

Research Opportunities in Norway

Yvonne Shafer

Although the focus in theatre research in Norway is the Ibsen material in collections and the production of his plays, theatre scholars can find many other opportunities for research. The theatre features a wide range of plays and the museums are of interest to the general theatre scholar as well as the Ibsen specialist. There are good theatres in many cities such as Stavenger and Furde, but I will focus on the theatres and collections in Oslo and Bergen.

There are many opportunities to see Ibsen's plays, but the most interesting for an English-speaking person is the new international Ibsen festival. Stein Winge, the new Artistic Director of the National Theatre, decided last year that there should be an annual international Ibsen festival in the theatre. With barely six months' time for planning, the 1990 Ibsen Stage Festival Norway opened with Ibsen's two epic dramas, *Brand* and *Peer Gynt*. The idea of such a festival was so popular that it was sold out as soon as tickets were available. Winge invited Ingmar Bergman to bring his "cinematic" *A Doll House* from Sweden, John Barton came to direct a Norwegian cast in his adaptation of *Peer Gynt*, the New Zealand Downstage Company brought a very funny *Hedda Gabler*, the Arc Dance Company brought the ballet *Peer Gynt* from London, the Lyric Theatre, Belfast brought *Ghosts*, the City Theatre of Kalmar, Sweden, brought a puppet show for children and adults called *The Fairytale of Peer Gynt*, and the Art Theatre of Rome brought a controversial four actor/two dancer production of *When We Dead Awaken*. In addition to Barton's *Peer Gynt*, the National Theatre performed a moving, often comic production of *Brand*, and a visually startling, erotically surreal production of *The Lady From the Sea*. Norwegian actress Monna Tandberg performed *Dear*

Dr. Yvonne Shafer is an Associate Professor at the University of Colorado at Boulder. In the last year she presented "Putting the Eros Back in Ibsen" at the MATC Conference, "Moll Cutpurse and Other Elizabethan Eccentrics" in connection with the Colorado Shakespeare Festival, "The Changing Theatre Scene in the GDR" at the ATHE Conference, and "Count Joannes and the Psychology of the American Audience" at the ASTR Conference.

Ibsen, a collage of pieces from his plays and letters. The students of the University of Oslo performed *Little Eyolf* as a chamber play, and Ibsen's poem *Terje Vigen* was performed by Norwegian actors and musicians as a fusion of acting, jazz, and classical music.

Although there were no American productions in the first festival, some American scholars participated in the two-day symposium titled, *Do You Know Peer? Who is Brand?* The first day there were speeches in Norwegian by Vigdis Ystad, Edvard Beyer, and Bjørn Hemmer (who will organize the 1993 International Ibsen Conference in Grimstad and Skien). The second day was all in English and took place on the amphitheatre stage where *Peer Gynt* had been performed. One of the high points was an eloquent talk on *Brand* given by Errol Durbach. I was one of the members in a panel debate with John Barton on *Peer Gynt*. This was a great opportunity to engage in discussions with noted Ibsen scholars such as Asbjørn Aarseth and Inga-Stine Ewbank. Next year, with more time for planning, there will probably be more American involvement.

The festival was a great success, particularly in focusing on new approaches to Ibsen production. Next year Winge anticipates the presentation of Bergman's new *Peer Gynt* with one hundred actors, Milan's Teatro Piccolo production of *The Lady From the Sea*, and such American productions as Marc Lamos' *The Master Builder* or Robert Wilson's *When We Dead Awaken*. Yoko Ono was in Oslo performing and came to the festival because she loves Ibsen. Winge spoke to her about creating a performance piece for a future festival. Another interesting presentation will be a performance of Ibsen-inspired music. Included in the evening of jazz, popular music, and classical music will be the Duke Ellington/Billy Strayhorn *Peer Gynt*. The success of this first year has led Winge to increase the number of performances, so the next festival will last three weeks. He remarked, "At the moment we are cultural heroes--we get flowers and sunshine all around." Because almost all Norwegians are bilingual, Ibsen Stage Festival Norway is a fine opportunity for American theatregoers as a number of the presentations will be in English.

Naturally there were several exhibits in connection with the festival. The Café Celsius had an exhibit of theatre memorabilia, and there were exhibits at the Theatre Museum and the Munch Museum. Oslo bookstores also had Ibsen exhibits. I was able to pick up an 1891 edition of *Mr. Punch's Pocket Ibsen* for about six dollars and a beautiful art nouveau book of *A Doll House* in comic book form using all the dialogue of the play. Many bookstores have first editions of Ibsen's plays with a range of prices depending on the condition of the book. In the same neighborhood as the theatre is the National Gallery which has Munch paintings, Impressionists, and a famous portrait of Ibsen. The collection of genre paintings of Scandinavian life is very impressive.

