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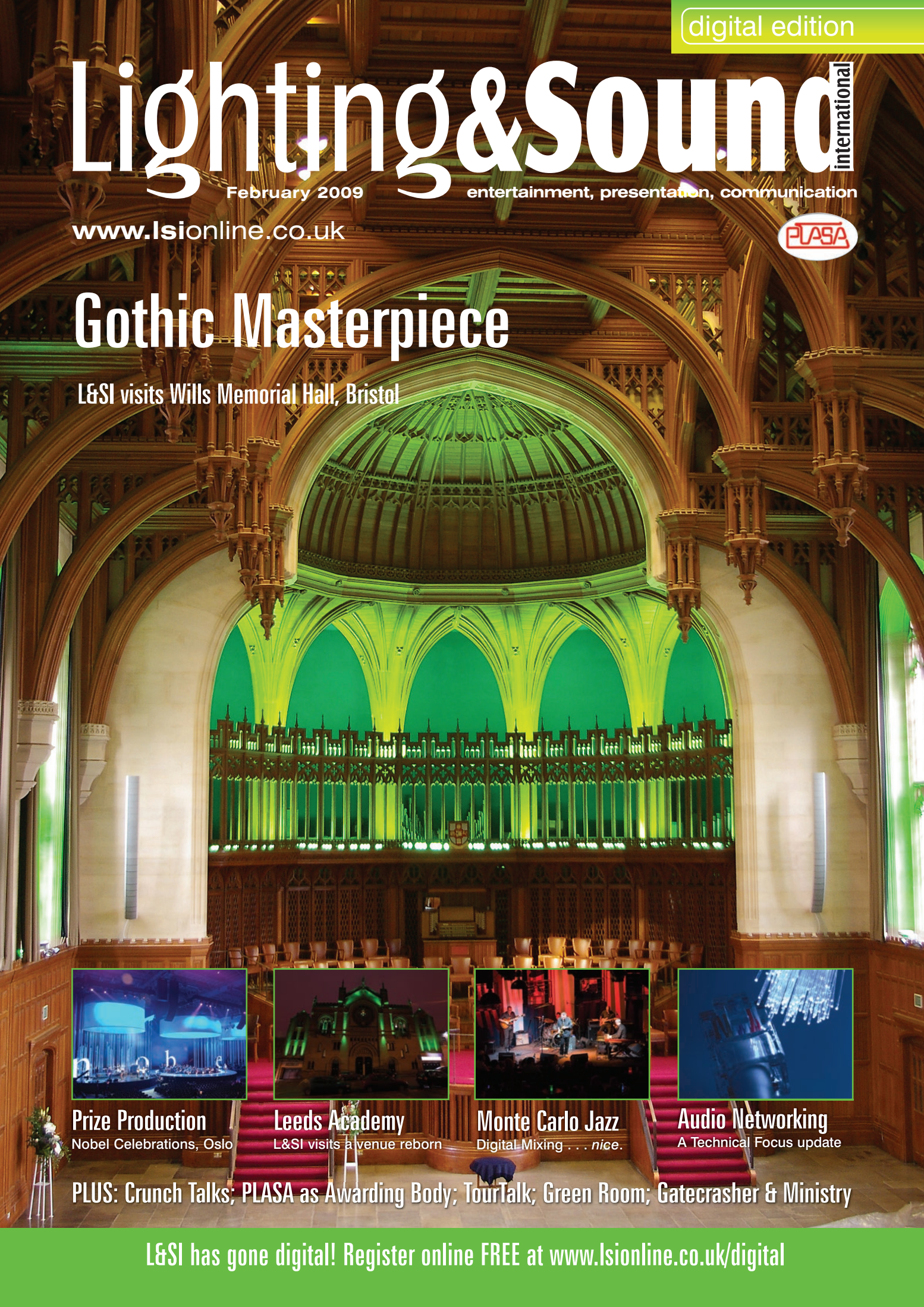
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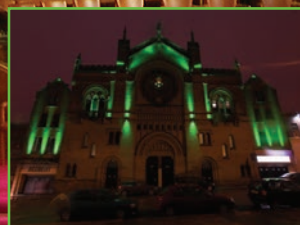


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Classic Gear: The Tallescope

Rob Halliday takes a nostalgic but instructive look back at the tools that have shaped the industry . . .

The tallescope. So simple. So incredibly versatile. So useful. And yet now so controversial . . .

UK readers will doubtless be familiar with the Tallescope - it's a working classic, still in active service. But it has never really travelled internationally, so for the benefit of those overseas, it is basically a vertical ladder on wheels. Made of aluminium, and therefore lightweight yet strong, the 'scope' - or the 'talley' as many refer to it - has a wheeled base supporting the central ladder section. The ladder is manually extendible by pulling a rope, hooks automatically locking the extension into place on the rungs, and has a basket at the top designed to hold one person securely, allowing them to work comfortably at heights of - in the biggest model - 31ft or 9.5m.

This remarkable device was introduced in the early 1970s, its manufacturers, Instant Upright in Ireland, intending it for access to streetlights outdoors and the ceilings of warehouses indoors. Theatres soon discovered its versatility, though, allowing them to replace access techniques ranging from A-frame ladders to bosun's chairs. The 'scope's adjustability and flexibility perfectly suited the ever-changing world of the stage. In particular, its adjustable legs allowed it to be leveled out and so used on a rake. And the ladder section is pivoted - fold it over and the 'scope will fit through most standard doors. Still not compact enough? The whole thing can come apart. And if space on the ground is tight, the whole thing - assembled or flat-pack - can be flown out of the way.

The controversy? That is newer. For years, standard theatre practice has been to have crew at the bottom of the 'scope moving it while someone is up in the basket, as long as the floor is flat. For focusing lights - the task for which the 'scope is perhaps most often used - this makes for

quick progress around the rig. But it's a use that was never approved by the original manufacturer (which sold all rights in the product to Aluminium Access Products in early 2008), and in these increasingly health- and-safety led times, has become frowned upon. The ABTT and the Health & Safety Executive continue to have back-and-forth discussions about whether this is safe. The argument in favour is strengthened by the relatively small number of accidents involving tallescopes relative to the number in regular use. Besides, climbing up and down the ladder once per light leads to an entirely different set of safety risks.

What the discussions have provoked is much greater safety in day-to-day 'scope operations, the use of outriggers having changed in recent years from something that should be done to standard practice. And as long as it is used safely, the tallescope's ability to get into the tightest spaces on the most complex sets (and more importantly, to then get off the stage through the tightest of exits - set designers rarely remember to factor the 'scope's dimensions into their designs!) remains unsurpassed. The scope's spiritual successor, the Genie Lift, may remove the need to climb a ladder, but it's slower, more cumbersome and - as anyone who has ever had to help lift one off a stage will attest - much, much heavier . . .

The current home of the Tallescope online: >>> www.tallescope.co.uk

Current guidance on tallescope use from the ABTT:

>>> www.abtt.co.uk/pages/news/viewnews.php?newsID=102



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