

MILESTONES

IN LIGHTING HISTORY

A regular feature in which Philip Rose looks back at some of the lighting innovations introduced by Strand and Century over the years.

1940 Strand's first Export of a complete Continental opera house installation, including a Light Console, to Teatro S'Carlos Lisbon.

1941-5 Although Strand was committed to War work, its involvement with flying and submarine simulators laid the seeds for improved optical and projection equipment post-War. The central Tactical Aircraft Trainer projector was the first to use remote control zoom objective lenses designed in Strand's pre-bombed Demo Theatre. Small things like the 'potters wheel' drive mechanics, and the use of high resolution photographic disks rather than hand-built mica disks for effects was a direct result of the War-time developments.

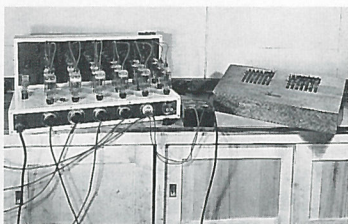
The real significance of this period was that it marked the turning point in technology. Before the War, stage lighting development was in the hands of the practitioners - mechanics, electricians and 'metal bashers' from the theatre. Low volumes and very little export meant that fundamental engineering designs, basic materials and simple production techniques were sufficient for the industry. It wasn't until after the War that Strand saw its first graduate engineer on staff, but in the early years even they needed the 'old brigade' at their side.

1947 George Izenour, a member of Yale University's Drama faculty and long-time Century consultant, had been working on his electronic control system from 1940-44 before it was put on ice. The working system, a 2-tube Thyatron dimmer and the CI

(Century Izenour) 10 and 5 scene preset remote control, was demonstrated in 1947. The electronic age had dawned. During the next two years, Izenour with Century, developed the twin tube "L" chassis electronic dimmer and the 'five scenes' edgeways-on rotary preset module of which tens of thousands were made (and probably still exist!).

1949 In the UK, the electronic preset control emerged, based on 'Woody's' 3 tube Thyatron design. The first UK system was at the New Theatre (now the Albery Theatre) in London's West End. On the first night of the production *Twelfth Night*, the board operator got one cue behind in cross-fading which did nothing for the play, and even less for the new board's reputation!

Strand's London Palladium installation of 1949 is historic in that it marks the move towards more directional lighting.



Test model of Woody's 3-tube Thyatron electronic preset control.

For further details on this period, see Fred Bentham's autobiography, *Sixty Years of Light Work* chapters 6 and 7.

FREDBENTHAM



Strand Archive

PLAYING WITH LIGHT

Concerts remembering the death of Tchaikovsky 100-years ago are going on all around as I write. Another event 20-years ago might well be coupled to this; for it represented the end of a long association of his 4th symphony with Colour Music and Strand.

Back in June 1935 the dramatic 1st movement concluded the inaugural Light Console recital which had opened with Wagner's storm-tossed *Flying Dutchman* overture. Between these items was a solemn Requiem, a Nocturne, and in strong contrast Twelfth Street Rag. Such recitals (and there were many) proved that stage lighting if played solo could be expressive and an entertainment.

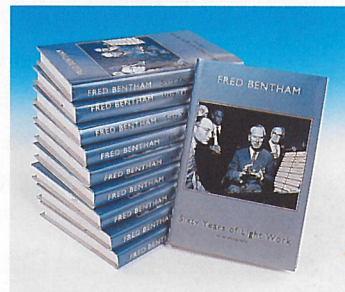
As stressed many many times before (not least in *Lights!* Feb. '92) the eye and the ear need totally different stimuli. Notes for the one mean flicker and fidget whereas for the other they are essential. However, one must add that occasional flashing is appropriate in much the same way as a drop of glissando or whatever does not come amiss, witness the opening of Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. What Colour Music has to do is to underline the emotions stirred by the music and help create relaxed concentration. Mind you the vast majority of real music is best left alone, it is a work of Art complete of itself - Hands Off!

Playing Light means modelling with the stuff and needs some sort of setting upon which to use direction, intensity and colour variation. A simple two dimensional screen hanging in the abyss will not do. Mask it properly so you cannot see where it ends and add an inclined plane along the bottom to hide the groundrow with 3-circuits and hang another 3 circuits of flooding at the top. The obvious colours are to use the primaries (Red, Blue and Green) and with six dimmers one is well away with

expressive lighting under the fingers.

Access to a full scale stage is not necessary. Make a good large scale model and one can become an expert before using any real stage. The fact that our setting evokes a sky does not mean we are limited to dawn or sunset music, though this does remind one of the value of slow changes; indeed of the role for speed of change in interpretation. Although our art is called Colour Music, colour is the least important element. Next is direction; where the light comes from as it is used to model a 3-dimensional setting. Does the light come from above or below eye level and so on. A good starter is side lighting of the folds of plain drapes - even though they are black and officially won't take light. But they will in a richness and depth beyond imagination.

It is time I stopped, if your own creative urge has not taken off by now, Colour Music is not for you. If it is, then my Light Console or one of the modern multi-dimmer systems is not necessary for you to begin and enjoy.



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Fred Bentham is giving a lecture and demonstration of Colour Music to delegates of the CIBSE National Lighting Conference in Cambridge on 27th March 1994.

The full story of Colour Music unfolds in Fred Bentham's autobiography, *Sixty Years of Light Work* published by Strand Lighting. See order card for details.

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