One of the finest, certainly one of the handsomest, theatre museums in the world is the one in Oslo. It is in the old Christiania City Hall built in 1641. The museum is a series of beautifully restored rooms literally stuffed with

materials which have been collected since 1920. Again, Ibsen material dominates (particularly since the temporary exhibit at this time was scenography for Ibsen plays), but there is also material of general interest. In the entrance area are some wonderful pictures of old Oslo, views of theatres, and machines to make the noise of carriages, etc. An adjacent room is set up for children to try on costumes and put on make-up. The museum is set up to show the various parts of a theatre building. So, there is a nineteenth-century dressing room with wigs, costumes, old-fashioned make-up, and crimping and curling irons. A replica of Bjørn Bjørnson's office with a desk, ledger, portraits, and photographs is interesting, as is a music room with a player piano, a costume for the Valkyrie, and musical instruments. In an elegant hall with Corinthian columns is a performance space. In this room with its portraits of actors and actresses in costume, the royal chair from the nineteenth century theatre in which Ibsen first worked, and a red dress worn by Strindberg's actress wife Harriet Bosse, there is a small raised stage where lectures on theatre are presented. Recently Carla Waal presented a very popular talk on Bosse drawing from material in her new book on the actress. Throughout the museum are theatre models, costumes, costume sketches, and designs, as well as some wonderful paintings for panoramas by Jens Wang and Oliver Neerland. The collection shows the range of Norwegian theatre from early very realistic photos such as Solveig arriving on skis in *Peer Gynt* to a semi-nude *Cataline* and imaginative modern non-realistic productions. Temporary exhibits selected from the permanent collection take place throughout the year. A beautiful 1985 brochure describing and illustrating the holdings by curator Trine Naess is available at the museum, as are posters and postcards.

Trine Naess is also a person who is very helpful to researchers who want to work in the University Library. Here the large collection of material on Scandinavian theatre, mostly in Norwegian, of course, can be difficult to comprehend and use. By writing or calling ahead, it is possible to set up a meeting and use this valuable and extensive collection.

Naturally the Munch Museum is a very exciting place to visit. After Reinhardt commissioned Munch to create designs for the 1906 Berlin production of *Ghosts*, Munch turned more and more to Ibsen, ultimately identifying with Oswald, John Gabriel Borkman, and other characters. During the festival there was a small temporary exhibit of Munch paintings related to Ibsen which filled only one room. However, I was able to buy a copy of *Edvard Munch og Henrik Ibsen*, an illustrated brochure for a much larger 1976 exhibit in Grimstad of the Oslo collection. It has a commentary on the collection and illustrations for several Ibsen plays. It was awesome to handle the originals of these, plus some unidentified sketches in the archives which have never been published. I particularly enjoyed an evocative drawing of Peer Gynt watching Anitra riding away. If a scholar writes ahead, he can examine drawings, use the extensive library and see the Munch correspondence and

diaries, and art of the period. This is an enormous collection with between four and five thousand drawings.

It is easy for a foreigner to get to the Munch Museum or anywhere else in Oslo on foot or on the subway or streetcars, but it is also possible to take a guided tour called *In Ibsen's Footsteps*. This includes a bus tour to several locations in Oslo including his last apartment at number 1 Arbiensgate, just down the hill from the royal palace. It has been purchased by a National Theatre actor who plans to turn it into an Ibsen museum. It is pleasing to walk to this apartment and stand where Eleanora Duse stood as she looked up at the apartment, hoping for a glimpse of her "saviour." Then one can take the walk Ibsen took every afternoon in the last years of his life to the Grand Café. Here the plates and cups are decorated with sketches of Ibsen, and there is a lovely period atmosphere. Lunch at the Grand is included in the tour.

Another part of the Oslo tour is the National Theatre. It is worth a visit independent of seeing a play there. In front of it are the statues of Bjørn Bjørnson and Ibsen, the latter decorated with a laurel wreath during the festival. It is a beautifully decorated, elegant theatre which opened in 1899. The spacious lobbies, reception rooms, the box for the royal family, the red velvet and brocade room for actors, and the art works are impressive. Here are paintings and sculptures of famous performers in their major roles. In addition there are temporary exhibits such as *Hedda Gabler—100 Years*, the Nilsen/Reznicek collection with photographs from the entire world. In the lobby posters, books, and brochures about the art collection and the history of the theatre are available.

