

'Using Strand Filters in the Theatre'



That knowledgeable and ebullient man of the theatre, Mr Francis Reid, has written a very useful guide to the current range of Strand Filters, both the colour and the diffusion variety.

He draws on his wide knowledge as a practising Lighting Designer, whose working life has ranged from Mozart at Glyndebourne to pantomime at Glasgow with side excursions in drama in the West End.

It may be unfair to pick plums from someone else's pudding, but here goes anyway with just a couple of examples of the wisdom on offer:

'The high intensity of light produced by Parcans allows use of the most heavily saturated filters. Note that the colour from a parcan will be considerably paler than the light from a conventional lens spotlight of similar wattage.'

'It is difficult to light white cycloramas to a dark blue. Cyc cloths should have a very pale blue pigmentation which will aid response to blue light but not upset response to the rest of the spectrum.'

There is a full list of Cinelux and Chromid filters, describing their effects and giving typical usages – and many of them are not as one would first suppose.

This six page guide is available free on request from Strand Lighting or from their agents.*

*Not available in North America.

Australian News Tropical Geminis

In the past few months three separate tenders for lighting control desks issued in North Queensland have been awarded to Strand. On each occasion they chose Gemini as their preferred control system, thanks to the efforts of John Rippin, Queensland's State Sales Manager.

This network of Gemini Control Systems at Townsville, Rockhampton and Mount Isa now enables touring Theatre Companies to use the same lighting plot on floppy disc at each venue. Any change in circuit location being handled by the proportional dimmer patch, which is standard on every set up system. Gemini's programmable effects, the most powerful in the business, was another feature high on the priority list.

Ambit gets Government approval

The Australian Federal Government have just moved house. The new Parliament House building was opened in April by HM the Queen.

The project took 10 years to complete. New South Wales State Sales Manager, David Kentish, ensured Strand Lighting was chosen to provide all the Architectural Lighting Control and Dimmers, all designed and produced in Australia.

Ambit unit dimmers were chosen for their reliability and compact size. Over 200 dimmers with by-pass switches were installed to handle the tungsten and fluorescent lighting.

Special 5 push button preset stations were installed to control the dimmers, finished in a colour exclusive to the project.

Testing, Testing!

The story behind Action, a truly multi national product.

Action was designed as our 'entry level' memory system. One of its objectives was that the system had to be available at a price that could be afforded by a small to medium amateur dramatic group, a school, a pub or a club.

We believe that where 'professional' lighting leads all others will inevitably follow.

Thirty years ago the professional theatre began sending its battens to the scrap yard – now, except perhaps when adapted as cyc. lights, practically all their thousands of fellows have followed, leaving directional lighting ruling the roost.

And I don't know if there is a professional theatre anywhere, defined here as a theatre that sells tickets, rather than throwing in a show as part of another deal, that still operates on a manual switch board. I doubt it.

So, following this logic of the spread of professional equipment, we decided to make a 24 channel, 99 cue plus effects memory board which because of its affordability would be available to practically everyone.

We were so convinced of its success that Action was the first board we ever produced that was designed from the start for manufacture in more than one of our factories.

Action is now in volume production in Kirkcaldy and will soon be in production in Los Angeles and Melbourne.

Before a company makes a commitment on this scale, it has to be certain the product is right – right for its market, right in design and right in reliability.

So, a long testing programme was the order of the day for the early prototypes.

In our R & D department we have small torture chambers in which desks can be cooked, then frozen. They are given a good shaking, to simulate ten years of touring on the back roads of Ontario or the country lanes of Greece, and to follow up touring procedure, they are dropped onto hard surfaces from tail board heights.

But, in the end, no testing we can do equals real life testing by theatre people rather than by engineers. A friend of mine in the motor industry told me that all engineers, simply by their training, have too much mechanical sympathy to make realistic tests. It is not that real users are rougher on equipment, it is just that they use it in the way it will actually be used.

So we sent out three desks to three different volunteers, each representing a different type of user.

We asked them to consider whether the facilities were right, whether the ergonomics were right and – above all – whether reliability was right.

