

Dallas makes front page news again. This time it's the cover of CUE featuring Vari-Lite the secret and exclusive product of that famous city. On page 23 Francis Reid takes the covers off this intriguing lantern now made available in Europe through Samuelson Communications.

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Cue is an independent magazine published bi-monthly by Twynam Publishing Ltd.

Available on subscription  
UK £10.50 per annum (6 issues)  
Europe and Overseas £13.00

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# CUE

## Technical Theatre Review 33

January/February 1985    £1.75

## WATER MUSIC

*For people who find it difficult to get to sleep when away from their own bed, a Wellington motel has the answer: White Noise. Guests at the Sharella can tune in to the sound of surf lapping on the shore . . . there are also plans to pipe in other sleep-inducing noises, such as the sound of rain and the sound of a waterfall.*

Alas there is nothing particularly sleep inducing about the sounds currently being piped into our theatres. We do not refer to the acousticians and their calculations: like most theatrical pundits we flourish on philosophy but are floored by a single algebraic equation. Neither do we take issue with the concept of an "electronic sound" whose timbres and balances include a technological element appropriate to our age.

Our concern is that the sounds frequently do not appear to be coming from the actors. Beyond perhaps a dozen rows from the front, musicals seem like mime. There is technology to overcome this in the form of progressive delay in the signal fed to the speakers serving the remoter seats. But this is futile when the volume is raised towards the threshold of pain and sometimes even beyond. At this level the sound can only exist separately from the actors who originate it. But, as David Collison so succinctly pointed out a decade or so ago (when most performances were relatively quiet by today's standards) — *one way of retaining the attention of an audience is to provide a level of sound it cannot ignore.*

The current obsession with flashing lights is self-defeating: after a relatively short time the lights no longer seem to be flashing. Sound is not dissimilar: it is often so loud that it is difficult to hear.

We therefore earnestly hope that, if we find ourselves with a reservation to slumber in an audio motel, there is a volume control which goes not just below the threshold of audibility but down to that ultimate in repose: off.

Incidentally, the diarist of the New Zealand Sunday Times, to whom we are grateful for the report which occasioned these musings, expressed his own concern . . . *Someone might get confused and think their waterbed had sprung a leak.*