



The Siemens B40 control desk at the Royal Opera House.

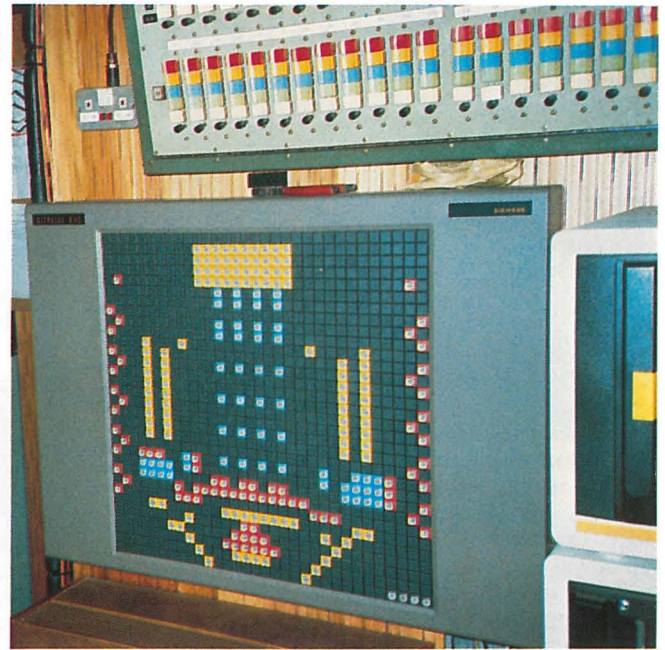
PERIPHERALS

Like all other similar big systems, additional control desks, hand held controls and links to other items of computer controlled stage machinery are offered as extras. The ROH has decided to work without most of these peripherals for the present. Unlike many other big houses, Covent Garden still finds it efficient to work in the traditional way with Lighting Designer and chief operator at the production desk in the stalls calling all changes to the console over intercom. Thus they do not need the portable extension available for the B40, although duplicate VDUs are provided on the production desk which show channels in use and the cue procession exactly as seen in the cabin. Nor have the ROH spent money on a hand rigger control because the big crews available can always achieve efficient results using intercom alone. Already included in the standard B40 are controls and memory storage for colour change and lantern pan, tilt and focus but provision for the remote control lanterns and data link wiring will come later. An interesting option offered with the B40 is the ability to create trial lighting plots on a suitable word processor in an office away from the board itself. This could be done as part of the Lighting Designer's homework and save both time and risk of error if circumstances were favourable, but again, to save money and to minimise disturbance to traditional working routines, the ROH has deferred purchase of this to the future. The only extra that seems to be under consideration for early purchase is a second mimic panel to be installed backstage to speed up checking after refocussing. At present this is done

using a fader panel known as the Z-Wing, a relic from the Strand C-AE control installed in 1964.

INSTALLATION

Anyone who has seen the tiny lighting control room created in an old ventilation shaft at the rear of the grand tier will doubt that the new board could be fitted into this confined space. In fact, as the pictures show, it fits very well with ample room for the two operators. The conversion was done by the ROH staff during a one week shut down last August. The old board was removed (and donated to the National Theatre as spares) and the dimmer wiring connected to new sockets to plug to the Siemens computer. As is normal practice, the B40 had been completed many weeks before and put on test in Erlangen and used for ROH staff training courses. As soon as the control room had been redecorated the new system was plugged in and worked immediately and has worked without fault ever since. Not a remarkable achievement in the world of industrial computers nowadays, provided the software has already been properly proved, but immensely reassuring to those who had taken the decision to purchase this product. The only compromises dictated by the confined space were that the mimic panel is not as conveniently placed as could be desired (it is on the right hand wall and behind the assistant operator) and the computer are squeezed onto a sub floor above with access up a vertical ladder: no problem except a minor one for the infrequent routine maintenance service. The overall result looks both efficient and comfortable and is a tribute to the design



The Push Button Mimic

team concerned.

On the occasion of the opening ceremony on November 20th a surprise bonus was added. After the speeches by dignitaries from all sides, Herr Manfred Bruns, the Managing Director of Siemens' Installation Group, handed over the keys for the B40 and then a certificate symbolising the donation of one of the Sitalux T40 mobile control systems for use by the Royal Opera and Ballet when on tour. The panel itself will be handed over early this year.

VERDICTS

There was no doubt, from the moment of my first request to Tom McArthur for permission to see the system, the ROH are delighted with the new board and with the service received from Siemens. Chief electrician Bill Old and the operating team Paul Watson and John Charlton who showed me the system said they found it very easy to use, once they had understood the special German operating philosophy, and, with some 25 shows lit or relit without problem since the changeover, they reckon they have now given the system a thorough trial. Bob Bryan, designing the lighting for the new production of Otello, also confirmed his pleasure and satisfaction though anticipating that there were many more tricks and short cuts to be learned before full use was being made of the system's possibilities. However, on my refusal to believe that anything can ever be quite perfect, there was an admission that VDU displays did not always update quite as fast as might be desired and that an easily avoidable software lock-up had been discovered and the cure organised. Other than that, absolutely everything at the Garden really seems to be Wunderbar!