



## SYDNEY'S FUTURE OPERA HOUSE

THE model of the new opera house has given the people of Sydney a much better idea of the building than photos did. These tended to give a side view of the structure which made the unusual roof design seem wayward and capricious. The model, however, makes clear the pattern of the roof, and this, together with some of Joem Utzon's explanations, allows one to follow the logic of the architect's conception, even if the result takes a little getting used to. First the model emphasises the fact that there are two large halls lying beside each other. The larger is to seat between 3000 and 3500 and the smaller 1200. Each hall has its own sail-like vaulted roofs, which are attached to the rest of the building as clusters of shells cling to a rock. From the front they look a little like the tall huts of certain primitive fishermen and the lattice-like effect used on the front increases this feeling of primitive shapes. From other angles the roof shows the curve of a petal or the billowing effect of sails and throughout there is a feeling of movement. Because there is no clear proportional relationship between the two roof sections one looks for a point of repose, or for some feeling of symmetry. However, there is none, and the architect says he chose the unusual roof design because he felt the site demanded a sculptured effect. In an interview in the *Sydney Morning Herald* he said, "In sculpture you work with shadow and new lines, new silhouettes. That is how it will be at Benelong Point. . . I looked at flowers and insects, at organic forms. I wanted something that was growing out." The roof has been certified as structurally sound and negotiations are in hand for a famous English firm to supervise this part of the work. It will be of concrete construction several inches thick, and the exterior will be covered with almost-white ceramic tiles.

Other facilities inside the building will include separate rehearsal rooms for each of the larger halls; a broadcasting centre for radio and TV; a restaurant

to seat 250; lounges, bars, etc., and two meeting rooms, one to seat 100, the other 200, for the use of groups with cultural interests. The whole project began less than three years ago. Twenty-two possible sites in the city were inspected and Benelong Point, where the city tram sheds now stand, was chosen as being outstanding. In all, 933 architects entered the competition, and 223 designs were eventually submitted from 30 different countries. The competition judges were the Professors of Architecture at Cambridge and Sydney Universities, the American architect Saarinen, and the New South Wales Government Architect. The judges stated that they believed the winning design was capable of becoming one of the great buildings of the world, and that its controversial sail-like roofs would relate as naturally as sails themselves to the harbour. Second place in the competition was won by a group of architects from Philadelphia, U.S.A., and the third by an English partnership, Boissevain and Osmand. Both these designs have less unusual exteriors than the Danish one.

The model was first put on display on the day of the special public meeting to launch the appeal for funds. It sat in a glass case in the darkened foyer of the Town Hall, illuminated by spots on the walls. Around it were a collection of large black and white drawings which again emphasised the structure's size. The tallest roof vault is expected to be as high as the deck on Sydney Harbour Bridge.

It now remained to find the money. In the Town Hall TV cameras projected over the balconies towards the stage, where amidst banks of greenery hung the Australian and Danish flags. An organ recital which preceded the meeting ended with another tribute to the Danes, a work by Buxtehude. The meeting was inevitably an anti-climax after looking at the model in the foyer but amongst the routine matters there were a few exciting moments. There was the great roar of applause when the audience caught sight of the tall figure of Utzon and his shorter partner,

Andersson, and close attention was given him when later Utzon rose to speak. Simply and clearly and in very few words he said how welcome he felt in Sydney, and how the tremendous number of letters he had received since the competition result was announced had convinced him of the real need for this opera house.

"Europeans will be quite envious of you if you get it built," he said. "We, as well as many other architects, have worked hard, so now it's over to you—in the easy way—you just pay!"

There was the spontaneous outburst when Sir Eugene Goossens's name was mentioned by the Chairman of the ABC, Sir Richard Boyer, as Goossens had worked hard for the opera house for many years. There were no massed choirs to sing "Advance Australia Fair," but spectacle of a kind was provided by the appearance of several internationally known musicians and an actor. There was Elaine Shaffer (flute), Ruggiero Ricci (violin), the soprano Joan Hammond, and an actor read the prologue to *Henry V*. The Premier of



JOEM UTZON

New South Wales, Mr Cahill, summed up the character of the building and the determination of the meeting to find the money.

"The average working family will be able to go there," he said. "There will be nothing savouring even remotely of class-conscious barriers. . . . Come what may we are going ahead. This building can and will be provided free of debt. Australians have a tradition of generosity, and all money donated to the appeal can be deducted from your income tax."

Well over £200,000 was promised during the afternoon, and the task of raising money other than by direct giving was handed over to the special committee which had just been elected. Meanwhile the architects will spend a few weeks more in discussion before they fly home to start work on the detailed drawings, which will be

ready in 18 months. The City Council has promised to remove its tram sheds and the foundation stone will be laid early in 1959. When building starts the architects have said they will probably live in Sydney for a while, and Utzon has given Christmas Eve, 1960, as a possible opening date, wisely qualifying this by saying it depended on the speed of Australian workers. If they share the enthusiasm of other citizens then there is every possibility that the building will be erected in record time.

Currently, Sydney is notable for one kind of free entertainment—one which is attracting large audiences to several of the large city stores who keep television sets switched on in their shop windows during the evenings, including the weekends. Any night in Elizabeth Street you will find a crowd of people blocking the pavement and looking at six or more television screens, the sound being carried outside by a loudspeaker. During their visit to New Zealand last year the Robert Masters Quartet described a similar scene in Baghdad, but at the time such happenings seemed unlikely in our own hemisphere. The Sydney crowds are not just the homeless; all ages tend to stop for a minute and then find it has become fifteen. Television is everywhere. Hotel lounges are dark cells for viewing, in many bars patrons have a severe twist whichever way the TV screen is set, and it can follow you to restaurants and cafés. The most popular channels are the Commercials. The ABC programmes at present have the smallest transmission range, a disadvantage which will soon be overcome when their new transmission mast is completed. Television is a live topic and a mobile TV van has only to appear in the streets for a crowd to gather and stare.

—J. M. Thomson