

Old Friends

THE START of a new project inevitably tempers anticipation with sadness and regret. The listing of the areas of theatre that should be chronicled or examined reveals other areas which have declined or disappeared. With excitement, the names of advisory editors and contributors are assembled only to reveal poignantly the gaps in the ranks. In the few years since *Theatre Quarterly* ceased publication, James Arnott and Alan Schneider have made their exits far too soon, and we are deprived of their wisdom, talent, and friendship. Both, in their separate ways, had particular qualities which will make them more than difficult to replace.

The urbane elegance which made James Arnott the best-dressed figure at any conference or other gathering extended to his mental composure and his handling of public affairs. In a profession all too often characterized by personal rivalry and jealousy he embodied a broad-minded tolerance and a generosity of time and energy based on a commitment to the co-operative advance and well-being of the theatre and of scholarship.

The skilful diplomacy, mature judgement, and wide experience gained and exercised through his membership of the Arts Council, the Theatres Trust, the UK National Commission for Unesco, and his chairmanship of the Drama Committee of the Scottish Arts Council, are qualities at a premium in these difficult times, and the British theatre, and especially the Scottish theatre, suffers in being deprived of them. His presidency of the International Federation for Theatre Research and his editorship of *Theatre Research* made him an ideal person to represent the British theatre abroad and gave him access to a wide range of people on which he made it always a pleasure and a treasure for friends and colleagues to draw.

The public achievements of Alan Schneider – in particular his long and successful association with the plays of Beckett and Albee – have been well recorded and will ensure him a place in theatre history. The man himself was equally impressive. I first met him at the beginning of my career in the theatre, when I was stage managing at the Arts Theatre and he came to direct Horton Foote's *The Trip to Bountiful*. Although I was not working on his production, he allowed me to sit-in on rehearsals and I imagine I was among the first of the many aspirant directors to whom he accorded this privilege. He was never dogmatic, and he glossed over his intellectual and technical proficiency with wry humour.

About three years later, I bumped into him in St Martin's Lane, at a time when I had gone back to stage managing in television. In answer to his question about my work I tried to put on an air more sophisticated and world-weary than I knew how to carry off. 'So, you gave up, eh?' he said, and walked on. The reproach stung, but had a salutary effect. It was over twenty years before I personally met him again, although in the years before I joined the editorial team of *Theatre Quarterly* he contributed significantly to its work. When we finally met up in Warsaw in 1981 it seemed only a matter of weeks since we had last met and talked. The same openness was matched by the same wry humour.

It is this quality of accessibility that united James Arnott and Alan Schneider. In the division of the world into those who give and those who take they both ranked high among the givers: nor did they exact tribute in any form from those who sought to tap their knowledge and experience. Their younger colleagues and students will remember them long and I hope show the same generosity of spirit to those who follow after them.

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