Another important facet of the National Theatre is the material in the archives. The theatre curator, Arthur Holøein, was very helpful to me, as were the rest of the staff. With his assistance I am writing a photo essay about the history of Eugene O'Neill in Norway. It should be noted that although Ibsen is the most frequently produced playwright in the theatre, many other playwrights, including Shakespeare, Chekhov, Brecht, Stoppard, Pinter, and Ionesco, are part of the repertory. This year Bill Bushnell of the Los Angeles Theatre Center directed Williams' *Night of the Iguana*. There are normally six productions a year in repertory in both the large proscenium stage theatre and the smaller amphitheatre, so it is possible to see several productions within a couple of weeks.

A trip to the island of Bygdøy is a marvelous experience as there are several museums there including the Norwegian Folk Museum. In addition to the farm houses and stave churches, there are examples of urban buildings, and Ibsen's work room, with his desk and a portrait of Strindberg have been preserved.

Before moving to Bergen, it should be noted that many different plays, operas, ballets, and musicals are produced in the numerous theatres in the city. In September *What's on in Oslo* listed several operas and ballet, plays presented in Norwegian by Arthur Miller and A. R. Gurney, *West Side Story*,

M. Butterfly, and a musical revue *Let's Twist Again*. I enjoyed seeing Liv Ullman in a very funny production of *Private Lives* directed by Jose Quintéro, and *Driving Miss Daisy* with Earle Hyman and Anne Gullestad at the Riksteater.

Bergen is a short flight or a several hour train trip away from Oslo, and both ways are beautiful. Bergen has a notable theatre history, and it was here at the Nationalscene that Ibsen developed his craft, directing plays, designing costumes, and supervising the theatre. Here, as in Oslo, the Theatre Museum and the old theatre building are worth a trip.

The Theatre Institute of Bergen University really is remarkable. Here students from all of Scandinavia and throughout the world have the opportunity to get a thorough grounding in theatre history, dramaturgy, and theory. They have the facilities of the archives and the Theatre Museum, and the opportunity to travel with fellow students and professors to study theatre in Germany and elsewhere. Interested students can write to the Institute of Theatre Research, Villavei 5, Bergen, Norway. A short course in Norwegian is offered in the summer for foreign students, and special assistance is offered to them.

Knut Ove Arntzen showed me through the museum which is not large, but has a wealth of material. There are wonderful machines for making noises of rain, thunder, wind, and carriages. There are several models of theatres including the Norske Theatre where Ibsen worked and which collapsed because of the bombing in 1944. There is a beautifully detailed model proscenium theatre replicating the Casino Theatre in Copenhagen which is larger than the famous working model theatre in Amsterdam. Unfortunately, this has yet to be restored and made to work. This should be done, and a film made of it working as it is a very important piece of theatre history. There was a very interesting set of drawings of stage properties and furniture from earlier periods of theatre. There is quite a lot of material about Bergen folk comedy which was very popular, and which still utilized nineteenth-century settings into the twenties. It was a pleasant surprise to see a photograph of Earle Hyman as Othello in this setting.

Absolutely everything from the theatre is sent over to the archives: photographs, reviews, posters, prompt books, lists of subscribers, correspondence, scene and costume designs, and models of settings. Material, including manuscripts of various types and music used in plays, dates from 1770. Strangely, there is not a great deal of enthusiasm among theatre scholars for Ibsen (perhaps he is too familiar), and much of the material languishes, waiting for someone to examine it. Thus, there is an excellent opportunity for American scholars, and particularly students who wish to study in Norway. There is a great deal of unpublished, and even uncatalogued, material. Tor Bastiansen Trolie, the curator and a professor in the institute graciously showed me the material. It was exciting to see an 1877 program for a production of Ibsen's *The Band of Youth*, and then look up the original reviews

of it. There are several promptbooks which are incredibly detailed--it is wonderful to see Ibsen's own indications of intricate movements for plays which demonstrate how knowledgeable he was about production and visual effects by the 1850s. Again, there is not only Ibsen material here. I saw a prompt book for a production of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*, and photos, posters, and slides of plays from many different periods and countries. There are beautifully detailed drawings of theatre buildings. All in all this is a marvelous collection which deserves more space and greater usage.

