

COLOUR MUSIC WAS ONE OF THE WONDERS OF THE WORLD BEFORE THE FIRST WORLD WAR. DAVID LAZELL RECALLS THE IDEAS OF PROFESSOR ALEXANDER WALLACE RIMINGTON AND SUGGESTS THE REVIVAL OF INTEREST MAY BE LONG OVERDUE...

COLOUR MUSIC LIGHT (AND A HINT OF BRITISH ECCENTRICITY)

If ever the stage lighting business needs a patron saint, it need look no further than to Professor Alexander Wallace Rimington. He was an advocate of Colour Music and a sort of roving ambassador for lighting effects in that halcyon period prior to the First World War.

Strangely enough, there was an awakening public interest in stage effects then, even though mains electricity, like the telephone, was still rumoured to be dangerous. But Professor Rimington determined to show the possibilities, not least by his domestic conversions to the Colour Organ apparatus which he designed and largely made.

Sarah Tooley, a magazine journalist of the time, wrote that the Colour Organ would 'flood the most prosaically dull room in London's murky atmosphere with vibrating rainbow hues which will bring music to the soul of those cultivated to receive these impressions'.



■ Professor Rimington.

Professor Rimington's life was almost contemporary with the great days of the Crystal Palace, that *ad hoc* auditorium in south-east London. Here, too, the early stage lighting effects had been subject to experiment by popular lecturers like the Rev. John Wood.

Wallace Rimington was born in 1854. As a young man, he had studied art, later exhibiting at the Royal Academy and the Royal Society of British Artists.

Inevitably, given the discoveries of the time, he became interested in photography and music, bringing to both a growing vision for lighting effects. His Colour Music idea probably grew from discussions found in late Victorian magazines, namely that colour and sound were two aspects of the same reality, i.e. the music of rhythm of the universe.

VIBRATIONS

This is probably 'old hat' now, but at the time, it seemed a novel enough idea

for Professor Rimington to explore further. He believed that sound (music) and colour were both due to vibrations that stimulated the optic and aural nerve endings. So if one could perform music whilst creating lighting effects that, metaphorically speaking, were on the same wavelength, it would be possible to capture more realistically the composer's intentions.

Stage drama might be enhanced, too, and in this sense there was perhaps some influence from *Bayreuth*, for Richard Wagner was certainly interested in colour, as Professor Rimington well knew.

Experimenting with electrically driven gadgetry and other marvels, Professor Rimington devoted much of his London residence — in Pembridge Crescent, W11 — to his Colour Music installation. Many celebrities came to see it, one being Sir George Grove.

Basically, the equipment projected varying hues onto a curtain or a screen,