

**T**HE last article I wrote under this heading\* ended on a note of frustration: we had not managed to sell even one of my Light Consoles. There had been all the press publicity we could wish and a number of quotes but, no sale! With the outbreak of the Hitler war there was no hope. All the more vexing because a mere three months earlier there had been a last fling for the Console and colour music but I had missed that through a serious illness. For the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition a 72-way 230-kW job had been constructed and hired to control the lighting in a 70ft tower known as the Kaleidakon. This stood in the pool inside the hall at Earls Court and a second Compton console enabled duets of colour music to be featured at intervals during the day. Very exciting, except that having seen it erected it was off to bed for me and the big chance for the then demonstration theatre boy – Paul Weston. So it was Paul who played hot rhythm lighting duets with the cinema organist of my choice, Quentin Maclean. I had to be content with "Success as he lies on his sick bed; too ill to see it yet." banner headlines in the Daily Mail!

Came September 3rd and with all theatres closed I had to find some way of retaining a foothold in Strand Electric. In fact the nearest I got to lighting was at the end of a telescope in our factory, then in Talbot Road West Ealing. I could be seen – mornings only by doctor's orders – sitting on a high stool in the middle of nowhere swathed in Union Jacks gazing down the instrument with a phone in my hand. My role was not that of an overpatriotic planespotter. My job was to check the cut-off angles of something called screen-pillars, or I think they were, destined for the Ark Royal and other aircraft

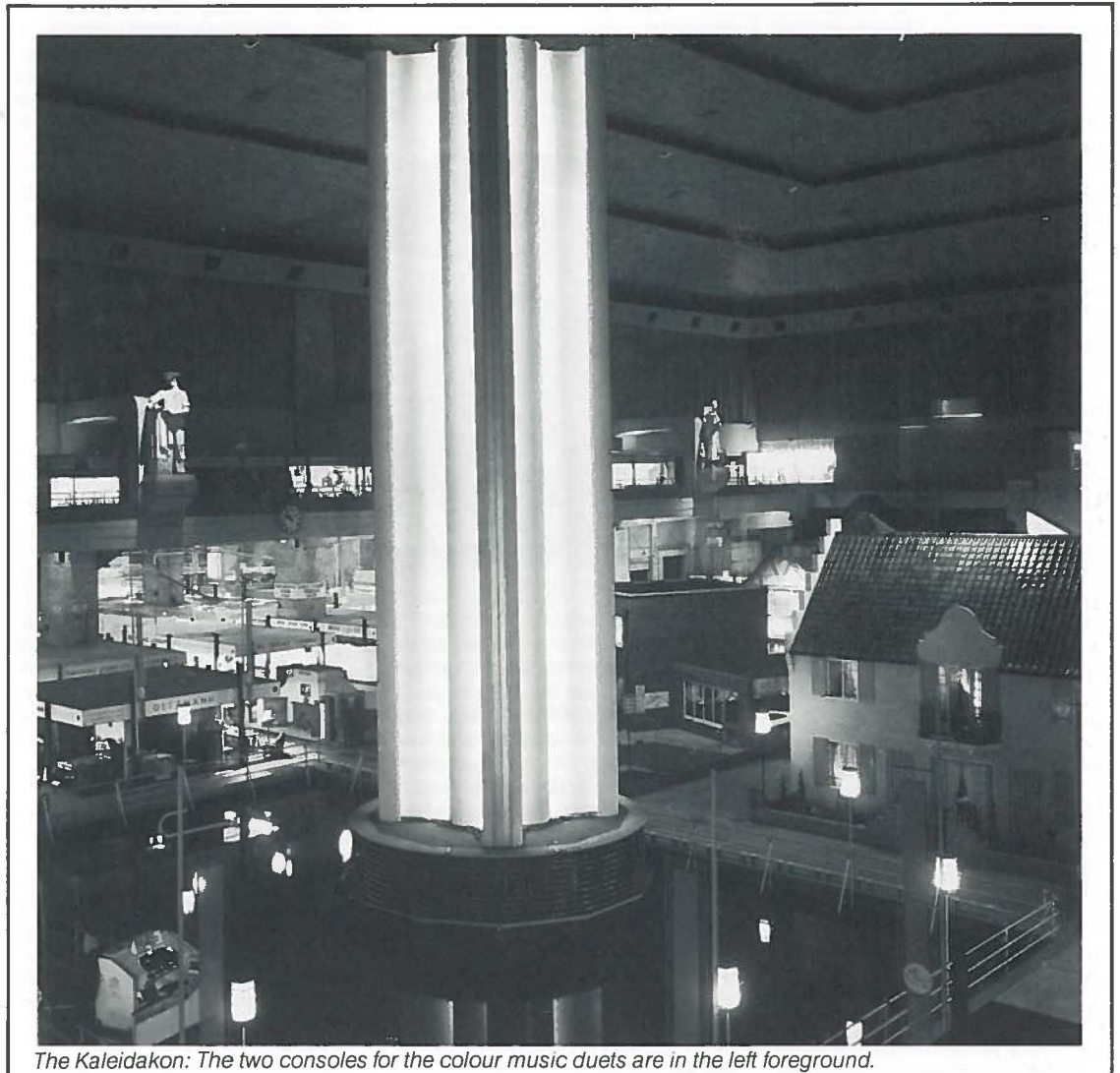
carriers. I am much clearer about the flags; leftovers from over-optimistic stocking-up for the George VI coronation, they served to keep out the draught. I was scared of further doses of pneumonia and these colourful layers over my overcoat showed that, whatever else was impaired, the inventive genius still functioned.