We followed up with site visits and questioning. And when the boards came back to R & D at Isleworth, Myles Donoghue, the electronic engineer who handled the Action project and his colleagues gathered round to probe and test every pcb and every connection.

Test No 1 – The Professional Theatre (The Salberg Studio Theatre of Salisbury Playhouse)

Our volunteer testers here were Peter Hunter, the resident Lighting Designer who came to Salisbury from the Redgrave at Farnham, and Christine Piper, assistant theatre electrician, who trained at the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Both therefore were fully familiar with the 'Strand Way' of control system philosophy.

Peter saw Action first at our 'Professional Launch' at Stratford last year, and saw again at our Road Show at the Southampton venue.

He was sufficiently interested to volunteer as one of our test panel.

The Salisbury Action was installed about ten months ago, first being used on a dinner show, 'Quirkish Delight'.

It then lit a comedy, but during this run was retrieved by Tony Brown, our head of R & D, who made a few changes as a result of our own in-house testing that was going on at the same time.

Back it came again, and back into use. But there was a problem – the goose neck



Salisbury Playhouse – scene of Action's professional Theatre test programme.



David Woodman (14) and Andrew Fordham (15) using their Test Action. Being bright lads at electronics and drama they have used their installed M24 to produce a V.D.U. display from the Action!

light flickered! Strong feelings of relief for Miles Donoghue and our team that nothing more serious on the reliability front had emerged. (Note: We have now improved the goose neck connector).

At the time of the Editorial Visit providence was being well and truly tempted. Rehearsals were in progress for the Scottish Play. If that didn't bring out the bugs what could?

Final result of the test? Salisbury became one of the first customers for the production version of Action.

Test No 2 –

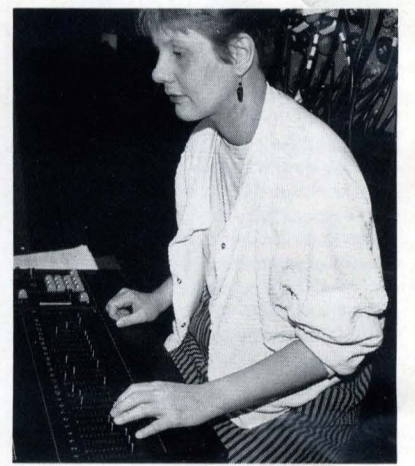
This test was arranged by Ken Priddy, technical chief at our South London distributors, Luff Light & Sound, of Gautrey Road, London SE15. The School chosen was St Dunstan's College, an independent long established and prestigious day school for some six hundred boys occupying what is probably the only worthwhile building in Catford, not a part of London too often on the tourist trail. Catford lies between Lewisham and Dulwich, dignifying the former and bringing a breath of real life to the esoteric sylvan delights of the latter.

Ian Burgess, the head of the Audio Visual department at St Dunstons, was the staff member who was good enough to volunteer to carry out this test programme. Again, he and his students are very familiar with Strand systems. An M24 is their current school lighting control.

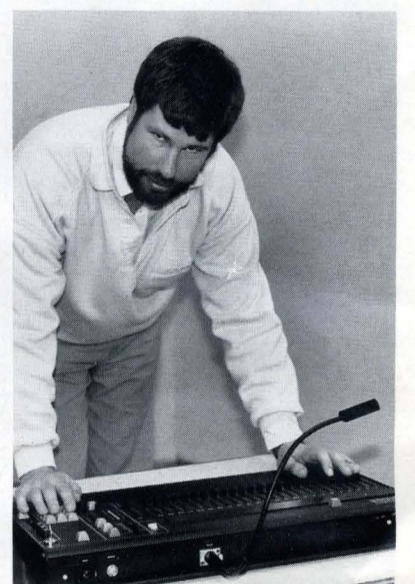
I visited St Dunstons after the system had been in use for just over three months. There were a number of criticisms. The strongest referred to our present manual*, which was considered acceptable as an installation guide and fine as a description in engineering terms of what each control did, but Ian felt that many people fresh to a memory system really needed much more basic knowledge from a manual. For example, terms such as 'Cross Fade' and 'Build' should be explained rather than understanding assumed.

