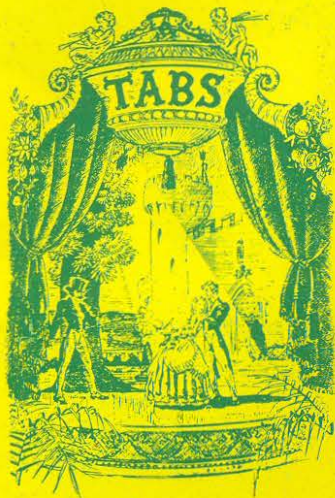


# TABS

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## Making Haste Slowly



A Laser-Chromason built for the Australian National University, Canberra. In this issue Mr Ostoja-Kotkowski describes 10 years research and development on lasers culminating in his latest experiments with laser as an art form. Our cover picture is a striking example produced at the Laser Art Laboratory, Quentron Optics, South Australia.

Draw a graph to represent development of mankind's speed of travel, over the last million years, and one would be faced with a horizontal line for the first 999,900 or so. For it is only in the last century, since internal combustion, that we have been able to propel ourselves faster than the speed of a galloping horse. Since then, the graph line shows virtually a right-angle.

Similar graphs would represent other aspects of human progress, if it can be termed that. Light sources is one. Nowadays one development usually leads quickly to another, and the speed with which it does so very often outstrips the ability of the lay mind to comprehend it. The more time that passes, the wider the gap becomes. That, too, can be said about light sources.

Light Amplification by Simulated Emission of Radiation is a case in point. Lasers have uses in science, medicine, industry, defence, and the arts. Many saw them first in the James Bond film *Goldfinger*, with the hero strapped spreadeagle to a metal table and a laser beam progressing surely and slowly towards him. If such a beam could cut through metal, how can it be used with safety for surgery, or for street lighting?

To some the Christmas illuminations in the West End of London are a pain in the neck (literally as well as metaphorically) although to others they are an essential part of the festive season. This year, in Oxford Street, there were laser beams. In Regent Street the lights were of the more traditional design. To stand at Oxford Circus, where the two streets cross, was informative.

Those who saw the Regent Street lights appeared to enjoy them. Reception of those in Oxford Street seemed less enthusiastic, although there was curiosity. But some

doubted whether the curiosity among onlookers compensated for lack of what they had come to expect as traditional Christmas lights.

So what future have lasers, and other new light sources, in the field of stage lighting? The answer is probably plenty, in time. In his article opposite, Mr. J. S. Ostoja-Kotkowski expresses disappointment that no stage lighting operator joined the students, lecturers, musicians, electronic engineers, sound engineers, artists and technicians during an exhibition of an 80 foot tall laser-chromasonic tower at Adelaide Expo in Australia this year. Is it really all that surprising?

The attitude may depend on one of three factors. One is simple theatre economics, and the expense of equipment. If it is specialised, it may not be suitable for general application. It may also date quickly. Furthermore, familiarity of light and its sources is one of the major factors which restrains acceptance of new methods. There is the question of training.

One has only to look at the doubts of public safety expressed about the Oxford Street lasers to appreciate this. Anyone who goes to a modern disco, and who is not used to it, may find themselves bewildered by the combination of flashing multi-coloured lights and overamplified music. It is little less than an assault on the senses.

But basically the answer depends on whether the role of stage lighting is a complement to art, or an art-form in its own right. To most it is the former, with some wishing that they had an opportunity to experiment in the latter. And it is only by experiment that general applications for stage lighting will become apparent. That day may be some way off yet.

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