

by the warders, and only allowed a few at a time from the cell into the seating area. But the memory that lingers is of the eminent but disabled theatre critic of the *Sunday Times*, Harold Hobson, unable to tackle the fire escape, being carried down like a babe in arms by one of the warders. ('It was,' says Thelma, 'the best entrance I have ever seen.')

And so, as more and more attics and cellars and upstairs rooms in pubs became theatre spaces, a year-round London fringe at last began to flourish. Back then we called it 'underground' theatre – there was even a guide to it under that name in the very first issue of *Theatre Quarterly* in 1971. That was compiled for us by *Time Out*, which had begun publication in 1968, the year in which so much happened – including the opening of the Open Space. But a lot had also happened in the earlier sixties to prepare the way, and Charles was there from the first, in that attic space in Fitzroy Square.

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Thelma Holt

Marowitz Remembered

CHARLES MAROWITZ and I were introduced to each other in the early 1960s when the actor I was playing opposite in a William Saroyan double-bill at the Duke of York's announced he was about to revive his performance of Hamlet, which he had played for Charles in Peter Brook's *Theatre of Cruelty* season. Charles had seen me in a play at what was the Hampstead Theatre Club where I prophetically played a lion-tamer. Neither of these performances indicated what he saw in me to play Gertrude as a mother merely eight years older than her son, Hamlet.

In his flat, the first sight of Charles was forbidding: he was very tall, unhealthily pale with a lot of black hair, a dead ringer in my eyes for Rasputin. He offered me a cup of coffee and, when he went to fetch it from the kitchen, I hastily scanned his bookshelves, to see if they would tell me something about the man. The books were terrifying as he was

so obviously very well read in terms theatrical from A to Z, and historically from the beginning of time to contemporary theatre. His smile obliterated the Rasputin impression: it was a wolfish grin. So I slipped into thinking I could play Little Red Riding Hood to his Big Bad Wolf.

He asked me what I knew about Artaud. I confessed that I knew nothing except one horrifying story: when he was seriously unwell mentally, in order to aid his recovery the psychiatric staff at Rodez, where Artaud was incarcerated, recognized his magnificent command of the English language, and gave him a children's classic to translate into French. Unfortunately, the book was Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*. Clearly, in my opinion, Rodez should have been closed down.

Charles did invite me to play Gertrude, after what seemed like a very long pause in our conversation. I asked him to tell me about the work that would be involved. It was a truly exciting rehearsal process, unlike anything that I and the rest of the company had learned in drama school. Journey? What journey? There is no journey as you are constantly changing gear (as Gertrude I had some of Polonius's lines, so there was no path that a character trod from the beginning of the play to the end). Charles was ruthless and very funny at the same time. It was clear that we would have more business together and that this production was not a one-off.

We played a small venue in London followed by a foreign tour. For the next eighteen months we talked endlessly about the possibility of building a theatre together. He would direct the plays and I would 'run the joint', as he expressed it. I would, when occasion presented itself, act, which it was understood would be very often. He would adapt more Shakespeare and explore the best of Off-Broadway, which was not coming to the UK very much at that time. A major part of my responsibility was finding the money to make it all work, and sort out how we would run our small theatre, which would in our ideal world hold no more than two hundred seats.

Why he thought I could this I do not know. I had never shown signs of it before, but he

was impressed that I had been a prefect and Captain of the School and he thought the job was very similar. I spent Christmas of that year out of the UK with my family, but received a telegram on Boxing Day saying he had found a venue in Tottenham Court Road. He told me what the lease would be and how much of a deposit was required to secure it. I consulted my father-in-law, who was rather clever about money matters, and he gave me the deposit. As a result the Open Space opened on 8 June 1968 with 128 seats and a play by John Herbert called *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, for which we created an environmental entrance, which was rather unusual at that time.

After that, Charles devised a beautiful *Macbeth*, a *Shrew*, another *Hamlet*, and many new pieces of work that would otherwise never have been seen here. He would ask anyone to do anything if he liked the idea. One of our biggest hits was *Flash Gordon*, in which the eponymous hero saves the world, and America of course. In the course of the action, the President of the USA was to wave him off surrounded by important dignitaries. On the screen appeared an image of the President speaking to Flash and using a combination of four-letter words that I have never heard before or since, and telling him he was going to blow everything up. The President was played by William S. Burroughs, whom we all worshipped at the time.

The Open Space company was a magnificent collection of talent that included Malcolm Storry and David Schofield, writers like David Hare, Howard Brenton, Howard Barker, and Peter Barnes, as well as the gloriously handsome designer, John Napier. Whenever we toured abroad the press all wanted to interview John. The leading actor was Nikolas Simmonds, who was wonderful, but was not as pretty as John. Charles took off occasionally to earn some extra money and I was perfectly happy with this arrangement. I heard no warning bells in this extra-curricular activity, but I know now that the kind of initiative that was the Open Space can only sustain a short and glorious life, like certain exotic plants. Ours although not running out of steam had begun to be predictable.

When the lease at 123 Tottenham Court Road ran out Lord Delfont gave us further temporary accommodation, even though we knew in our hearts that the writing was on the wall. We opened the new Open Space in the Euston Road with our last Shakespeare together, *The Merchant of Venice*, in which I played Portia. In the middle of that production erupted the 'pink bathroom scandal', in which the press noticed that a bathroom suite was listed in the credits for the production, although the items never appeared. They did, however, in Charles's bathroom. It made some of our board members, including my husband, somewhat angry.

Charles was beginning to want a grown-up life, while I was still happy in the kindergarten. He had a new wife-to-be and many of his contemporaries were doing very well in Hollywood and New York. He decided the time had come, metaphorically, to bring down the curtain. It was seen, of course, as a terrible split, although the proof of how wrong that was came in an announcement six weeks later.

I went on what was supposed to be a temporary joy ride to run the Round House where the incumbent had become seriously ill, and they had been left in what I euphemistically told Charles was a 'bit of a mess'. We presented a whole raft of rock concerts to make some money, but the first plays I brought there were *The Strongest Man in the World*, directed by Nikolas Simmonds who had been my first Hamlet, followed by *Hedda Gabler* with Jenny Agutter, directed by Charles. That was the last work we did together.

Do I miss Charles? Of course, I am constantly reminded of him. Many of us who worked together in those days are still firm friends, and we have stories that could not appear in print. Whichever bit of heaven he has gone to, I know he will have found another me. She will pull all her friends together who have gone before. Nigel Hawthorne will probably have been part of the reception committee. So everything will go on in heaven as it did here, although there I am sure one doesn't need the Arts Council. That is fortunate as Charles was not good at dealing in that area: that was my job.