



Schwaabe Horizon Flood

It is true that theatres had only the basics and that almost everything important had to be hired for a show, but it could be and was. Not even the Schwaabe installation was unique, Basil Dean had been using such equipment at the St. Martin's in 1923 and in 1924 for his superbly lit *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at Drury Lane which I can still conjure up in my mind's eye. There was Terence Gray's Cambridge Festival theatre of the twenties and *White Horse Inn* at the London Coliseum in 1931 had a complete cyc and its Schwaabe lighting. All C.B. Cochran's shows were properly lit and staged. Even the tiny Westminster theatre (1931) had a permanent cyc with an

appropriate Strand installation which Molly McArthur was able to use with remarkable effect in its opening years.

Above all, exactly one month before Glynedebourne opened for the first time the Royal Opera House under Beecham inaugurated its entirely new stage lighting installation with brand new productions of Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Wagner's *Ring*. It is curious that even I, who was up there on the cyc end of the control and brought face to face with the practical side of staging opera for the first time, had forgotten until this point of the article the historic relationship of the two installations. There at Covent Garden was for the first time the Hasait cloth cyc from grid to floor encompassing the main stage with the associated pros. bridge and perch structure. Having described it very fully a couple of years ago\*\* it must suffice here to say that no part of it came from Germany, it and its unique (literally) remote control was by Strand Electric.

No credit for any part of that installation can be claimed by myself but whereas in time I was to 'do' Covent Garden, those other gardens down in Ringmer have kept themselves clear of Benthamism. Even when in 1964 they had at last to pension off the Bordoni, unlike Covent Garden who – coincidentally – did the same with their 1934 control that year, they resisted any control of mine. Instead of a system C/AE

\*\* Famous Strand jobs of the past: Tabs, Vol 39, No 1

desk they insisted that Strand make a control desk to the design of their Lighting Manager – a man called Francis Reid!\*\*\*

Looking back in this Golden Jubilee year to those strange but not brief encounters of night on fifty-two years ago, one cannot help wondering what the story would have been if Hill, Norman & Beard had been my chosen organ builder. Would my first Light Console have been in Glynedebourne – and if so would the espousal to electro-pneumatics have blighted its career elsewhere. As it was, John Christie never had a good word to say for it. I have a clear memory of an Illuminating Engineering Society visit there in which the members formed a square on the upper lawn while an impromptu tennis match of words went on between he and I with Applebee as umpire – great fun. However, when Carl Ebert in 1948 sat down at the console in the London Palladium he declared after a solemn pause: – "All my life I have dreamed of something like this." And shortly after we installed one for him with all the other stage lighting equipment in his opera house in Ankara. Back at Glynedebourne – I have recalled one achievement to make a worthy conclusion to this strange tale. The year was 1976, I think: that year I was among those who, granted official dispensation because of the intense heat, removed our dinner-jackets and enjoyed the opera in our shirt sleeves!

\*\*\* That control and the ones that preceded it and succeeded it were described by Francis Reid in Tabs Vol 35, No 2 1977 page 3 et seq

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