Because they learned of so many unsuspected facilities in Action after a visit by Myles Donoghue, Ian wonders if a video couldn't be loaned with each system to allow the fortunate new owners to appreciate fully the power and flexibility of their new board. VHS & BETA, please.

He also offered some other opinions on the software that are being pondered deeply by our team. What were they? Alas, dear reader, there is always a remote chance that one of the eighteen thousand copies of Strandlight just might come into a competitor's hands and knowledge of this kind should be reserved for the companies



Christine Piper, one of the Playhouses assistant electricians in action on Action.



At the Redbridge Drama Centre. Ray Balcome, the Technical Resources Officer, who used his Test Action in Video production.

push buttons had at least protection from any heavy loads unthinkingly laid on them? Readers views are welcome.

Another idea from Redbridge that has already been adopted, was that the 'MemClr.' and 'Mod' buttons should have their importance emphasised by being red in place of the standard grey.

So, there is the story of three field tests. From our point of view good ideas have come forward and our basic design from the self diagnostic test programme to the illuminating 'Bump' buttons has passed the only exam that matters – the one the customer gives.

We have been tremendously re-assured by the reliability of 'Action' in the field. Reliability must always be at the top of the agenda on any theatre system, but it's especially vital for a board that may be used in some very remote spots. We, here in the U.K. are sometimes spoilt by the ever available Strand service from Ken Priddy and his like, strategically placed around the country. It's when you get to, say, a touring company in Australia that reliability really counts. We never forget that over sixty per cent of our production is exported – but perhaps the necessity to cater for this need for reliability is what keeps us number one at home!

*Now extensively revised
** John Betjeman's Collected Poems.
Published by John Murray.



St Dunstons School, Catford. 'Probably the only distinguished building within two miles' – scene of Action's schools test.

who had the initiative to seek it out. After all, any car company will tell you that the most valuable cars on their strength are not the Managing Director's top-of-the-line de luxe example, but the engineering departments, 200,000 mile survivor of a rigorous test programme. That's the one you learn from.

Test No 3 – The Drama Centre

This testing programme was carried out at the Redbridge Drama Centre, 'Where', may an overseas reader wonder, 'is Redbridge?' Well, in John Betjeman's words:

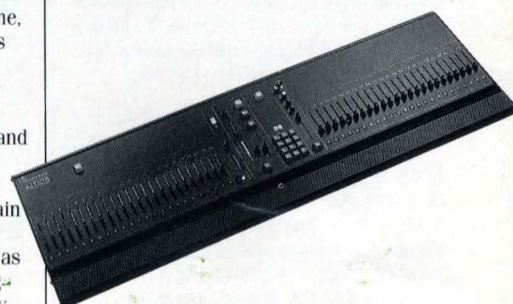
*'At huge and convoluted Pubs
They used to set us down from brakes
In that half-land of football clubs
Which London near the Forest makes'***

The late poet Laureate's words are so much more interesting than my merely saying that Redbridge lies on the eastern borders of London near Epping Forest.

The Drama Centre, where Ray Balcome, who is the Media Resources Officer, was our contact, controls all the Borough's technical drama equipment. Action was put through its paces for some twelve weeks, used both in drama by students and for lighting video productions by Ray. A number of suggestions came forward. Again, some of them I regret, must remain under the cloak of discretion, but he did feel that since the system was designed as a touring board, its chances of surviving – unsympathetic get-outs would be greatly increased by a protective cover – not a cloth or plastic sheet, but a metal or a rigid plastic lid. St Dunstons School, incidentally, felt the same.

If this wasn't possible while keeping the price at the level required, then how about raising the vertical height of the two end cheeks, so that the sliders, faders and

Stop Press



We are delighted to announce that success has led to growth! So here is the very latest Action board – Action 48! There will be an opportunity to see this new board at the PLASA 88 Light & Sound Show at Olympia 2 11-14th September on Stand F150.