



NEW PRODUCT

by Frederick Bentham

I NEVER thought that I would get enthusiastic about floodlights again but here I am, so much so, as to volunteer to write this piece for Tabs. The last time I got excited about floods was fifty years ago when I tried the reflector out of Strand's Arena flood (Patt. 35) to see if it would make a good cyc flood and it did. In 1932 the problem was to get even 3-colour mixing on the cyclorama in our Seecol* demonstration theatre. There was no height above stage and the range was very close so a double batten was used but the result, as soon as colours were mixed, was patchy or blotchy. There was great concern: 'they' even called the great Harold Ridge in to give advice but to little avail.

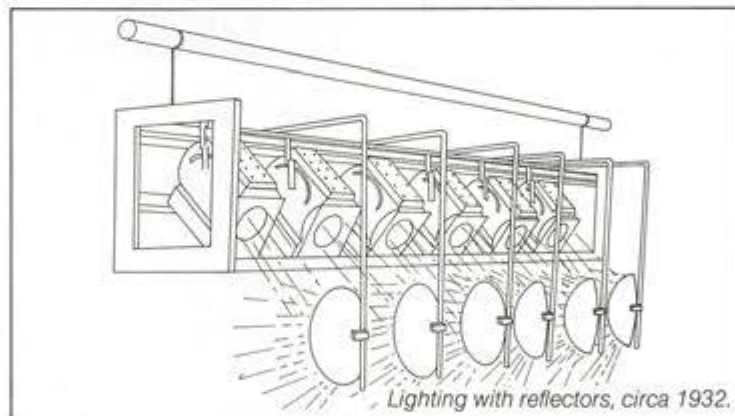
Always a lateral thinker, to use the De Bono term, I found myself eyeing the flood which was used to hang high above and concentrate light on arenas, boxing and circus rings but which slopped light all over the place unless used with a hood. The result of my test was a shortened version of that Patt. 35, designed to hang horizontally instead of vertically and called Patt. 55. The two rows of battens were taken down and eight of these 500-watt G/S floods (2x6 red, 2x39 green and 4x20 blue) jammed in instead. These floods were 16ins in diameter so the same reflector in a 12ins square box (Patt. 60) was also listed for the rather less fussy. The reflectors were of the silvered-glass Sunray type.

I imagine that the first use for floodlights that comes to mind today is for backcloths, backings and the occasional cyclorama; though the latter seem much commoner in television studios. In those days back in the thirties the cyclorama was the mark of a stage with advanced thinking behind it. The great name among directors, over here, in this connection was Basil Dean. Once you had a cyclorama sky to your scene you were restricted in your use of that other floodlighting equipment - battens and footlights. Otherwise these were very much the staple for stage lighting especially in all the super cinema installations concerned, as they were, with the lighting of drapes.

START WITH THE CODA

One could say that in the theatre of the thirties the battle for spotlights was under way. To put it simply, there were two forces at work. Spots were essential to pick out dramatically, to create light and shade, in the one case or to keep light in its place, off the blue cyc for example, in the other case. Although, in general, spots were few in number in today's terms, there were occasional productions which did use them in quantity. For

key words to start with are Basil Dean. And if we want to be fair to stage lighting in U.S.A. then those two words ought to be David Belasco. How come? Accustomed as we are to hundreds of separate strong sources of light, often with gobos added to give the effect that the Germans call *fleckenlicht*, it may be difficult to imagine ardent pursuit of even shadowless light all over the stage. Yet here is Basil Dean talking



Lighting with reflectors, circa 1932.

The Boy David, with Elizabeth Bergner, C. B. Cochran in 1936 hired sixty-one spots for the Edinburgh opening and there would have been more when it arrived at His Majesty's in London. Spots or no I did not care much for the show.

In our present Coda context the more intriguing avenue to explore is that of keeping light in its place. Did we, and do we, need always to think of spotlights for this role - fine though the range is now? The two

about his 1939 production of Priestley's *Johnson over Jordan*: "I had in mind a development of the reflected light I had used at the St. Martin's years before. An overall luminosity that came from no specific direction would create just the right atmosphere for this eerie play." Later in the same article he refers to twelve 2kW special projectors supplied by Strand in front of which were fixed reflectors "with trunnion irons and universal joints so that the angle of reflection and, to a

certain extent its area could be adjusted." And now David Belasco comes into the picture, for Dean goes on: "These reflectors were coated with reflecting paint made up from Hartmann's original formula."

Louis Hartmann was Belasco's chief electrician "since 1901" according to the title page of Hartmann's little book *Theatre Lighting* which was published in 1930. The line illustration (below left) comes from that book and makes clear what Dean was talking about. As can be seen the spotlights were pointed in the opposite direction to that required and are diffuse reflected onto the acting area. These reflectors onto the acting area. These reflectors must not be confused with the sort of diverter mirrors we sometimes hook on the front of objective lenses for optical effects, particularly wave effects. Sheer size was essential. To quote Basil Dean again: "We conducted exhaustive experiments before deciding upon the type of reflectors. Finally, we chose an ovoid shape, roughly 2ft wide by 4ft long, flat at the bottom, not unlike an infant's hip bath, only shallower, the sides varying from 6ins to 9ins deep." So much for overhead but there was also preoccupation with *indirect* footlights working on much the same principle but with a long narrow continuous diffuse reflector. Such a thing described as "G.E.C. Schwabe Direct-Indirect Footlight" was illustrated in Harold Ridge's *Stage Lighting* a book also of 1930. The footlight itself dropped down to give the 'indirect' diffused effect but although quite a number of moving 'disappearing' footlights, mechanically or electrically driven, were installed in the thirties, I do not remember seeing one of these.

My own pre-occupation in those far off days, insofar as it concerned even all over light was, as has already been pointed out, with colour-mixing on the top and bottom of cycloramas. This makes a good starting point for a discussion on the new Strand Nocturne and Coda floods. Especially as I have actually been able to try them in the role; whereas what follows later is mere speculation, completely without any practical test whatever. At the product launch at Brentford there was a flat cyclorama lit top and bottom with these things, and using the dimmer lever part of the Tempus control I set about mixing the saturated colours - the three primaries at the bottom and the 'secondaries' at the top. They are not really secondaries but anyone who has read the *Art of Stage Lighting* will know which ones I mean. The testing colours are mixtures of all three circuits - the grey-blues, washed-

