

# PRODUCT NEWS

The ABTT memory control symposium held in January provided the rare opportunity for an informative and informal get together of manufacturers and lighting men at Warwick University. For the benefit of those unable to be present we have asked Adrian Dightam, chief lighting technician, London Contemporary Dance Theatre, to review the occasion.

Our extended products feature in this issue also includes John Leonard reporting on some significant developments of sound controls in France.

## Memoria 80

Where is it all going to go next. I keep saying to myself what more can they put on to a control board that is going to make the way it works any better. Well the answer is a lot more. Don't ask me what – but while the competition is as hot as it is at the moment manufacturers are going to have to keep updating the facilities of their respective controls just to keep in business. We all had in our theatre's SP's and Three-sets and LC's and CD's that lasted for ten to fifteen years or more. The memory board that I bought for LCDT three years ago is already obsolete and I'm talking here about a relatively up-to-date desk that was reliable. But I find myself saying that we must get a new control board soon, very soon, because I need the 'profile fade' and I need the 'dual floppy disc' and I need the . . . ! When of course all I need is the memory facility of circuits and levels that can be assigned speedily to a few masters, two hands and a lively brain.

Too late now anyway. The race is on. The operators have had their appetites whetted and they want more facilities and colour VDU's and this and that; and of course it is fun, all these buttons and lights, and you can do a lot of tricks, but it's funny how routine it all becomes. Working a fast show on a manual board was real fun and it made you work, really work. Now it's all one finger – or for those who like to think that they are working it manually a few levers to push. Hands up those board operators who come down at the end of a show with a real sense of having contributed – and hands up those who at the close of a show pat the memory desk on its mimic board, say well done, goodnight – and cover it up with its own tailored bright red dust sheet. Don't get me wrong – I'm for memory boards very much. But after Memoria 80 – it really did strike me that even ultimate control of the lighting soon will be under a CPU rather than a MAN. 'No', I hear the shout go up, 'there will always be an operator.' WANNA BET?

Memoria 80 was the extremely bright and innovative idea of Barry Griffiths and Mike Reese of the Midlands Branch of the ABTT. That fine organisation for us technicians that I and many of its members don't support enough. Anyway Barry and Mike decided that instead of having a routine meeting they would do something

that would benefit us all. So being themselves in the process of getting their own control desk, but still waiting, they thought it would be a very good idea if they invited all the suppliers of memory boards in this country to come along to Warwick and display their wares. And it seems most manufacturers thought so too. Thorns absence was a disappointment however, because most of us would like to have seen representative models of all the controls on the market. I was particularly sorry they were not around as I bought one of their fine controls for LCDT a few years ago – and I like Thorns.

Anyway, on entering the theatre, the stage was a sight indeed. I didn't know that so many controls now had VDUs, there must have been a dozen of them. Indicators galore were flashing – and my fingertips started to get that itchy feeling which has resulted in many a button being pushed with no idea of what I'm doing. All the controls were arranged in a large semi-circle around the stage. There were two rules to be observed; only one desk could be displayed and no dimmers were allowed. It was after all unnecessary to have lights going up and down to see how a control works.

The time-table ran thus: From about mid-day to 2 p.m. the stage was opened for everyone to have a look and talk to the reps, or have a chat at the bar. The stage was packed at this time with 250 people moving around comparing one desk with another without the distraction of someone selling a G clamp or the new profile bomb tank with non-stick shutters. It was a unique exhibition in that it was devoted entirely to memory control desks. Then at 2 p.m. came the discussions and demonstrations proper.

Fred Bentham opened the show with a short speech. I like Fred. He says things that do put your feet firmly on the ground. His wealth of experience and being perhaps the father of British Theatre Lighting gives him the right to say some things that I respect but don't entirely agree with – but he did set me on my opening train of thought. I have not the space here to quote him, but *ABTT News*, January 1980, has some of his speech in and I'm sure the next edition of *ABTT Sightline* will quote him in more detail. One thing for sure, Fred's eloquence is not shared by many of his contemporaries. Now I know it's not easy

talking for ten minutes about anything to an audience and particularly difficult if it is the workings of a memory board which you must put into a ten-minute nutshell. But if sales of memory boards depended that day on the salesmen's performance instead of the silent flashing of indicators on the controls themselves, then I'm afraid not many boards would have been sold. Too much time was spent telling us about facilities on desks that they all had in common, e.g. that they all had memories, and timers, etc., rather than a hard-hitting concise 10 minute demonstration on the specialities of their particular control. Statelight did very well indeed with illustrations and a *News at Ten* style presentation. Berkey set up TV cameras and monitors and looked very impressive and then they proceeded to blow it with a garbled monologue which mostly concentrated on past failures (I thought only the British undersold their products like this). The Swedes were good, one of them marching about with his remote control doing the most complex lighting changes with the same ease as changing channels on your TV. The achievements of all the manufacturers of lighting control boards in recent years have been quite remarkable and this is something they can be proud of.

Here is a brief rundown of the exhibits at MEMORIA 80 with a few comments on items of special interest rather than a full brief. This is better gained from the dealer.

## BERKEY COLORTAN

Watch out English lighting manufacturers. Here's a firm with a lot of potential and a lot of guts behind it. They are going to make big inroads in British Theatre in the next couple of years. I went to see them in Burbank, California last Xmas and they have a good setup with people that have a type of energy that I haven't seen in England for a long time (except possibly their best friend in England, Tim Burnham). They were showing the very able Berkey Channel track. They will be very happy to supply full details on request. I rang Alistair Coubrough from Norwich Theatre Royal who was full of approval for it. He said it was exceptionally reliable. He was very impressed by the speed of operation, he said he can punch in circuits and levels at the same speed as the designer calls them, with no sweat at all. He also said they all appreciated the very straightforward operation. However he wished it had a little more manual facilities for those unpredictable Sunday concerts.

## CCT and MEMOLIGHT

A new improved version of this Israeli made control was shown. I really am trying to like this board – but it is still a little complicated. The new program however has given it more possibilities with less button-pushing and it is beginning to sell.

## THEATRE PROJECTS and the KLIEGL PERFORMER

Nothing too special about this. It is rather like a small office computer in looks. It has