If I had only known it, I need not

S'Carlos opera house in Lisbon. Those were the days, before Lend-Lease, when we were encouraged to export. This country had to get the money in somehow.

On behalf of the Minister dos Obras Publicas e Monumentos Edifos a letter arrived saying; "But what about the piano?" The Strand tender had stuck to the usual Grand Master board as the easy way out

to complain about the coffee on the Southern railway train; not its quality – he had lived too long in England – but its temperature. There was no doubt about it, our coffee was nigh on stone cold. The steward's retort to his complaint was: "It can't be" and that was that. It was only when we joined the boat at Newhaven and Martin retired to lie down below as a precaution against mal de mer that



The Kaleidakon: The two consoles for the colour music duets are in the left foreground.

# I was There!

by Frederick Bentham

have worried; the theatres reopened before long and then out of the blue was to come the touch of a magic wand. War or no war – someone wanted to buy a Light Console! Our Mr. Applebee had quoted, in competition with the Germans, for a complete new stage lighting installation to go into the

but the Light Console featured prominently in the catalogue and its photographs intrigued. Certainly in this case it was the odd non-resemblance to any switchboard which sold it. But I anticipate: Applebee and I had to go out with our interpreter and clinch the matter in Lisbon. And what an interpreter we took with us! "Old Martin" was an elderly French-Canadian who had worked as an engineer in Switzerland once upon a time and had worked in the theatre since. He was well known to some Strand people.

Lisbon seemed a long way away in those early months of the war. A full four days of which there was a night in Paris and two nights on the Sud-Express. The journey started from Victoria early and inauspiciously. Old Martin had the temerity

we got some peace.

It was a bleak grey day in the early part of 1940 and as the ship rolled and yawed a door banged shut loudly only to prime itself for the next big bang. Pursuing the hint, I decided that in the event of a torpedo it would be a waste of time for me to take to the boats and embark on the inevitable pleurisy and pneumonia cruise. However, once safely on terra franca all this vanished for there it was, an exciting novel train known as the "Michelin" in which we were to shoot off to Paris. It was a streamlined multiple-unit Diesel to Pullman standard and the Michelin bit came from the rubber-tyred wheels which ran on the rails.

Paris was by no means as blacked-out as London. Everything was very civilised except for the

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