

Oren Parker,
USITT Delegate to PQ'91

Centerline: Impressions of PQ'91

I am sitting in the Green Mountains of Vermont trying to recall my rapidly dimming memories of the whirlwind trip to the 1991 Prague Quadrennial. I must work quickly for the fascinations of Vermont, far removed from theatre, are calling.

I know others will be more profound in their review of PQ'91 so let this be the personal impressions of Oren and Teschie Parker, although we were traveling incognito listed as Wilford and Thelma.

This year the international exhibit of designs for the theatre was held in Prague's new Palace of Culture. The palace, with an all glass facade and elaborate internal framing to provide numerous floors and balconies, was so new that only the "up" escalators were working and all visitor elevators were inoperative. Teschie's aversion to steps led her to a service elevator that was working. For two full days we visited and revisited the many floors of exhibitors.

As we absorbed PQ'91, my wife and I could not resist comparing it to past Quadrennials. The first in 1975 was actually held in 1976 because of troubled times in Prague. Many lasting European friendships were formed that were rekindled every four years. It was a stimulating exchange of ideas that recharged one's creative batteries.

Unfortunately, in this aspect, PQ'91 did not live up to the past. The Quadrennial was an excellent exhibition but not an international event. Gone were the Embassies' receptions and other social events where designers and teachers might meet their international counterparts. An over-sensitive American might draw the conclusion that when East European borders were closed, they needed the Quadrennial for outside contacts. Now, with the borders open, the PQ is of less importance, for their attention and energy are now needed to ensure a lasting free-

dom. Another assumption may be that the movers and shakers of past Quadrennials are no longer in power.

In spite of the lack of official functions there were some individual gatherings. The British designers, for example, were present and managed a small but delightful reception. We were able to see old friends and make some new acquaintances.

As an exhibit, PQ'91 was a fresh and exciting show. After exhausting of the many floors, one could see certain style trends and design metaphors appearing and reappearing. For example, the fragmented colossus statue was a familiar motif. Ideas are like an airborne seed—they travel far and wide.

The most encouraging moment of the exhibit was the inclusion of Israel. So long barred for ideological reasons, Israel had a very contemporary showing of stage designs. The world is improving.

The Canadian exhibit caught our eye. There we saw many familiar stage settings. We have attended the Festival for many years watching them bring together good acting, sensitive directing and fresh design.

Congratulations to the United States for winning the Gold Medal for the Special Theme in PQ'91. The exhibit was a well-executed, functional design with a very comfortable atmosphere. There were chairs to sit and rest weary legs at the

same time watch Peter Sellar explain contemporary Mozart. We complement everyone involved in making the show a winner.

Traditionally neglected, the student exhibit was in a remote part of the parking garage in the basement. After many inquiries and much groping in the semi-darkness, we found the show. The students present were so happy to see anyone that they treated us like royalty. The most interesting encounter was a Japanese girl, a student at Motley, London. We were able to see her project which was on videotape. She was a very advanced student.

Another PQ has come and gone. Teschie and I ask ourselves if it was worth the effort. The answer is yes. Traveling with the American contingency was worth the trip. It was a thrill to be with so many dedicated young people. (At least most were younger than us.) We had a wonderful feeling that the future of theatre in America is in good hands. I hope Leon Brauer and his wife Roberta feel the same. Although, how many times can you answer the same question and still retain your good humor?

A special thanks to all our traveling companions who helped to make our fourth PQ so enjoyable. ■

Oren Parker was one of more than 60 members of USITT who traveled to Czechoslovakia for PQ'91.

Look for an expanded report on the exhibits of PQ'91 in the Fall 1991 issue of TD&T.

