

**SBW Foundation Performing Arts Collection**  
***The Mermaid Theatre Review 1959***  
**and original letters of famous British actors**

This bound volume of 109 pages with supplementary unnumbered advertising pages was originally acquired by the Dennis Wolanski Library of the Performing Arts, established in 1973 at the same time as the opening of the Sydney Opera House. The publication was apparently donated by "W.A. Judges" on the 18<sup>th</sup> April, 1980, and accessioned into the Dennis Wolanski Library at Q/792.09421/QMER/1. When the Dennis Wolanski Library was dispersed following its closure in 1997, this copy of *The Mermaid Theatre Review* for 1959 was acquired by the SBW Foundation which now owns the volume and the remarkable collection of original letters contained within it.

The book is a commemorative publication to mark the occasion of the opening of The Mermaid Theatre at Puddle Dock by the Thames in London. The Mermaid Theatre began in Duff House at St. John's Wood in 1951. Cyril Walter Hodges, a well-known illustrator and the author of one of the best books published on the Elizabethan playhouses, and Michael Stringer, a brilliant young British film-art director, were the designers of the Mermaid Theatre since 1951. Bernard James Miles, English character actor, writer and director, was the leading spirit in the conception and carrying out of the Memorial project, and Josephine Wilson, Mrs Bernard Miles, helped to build Bernard's dream. The first Mermaid Theatre was built at the Nettlefield Film Studios and erected by stage carpenter Roy Todds. Between May and August 1953, the Mermaid Company played thirteen weeks in the very heart of the City of London following the conversion of the Royal Exchange, and 70,000 people paid to see the four productions.

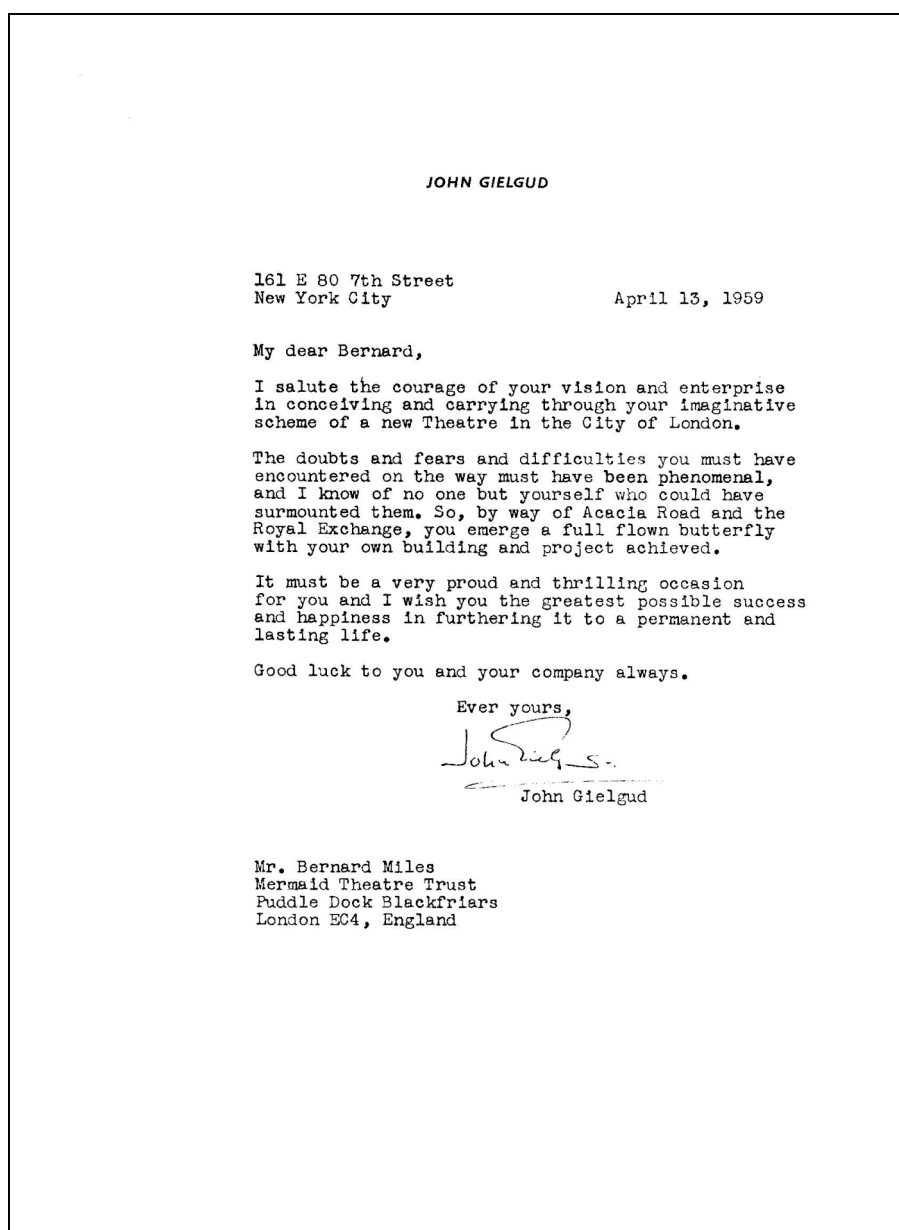
Not content with the successful conversion of the Royal Exchange, Bernard Miles proceeded to take a stage further his idea that the City of London should have its own theatre. With the help of the City Corporation and their Planning Officer, a decision was made that an old, derelict, bombed warehouse in Puddle Dock would be the theatre's new home. The architect was Elidir I. W. Davies, F.R.I.B.A., who contributed an article entitled "Take One Bombed Warehouse and Make a Theatre of It.", *The Mermaid Theatre Review 1959*, pp. 16-17]. Another article by S.W. Marshall-Andrew, Chairman on the main contractors, consists of an illustrated story telling how the Mermaid was built from the 21<sup>st</sup> October 1957 when the contractors first commenced on the site to the construction of the stage set for the inaugural production of "Lock Up Your Daughters"