There is excellent cooperation between the Institute and the National Scene, the major theatre in the city, as well as with smaller theatres. The Artistic Director of the National Scene, Tom Remlov, comes to give lectures, and the students have tickets to performances and can observe rehearsals. The handsome theatre raised on a small hill in the center of the city was built in 1909. There is a charming lobby with murals depicting typical scenes of Norwegian life. Following a fire in 1983, the theatre was restored to its original beauty. In the building are three theatres which are used for different types of productions. While I was there, one had been entirely converted to a tacky nightclub for a new play. In the large proscenium theatre there was a fine production of *A Doll House* brought in from the theatre in Furde which played in repertory with a sequel to Ibsen's play. There were preparations for a Pavel Kahout play rewritten for children: a delightful front curtain with a circus motif, and on a rooftop terrace, rabbits and other animals to be used in the production. A grand circus wagon was being constructed. The theatre is very well-known for its children's plays, and draws enormous audiences from throughout the country. As in Oslo, there is a beautiful room for the actors and an elegant box for the royal family. There is a large collection of theatre scenery and costumes stored in the building and elsewhere. I was particularly impressed by dozens of front curtains dating from as far back as 1909.

Of course the famous Bergen International Theatre Festival is very prestigious. Headed by Sven Åge Birkeland, this festival draws productions from all over with an emphasis on new approaches to theatre in unusual spaces. Much of it takes place in the three theatres of the National Scene, but there are performances throughout the city. Several years ago Earle Hyman performed speeches from *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* with organ accompaniment in one of the old churches. Last summer there were productions from Sweden, the Soviet Union, and one of the most popular productions was Ingmar Bergman's *A Doll House*. Last year the festival drew 175,000 people, nearly 20% more than the previous year.

Part of the charm of a visit to Norway is the friendliness of the people and the beauty of the landscape and architecture. For theatre scholars there is the additional attraction of a variety of plays to see, including American plays. I was told in Bergen that many American comedies are performed each year because Norwegians understand American humor more than British or French. An excellent way to find out more about Norwegian theatre is to

look at two publications. The Norwegian Theatre Yearbook is called *Pa Norske Scener*. The journal covers all aspects of theatre, including the new and experimental theatres, and is fully illustrated. For information about subscriptions write to De norske theatres forening, Egertorget 0128, Oslo 1, Norway. Next year for the first time the Ibsen Yearbook will be available in English. Bjørn Hemmer, the new editor, is eager to include material about Norwegian theatre and theatres abroad. The next issue will mainly contain papers on Ibsen from the International Ibsen Conference held in Yale in 1989, and the following issue will focus on Ibsen 1850-1873. For information about the journal or the 1993 conference, write to Professor Hemmer at the Universitetet is Oslo, Postboks 1013 Blindern, 0315 Oslo 3.

The Royal Ministry of Norway is very interested in increasing cultural interaction between America and Norway. The new Norwegian Consul to the United States, Odd Wibe, attended high school in Ferndale, California as an exchange student and is very interested in the arts. When I directed *An Enemy of the People* in 1990, he visited the University of Colorado at Boulder as a representative of his government and gave a lecture on Norwegian culture. There is an interest in American theatre and Americans have been honored for their work on Ibsen: Earle Hyman and President of the Ibsen Society of America, Rolf Fjelde, have both been granted the Medal of St. Olaf by the Norwegian king. This is an excellent time for theatre scholars and directors to increase their knowledge of Norwegian theatre and promote interaction between the countries. Any time of the year is lovely, but there is little theatre in the middle of the summer. There are theatre festivals and other special events throughout the year, and information on these are available from M. Wielgolaski, Geelmuyden, Kiese as Vollsavn, 13E, 1324 Lysaker, Norway.

University of Colorado, Boulder

ACT NOW! Subscribe to...

New Theatre Quarterly

CLIVE BARKER, Department of Theatre Studies, University of Warwick
SIMON TRUSSLER, Goldsmiths' College, University of London



"Every college library – every drama department – every student of theatre – every theatre-goer has to subscribe"

Eric Bentley

"It's hard, adult, and uncompromisingly serious... To be frank, it's the first time I've found it absolutely necessary (and stimulating) to read a theatre magazine"

Peter Hall

"...the best theatre magazine I know of in English.."

Edward Bond

"We should thank our lucky stars that NTQ has been around to stimulate the clapped-out brain cells of the English Theatre"

Charles Marowitz

"...unequivocally recommended as a primary source of critical studies on modern drama and the classical repertory."

Choice

For further information

or a free sample copy please contact: Journals Marketing Department, Cambridge University Press, FREEPOST* Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 1BR, England
TEL: (0223) 325806

In US & Canada, write to Cambridge University Press, 40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA

*No stamp necessary if posted in the UK

New Theatre Quarterly is a journal combining theatrical scholarship and practice. **NTQ's** articles are hard hitting. They question prevailing assumptions in the theatre world. **NTQ** follows four independent premises:

- theatre needs a philosophy
- theatre studies need methodology
- criticism needs a language
- theatre history has a contemporary relevance

What does all this mean to you?

