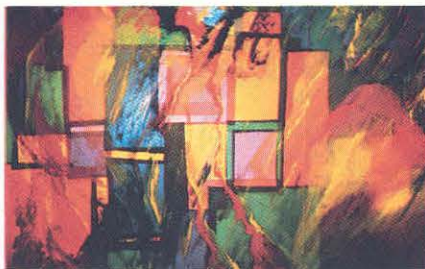


lamps faded up. Two coloured 60 W bulbs in ordinary sockets screwed to a wooden batten fixed out of sight at a total cost of about £1.30! The effect lasted 35 sec; for six performances 0.6p a second!—against 5½p a second? That was at 1974 prices when *Royal Windsor* was presented with a star studded cast: Marius Goring, Francis Matthews, John Bentley, Bob Danvers-Walker and Reginald Marsh—all recorded in the studio and the resultant tape worth every penny. One episode related to the burial of the beheaded Charles 1st. The Governor of Windsor Castle had refused to allow a service in the Chapel so the night before the body was taken by torch light to the Parish Church, the service read and the body returned to the Castle. Researching the script I found a description of the next morning by Charles's valet: "When the coffin was brought out into the courtyard the sky was serene and clear, but presently it began to snow, and the snow fell so fast that by the time the corpse had reached the west end of the Chapel the black pall over it was all white" an obviously visual moment to be created. Windsor church has a finely carved screen separating the audience from the Sanctuary, and as Marius Goring began narrating the passage the entire church became dark except for the flickering torchlight effect in a side chapel. As this faded the screen was "backlit" so that the carving was in silhouette, beyond, all darkness. Very gradually the Sanctuary became a deep, royal purple, the black shadow of the coffin appearing to lie on the altar. Then snow began to fall, at first through the purple but as the colour was faded and the screen darkened it fell faster and faster while the tall wooden Cross on the top of the screen shone brilliantly and the black "coffin" became white as music swelled and rang round the church. Simple to achieve, a most memorable effect—but what a cost! For those 54 sec:

- 4 x Patt. 137 @ 55p each per week to backlight screen
- 8 x Patt. 137 @ 55p each per week with purple filters
- 4 x Patt. 123 @ £1.10 per week each with purple filters
- 1 x M.R. "Inkie" @ £1.00 per week with purple filter for shadow over altar—black
- 1 x Patt. 52 with Snow effect @ £3.75 per week
- 1 x Patt. 23 @ £1.10 per week to give white "coffin" effect
- 1 x Patt. 23N @ £1.25 per week to illuminate Cross on screen.

Not including cost of filters, cables, operator's time etc. the total weekly cost was £18.10—and six of these lamps were used only for that one effect!

Cost has been emphasised because the biggest single factor affecting the lighting director is staying within his budget—if he wants to work again! So how does he decide what to light? Nothing moves except the eyes of his audience (though I have been more than once assured that actors have been seen—proof of the power of illusion!). Once the features of interest have been isolated he must become a "painter with



The 2-way screen showing detail and effect: a useful addition where building lacks feature.

light". He can be a Rembrandt playing with the blackest shadow and silhouette, or a Monet using Impressionist colour. His job is to be a "mood merchant" heightening the effect of the words with the pictures he paints. If he is not familiar with the basic concept of colour, highlight and perspective he will not be employed except at the Producer's peril. It is amazing the speed with which the bad word travels even in a large town! But he can "travel" his light, create extraordinary effects, even seem to set a Cathedral ablaze (and given an overload on his cables he can do it for real if he is not careful—old timber being tinder dry) or to chill the audience with falling snow, run water down walls, hurl harsh shadows or jerk them awake with unexpected blazes of light—he is limited only by his technical skill, his imagination—and his budget.

Among notes for past productions I find: *Silhouette Cross on altar, cross-fade to front lit (and make sure polished daily for "sparkle")*

*Pick out arch and pillars of tower support, slowly fragment colour when script calls for tower to collapse. (Actually this effect worked so well that one or two gasps came from people who knew the tower had really collapsed twice in its history and the production was to raise funds to stop it happening again!)*

*After 1st World War sequence, as "Last Post" played—fade all to leave colourslide of Regimental banner broken over walls: travel Strobe lamp across east wall for train effect: on sound stained glass in east window to "glow", then become sunburst of colours.*

Stained glass is always effective but it is necessary to position at least two 1,000 W floods directly in the audience "sight line"

some 20 plus feet from the window if real brilliance is needed. In churches lacking interest the "two-way" screen can be an effective temporary addition: it can be effective anyway! Developed with assistance from Donald Walker (whose "Walker Rig" was featured in TABS Vol. 34, No. 1) it consists of a translucent screen mounted behind the altar. Lit from in front it is a modern abstract painting, the colours changing depending on which filter is on the lamp being used. When front lighting cross-fades to lighting from behind the screen modern "stained glass" appears and the "abstract painting" vanishes before their very eyes! A trick to be used sparingly—but magical. Other additions to the church may need to be made. For "Royal Borough" the East Surrey Regiment museum lent a uniform, helmet and drum to add a splash of colour against the grey pillars when the script told the story of their achievements in two World Wars.



A splash of colour against the grey.

More recently, with the aid of Sir George Pollock, colour slides have been projected to complement the lighting. This was in a church with no stained glass in the east window so a fine muslin screen was hung inside the window. It vanished like a theatre gauze when lit from outside, the shadows of the leaded panes making faint but attractive patterns. But when the slides were projected onto it, it became a screen, as did the entire wall. The final sequence; using two projectors and a Duo-fade unit mounted in the organ loft at the back of the church, was a Head of Christ. Taken of a carving less than an inch and a half high the pictures covered the entire width of the wall with breathtaking effect. Later one critic remarked that "purists" would not approve—but "Purists", if they exist for so new a medium as *Son et Lumière*, do not pay the bills with their carping: and the audience both paid and approved.

In the final analysis *Son et Lumière* can only succeed if it is treated as an entertainment: which means that the most important people are not the Producer, Lighting Director or Writer—but the audience. And as Noel Coward, the Master quoted earlier, said—an audience will accept almost anything: except boredom.

*Robin Close trained at R.A.D.A., had his first lighting job working a follow-spot at London's Fortune Theatre, and is now a novelist and script writer as well as producing Son et Lumière. Among his credits are 'Royal Borough' and 'Royal Windsor'. Photographs by the author.*