

THE STAGE

"All the Men and Women Merely Players"

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SEEKING PANTOMIME INSPIRATION

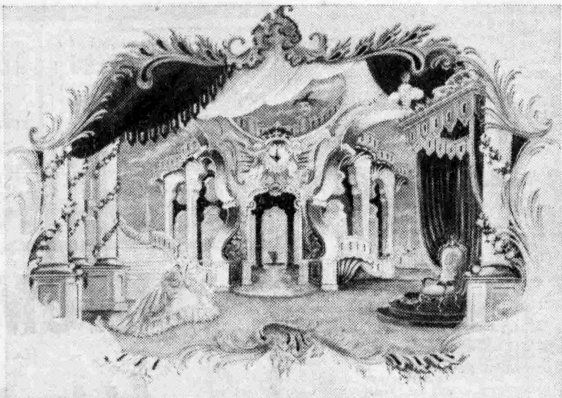
FREDDIE CARPENTER TURNS TO CHILDREN

A MANAGEMENT upholding grand pantomime traditions as loyally and affectionately as the house of Howard and Wyndham finds the search for an ideal pantomime producer far from easy, as they demand someone who can unfold the old stories with all their period charm, while exploiting present-day talent and stage technique.

When they find such a man of the theatre, as they have in Freddie Carpenter, they are tempted to invite him to produce as many as three pantomimes in the same season. This year he is directing "Cinderella" at the King's, Edinburgh, "Queen of Hearts" at the Royal, Glasgow, and "The Sleeping Beauty," which Howard and Wyndham are attempting in association with Stephen Mitchell, at the Blackpool Opera House. The layman might be excused for wondering if one producer can do justice to three productions, which must necessarily open within a week or so of each other.

"I would never agree to produce three entirely new pantomimes in one season," explained Mr. Carpenter. "Cinderella" is the only premiere this year, and on that account it is receiving more attention than the others, which are in the nature of transfers. There has been serious thought on "Cinderella," periodically, since last February, and have been working in close

collaboration with Berkeley Sutcliffe, who has carried out designs for the décor and costumes. In so fanciful a production as a pantomime I consider that the producer and the designer can give each other inspiration, and on that account should be in constant touch with each other throughout the preparatory period.



Berkeley Sutcliffe's design for the Ballroom in the Howard and Wyndham production of "Cinderella," being directed by Freddie Carpenter at the King's, Edinburgh, this year.

"Last year, 'Queen of Hearts' was the new production, which now moves from Edinburgh to Glasgow. It will not require the same degree of concentration this year, though there will be certain alterations on the musical side. Pantomime comedians, like circus clowns, bring much of their own material to be merged into the story. Laughter must be introduced into panto-

mime, if it is to appeal to grown-ups as well as children, and so the comedians must play a large part in any production.

"While fully realising the significance of comedy in pantomime, I think it essential that one of the comedians should be what I call 'the children's friend.' In 'Queen of Hearts' I am lucky enough to have

George Lacy, one of the greatest Dames in Pantomime history, as well as Jack Edge, who has a flair for winning the affections of young folk. He makes a point of playing specially to them. In their eyes he can do no wrong, which makes it rather difficult for him to steal the tarts, in his rôle as the Knave. He cannot break faith with his friends, so he comes down to the footlights with an aside to explain that he is not really a thief, but has to pretend to be one to comply with the demands of the script.

"Pantomime must be devised for the delight of children, and on that account I try and find out which particular pets and toys are in vogue.

Brumas, the young bear at the Zoo, is this year's unrivalled object of child hero-worship, so I have introduced a little bear into "Cinderella." It is dovetailed quite naturally into the Perrault story by being found by Cinderella in the wood on the morning before the ball. She takes it home to cheer her loneliness when the

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Ugly Things leave her behind. "All the serious scenes must be played sincerely in pantomime. The comedians are allowed a great deal of comic licence to get their laughs, but they must not be permitted to turn pantomime into revue. If they crack risqué jokes in the serious scenes the main structure of the show collapses and the book is thrown to the winds. Specialities are an essential part of every pantomime, but, like Brumas, they must be introduced in such a manner as to give the impression of being part of the original story. In the production of "The Sleeping Beauty" I am using a talented contortionist as a snake in the enchanted wood. The spell would be shattered if he walked on to do his act in a loud cheek sportswoman.

"Nothing makes a man or woman happier than seeing children enjoying themselves at the theatre. As such enjoyment is infectious, the whole house purrs with satisfaction if the children are happy. In other words, if the pantomime producer caters for the younger generation, the elders will take care of themselves."