850

### *Cape Advertiser:*

6 November 1841

17 November 1847

25 March 1848

10 July 1850

24 July 1850

*Cape Argus*

16 September 1857	13 February 1866
24 February 1858	10 March 1866
29 April 1858	13 March 1866
31 July 1858	15 March 1866
21 January 1860	19 March 1867
2 February 1860	21 December 1872
4 February 1860	13 January 1874
1 March 1860	6 March 1875
13 March 1860	2 June 1875
31 May 1860	7 August 1875
7 June 1860	12 October 1875
12 June 1860	6 November 1875
14 July 1860	11 November 1875
2 August 1860	December 1875
21 August 1860	25 December 1875
4 April 1861	17 February 1876
22 June 1861	26 February 1876
13 July 1861	8 April 1876
30 July 1861	13 May 1876
September 1861	3 August 1877
October 1861	3 September 1877
August 1861	3 January 1878
29 October 1861	26 April 1886
14 November 1861	30 April 1886
16 November 1861	1 May 1886
15 March 1862	15 May 1889
19 June 1862	8 December 1891

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*Cape of Good Hope Exchange Gazette*

7 December 1850

8 March 1851

*Excalibur*

10 June 1887

*Het Volksblad*

November 1873

*Mercantile Advertiser*

24 October 1859

*Monitor*

16 June 1855

28 July 1855

15 September 1857

11 April 1860

12 April 1860

*S.A. Illustrated News*

21 June 1885, p. 115

*South African Review*

1 September 1893

*Zuid-Afrikaan*

20 November 1848

10 May 1849

3 December 1849

26 June 1851

12 September 1853

8 April 1875

**Map 1:**

Cape Town as it looks today. The green spots roughly indicate the locations of some of the theatre houses discussed above.

**Code:**

1. *African Theatre*
2. *Bree Street Theatre*
3. *Theatre Royal, Burg Street*
4. National Art Gallery and the vicinity of the *Exhibition Theatre*
5. *Masonic Lodge de Goede Hoop* and the *Good Hope Theatre*
6. *Oddfellows Hall*
7. *Mutual Hall*, corner of Parliament and Grave Streets
8. *Opera House*
9. *Tivoli Theatre*
10. *Haupt's Theatre*, also the *Hope Street Theatre* was situated in Hope Street
11. Vicinity of the *Roeland Street Theatre* and the *Harrington Street Theatre*, also the first *Theatre Royal* was found near this site in Harrington Street
12. The *Nico Malan Theatre Complex*

(Map: *Cape Town and Environs Street Guide*, 5<sup>th</sup> Edition, Map Studio, Cape Town.)