



Unorthodox but effective: the Cross lit by three ordinary torch bulbs, shines in the darkness once other lights are faded out.

Unlike theatre lighting where actors have to be visible and the lighting must blend unnoticed as a compliment to the action, in *Son et Lumière* lighting alone provides action and movement. Each location presents its own demands on the lighting director's skills, technique and inventiveness. Taking the materials to hand; the building and lamps available; it is up to him to fascinate, interest, amuse or even shock the audience with the pictures he creates. I am not a great believer in hard and fast rules once basic principles have been absorbed, they tend to limit a creative approach—but two are vital:

- (a) always remember *Son et Lumière* is an abstract medium; a medium of illusion. It is not a play with the actors missing but an "art" in its own right;
- (b) never forget that boredom does not have to be worked for: but an audience's interest does.

Trite? Cliche? Obvious?—agreed; but too often ignored or forgotten.

In practice (a) means that where possible the audience should see without knowing how it happens, lamps should never be visible, or the illusion is broken. Last year I went to a production in a small but attractive church. Some 30 lamps, mostly Patt. 137 mixed with Patt. 23, were on view. I assumed there was nowhere to hide them and waited for the performance to begin. The moment it did my wife turned sickly green. As she slowly went bright red I realised what had happened and relaxed: as she turned blue I knew she was not having some obscure form of fit but that the engineer had committed a cardinal crime—he had lit his audience. I prefer my wife her normal healthy colour and had wanted to see the church lit as I would never otherwise be able to. I was disappointed—and as the sound was distorted by being "pushed" too hard through the amplifier and came in part from behind me I gave up; it also lasted too long—an hour on a church pew is enough for my anatomy.

So, a rule: never light the audience. And to prove I do not like rules let me add that I

once did, quite deliberately, with spectacular effect; using ultraviolet lamps every shirt collar and cuff and white dress became fluorescent. It caused gasps of amazement which turned to amusement—as I had intended. It is essential to know not only what you want to achieve but also, more importantly, how the audience will react. In passing, another fundamental rule, usually learned the hard way it seems; never ask your audience to turn in their seats nor, no matter how fantastic the roof, make them look up till they are in danger of breaking their necks. The only thing you actually break is that fragile thread of concentrated attention on which so much depends. Special effects; snow, fire etc.; can only be used once with real impact, and to switch attention from far left to right by sudden changes of light is a useful "shock"—but must be used sparingly or bewilderment sets in.

Imagination is naturally the key and if the lighting director is any sort of artist rather than a mere technician he will have plenty; and it need not involve great expense. I work in churches to avoid the perils of the weather and add a vast sum to the budget for heating if it is in winter: In one production there was a particularly attractive Cross; I wanted it to "glow" in an expanse of absolute darkness without shadow, reflected or overspill light anywhere. But it was in full view of the audience; nowhere to conceal a lamp nor one small enough to avoid casting a shadow. The answer was to use three pre-focused torch-bulbs and a 9 V battery, the bulbs set in plasticine 2 ft. from the Cross, hidden by a wooden strip. They were switched on when the area around the Cross was brilliantly lit, then as the other lights faded the Cross stood in splendid isolation, gleaming. The impact was tremendous despite the unorthodox and low power source, the cost even lower.

Using more conventional but still "unprofessional" equipment, another effect cost so little that it is worth bearing in mind that sometimes unshielded domestic bulbs can be more effective than the most expensive lamp. The production is a special Christmas one for smaller churches telling the story of the *Nativity*. If you ask how the story can be of anything other than the building, which is normally the "star", let me say that it has been done with constant critical and financial success—even the BBC liked it! *The Nativity* brought a comment from photographer Sir George Pollock which has been taken to heart ever since when it was first produced, "Nice, but not enough colour". Taken to heart by my bank manager too because too much colour costs too much money—a practical if inartistic check on over lighting! The most recent production was in a church lacking architectural detail though having a fine arch over the Nave (in front of the audience) and an "odd" little "window" let into a wall at the head of curving steps by the Communion rail; originally it was an access to a gallery or so I suppose. The script called for a "cold" effect. The only light in the darkness was a single bulb concealed in the angle of the steps and throwing through the window giving a steely-blue which slowly cross-faded to a rich, warm amber-gold which was then spread through the entire building as other