The new Mermaid Theatre erected at Puddle Dock, which stands almost on the site of Shakespeare's old Blackfriars Playhouse, and within full view of the Globe, opened on the 28<sup>th</sup> May, 1959 with a production of "Lock Up Your Daughters", a musical based on an 18<sup>th</sup> century comedy, "Rape Upon Rape", by Henry Fielding and adapted by Bernard Miles. The musical was directed by Peter Coe, choreographed by Gilbert Vernon, the lyrics were written by Lionel Bart, and the music by Laurie Johnson. This was the first production at the Mermaid Theatre in London and it ran for 328 performances. A revival, directed by Richard Wadsworth and choreographed by Denys Palmer, opened at the Mermaid Theatre on 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1962 and ran for 664 performances.

If any Friends of the SBW Foundation have a copy of the programme for either of these productions which they are willing to donate to the SBW Foundation Performing Arts Collection, we would be most grateful.

## Original Letters to Bernard Miles (1907 – 1991)

Inserted loose within *The Mermaid Theatre Review* of 1959 is a collection of ten original manuscript and typescript letters addressed by prominent British actors to Bernard Miles, Mermaid Theatre Trust, Puddle Dock, Blackfriars, conveying their congratulations on the opening of the Mermaid Theatre. The letters are from Teddy Knox, John Osborne, John Gielgud, Peter Sellers, Tyrone Guthrie, Noël Coward, Doris and Marty Melcher [Doris Day], Diana Dors, Vivien Leigh and Burl Ives. Reproduced below is a copy of one of the letters from John Gielgud to Bernard Miles.



Copy of an original typescript letter, dated 13 April 1959, from Sir John Gielgud conveying congratulations to Bernard Miles on the announcement of the proposed opening of the Mermaid Theatre at Puddle Dock, London, on the 28<sup>th</sup> May 1959.

**Dr Peter Orlovich**  
**Director**  
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