NTQ has something for everyone by providing thought-provoking, interesting articles that you will refer to again and again. It's written for you! From theatre specialists to theatre-goers, **NTQ's** news, analysis and debate will prove to be an invaluable source of theatre research.

Subscription Information

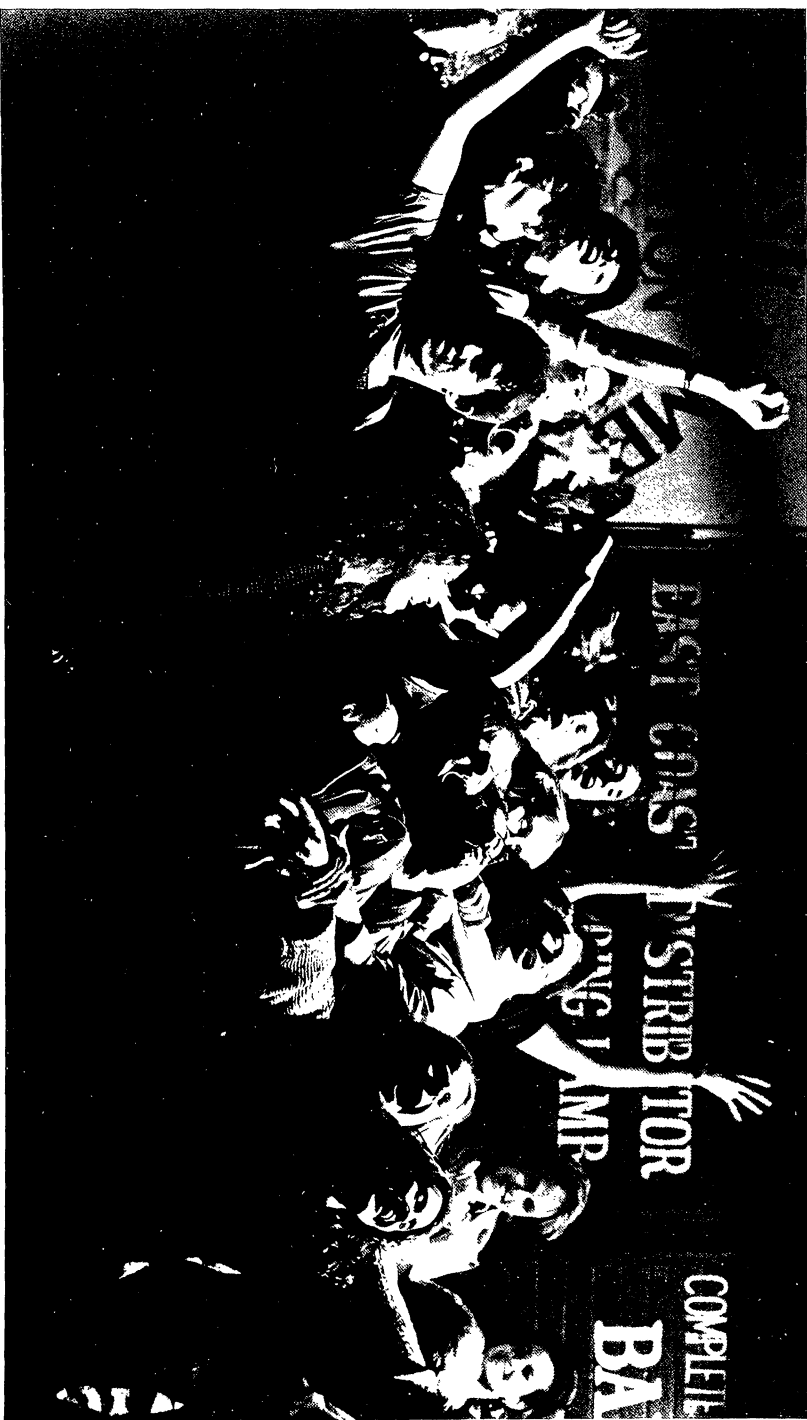
Published in February, May, August and November

Volume 7, 1991: £34 for institutions; £19 for individuals; £9 for single parts; airmail £12 per year extra



**Cambridge
Journals**

Play Reviews



Cast members in a scene from Reza Abdoh's and Mira-Lani Oglesby's *Father was a Peculiar Man*, produced by En Garde Arts, running through July 21st in the meat packing district. Photo by Tom Brazil.