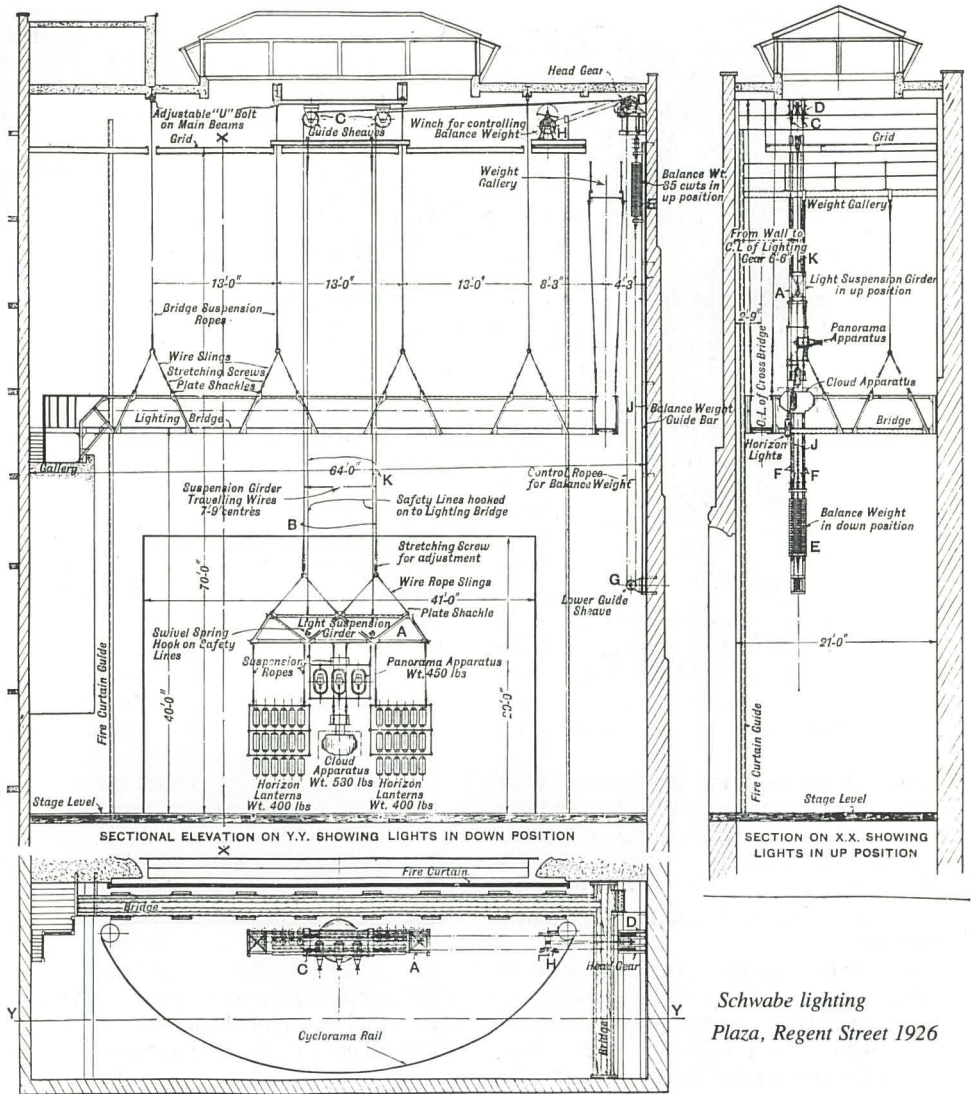


with a Bordoni transformer as the dimmers. For some reason the regulator was not German but appeared to me to have been made by Mickelwright of Alperton, a small firm which made switchboards for Strand's various oppositions. The mechanical facilities were very limited compared to the genuine German article. The reader must bear in mind that when the Glyndebourne opera house was completed and opened for its first season at the end of May 1932 it was much smaller both backstage and out-front than what we have come to know over the years; and one cannot think of it, even as it is today, with a pros. opening of under 30-ft as anything but on the small side for opera. How Christie could ever have conceived that Wagner was a practical proposition for 1932 can only be explained in terms of absolute faith in the powers of German stage lighting. Get that right and all things were possible!

A photograph of the Glyndebourne backstage in The Times Weekly Edition taken shortly before the place opened shows everything German with the exception of the compartment battens which look like Strand B-type. L.G. Applebee, manager of the Theatre Lighting Dept. for so long, must have had a go at selling Christie something — it would be quite unlike him not to. In any case, the famous Schwabe double-tier cloud machine ex-Plaza cinema Regent Street turned up in 'my' showroom for overhaul by our effects expert Frank Weston. I was not told, but someone must have arranged it. All of a sudden, it was hauled up on the outside crane to hang among the large crystal chandeliers for some weeks while Frank tinkered with it or got his assistant Eddie Biddle to do things to it. None of John Christie's visits coincided with its stay there — perhaps the notion of a Teutonic breakdown was distasteful.

There were diverter mirrors to the ten lenses in the bottom tier driven via axles & bevel gearing from one motor and eight in the top tier driven from another motor in the same manner. A third motor rotated the whole machine. Each lens was a high quality objective and plus its individual cloud slide and condenser constituted a projector, only the 3-kW lamp being common to all. It was an elaborate and very expensive machine, proper in the context of the great German stages but absurd in the cramped confines of the Plaza cinema. Who on earth managed to persuade them that this, complete with horizon lanterns etc, was appropriate to a cinema stage only 21-ft. deep is not known. The GEC were the Schwabe agents in the twenties, so perhaps it was H. Lester Groom the Heidelberg-scarred manager of their stage lighting department.

The object of the tier motors was to ride the clouds over each other for greater effect but this stuff had been badly damaged and was stripped off. It is important to put the Glyndebourne lighting in its proper context. Listening to John Christie at the time and long afterwards, one might imagine that the rest of the U.K. merely slopped light all over the place using just battens and floats.



Schwabe lighting
Plaza, Regent Street 1926

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