

changing of plugs used a lot of time before you could even start to hang the equipment. In those days it was impossible to visualise the uniformity of equipment and control which we take for granted today."

With the arrival of the Grid so well exemplified by Battersea Power Station there was a change over to AC and the supply voltage tended towards a standard. It has to be put that way because it took many years and the chief engineers of the various area supply authorities still could exercise their own preference as to voltage. What the change-over did mean was that the old switchboards were replaced by dead front ones with a new electrical installation to match. Such boards were either Grand Masters or less expensive variants of the same idea. All, except the Covent Garden and Glyndebourne ones of 1934, were direct-operated and cumbersome for what they did so they *had* to be backstage in theatres. Curiously many of the boards they replaced had been remote control – the smelly liquid dimmers were housed in a room somewhere off or under the stage and a tracker wire linkage used. The obsession with battens as the backbone of any installation still tied up a large part of the house-board so that in spite of the increase in its number of control-ways, this plus the greater use of spots on productions meant that not only did the need for portables remain but their numbers increased also. Remote control began to be accepted just after the war.

But it was not until well into the 1960s that a standard stage layout for the electrical installation came into being. This had long been the aim of some of us, both inside and outside Strand Electric, but it needed an Association of British Theatre Technicians to provide the ambience and status. The ABTT was launched in March 1961 and Joe Davis was the first elected chairman of their stage lighting committee, and layout went early on the agenda. *Tabs* first published that layout in December 1965 and states that the first installation went into the Apollo theatre, but I have been unable to track down the date. However, late in 1961 Joe resigned from that ABTT committee and devoted himself to the professional aspects represented by his SPTLD: that and Theatre Sound & Lighting Ltd. of which he was a founder and director tended to take any time he could spare from the actual process of lighting shows.

It had been in 1935 that he joined H.M. Tennent and "except for a season with the R.A.F." had "been in a constant state of production" ever since and even in the war "season" managed to get himself mixed up in shows, notably John Gielgud's *Blithe Spirit* and *Hamlet* tour of the Far East. Among other *Hamlets*, he did the Peter Brook one in Moscow in 1956. His work for Tennent's in the decade just after the war meant that not only did he light the majority of the important West End productions which originated in this country, such as *Ring Round the Moon*, *The Lady's Not for Burning*, *Under Milk Wood* and *Irma la Douce*; but he was responsible for adapting



Joe Davis, left, during fit-up for *Gay Hussar* at the *Palace Manchester* in 1933.

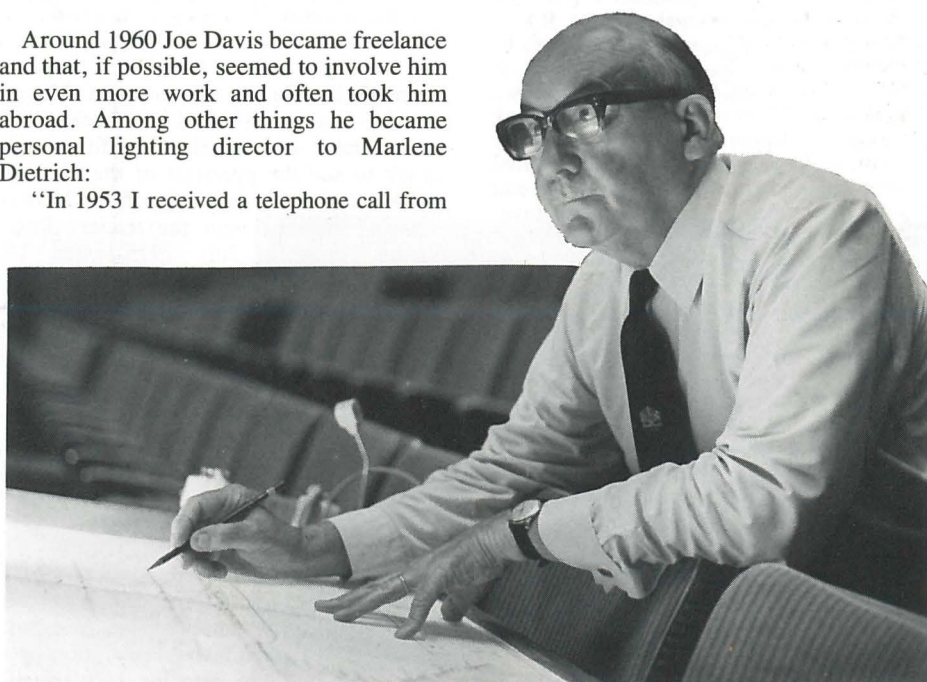
the lighting of Broadway shows over here to cope with our decidedly different equipment and techniques. Examples were *A Streetcar Named Desire*, *Death of a Salesman*, *Oklahoma* and *West Side Story*. I was able to see this technique of his in action to perfection in the case of *My Fair Lady* at Drury Lane in 1958, as I was on standby at the lighting rehearsals. It was a case of transposition in terms of a quite different set of instruments – among them that most eccentric of switchboards, the Light Console!

Around 1960 Joe Davis became freelance and that, if possible, seemed to involve him in even more work and often took him abroad. Among other things he became personal lighting director to Marlene Dietrich:

"In 1953 I received a telephone call from

Noel Coward at the *Cafe du Paris*. He explained that Marlene Dietrich was to appear in a season there, and the lighting was practically non-existent. I was asked – or perhaps summoned would be a more appropriate term – to go and see if I could help with her lighting problems.

"With great trepidation I went along and was introduced to her. I had already been warned that she was her own expert on sound, lighting and music and that she demanded the highest possible standards.



Joe Davis lighting from the stalls, anytime and anywhere in 1980.