



by Gail Hardman

IN schools and other educational establishments the length and breadth of the country, Mini-2 reigns supreme! This is the finding of a small survey carried out by your reporter during the last summer term – ten out of ten for Mini-2!

It would seem that drama in schools, especially the care and attention paid to technical matters, has come a long way since I wore a gymslip. The first school I visited was Arnold Lodge School in Leamington Spa, a 380-pupil mixed preparatory, with about 70 boarders. There, David Nason, Head of Drama, showed me their facilities and introduced me to board operator Douglas Hall (12).

Douglas already has quite an impressive list of productions to his credit. From working sound for 'Aladdin' at the age of 9, he quickly graduated upwards to lighting (though Mr Nason does all the work up the ladder, for safety reasons!) Since then, Douglas has lit 'Jack and the Beanstalk', several one-act plays, 'Humpty Dumpty', 'Robinson Crusoe' and their latest musical extravaganza, 'Tom Sawyer'.

With 70 7-13 year-olds performing on a stage 20 feet wide by 18 feet deep ('same size as the Folies Bergere', as David pointed out) and a stage crew of 3 adults and half-a-dozen youngsters, there are both physical and financial constraints on what can be achieved in terms of scenery, and so the lighting has to contribute settings as well as atmosphere to the productions. Both David

MINI-2 RULES-OK!

'Tom Sawyer', which packed the house every night of its six performance run, involved most departments in the school one way or another, and was a credit to the hard work of everyone concerned. Douglas, who is fascinated by all aspects of theatre, admitted to a few sleepless nights worrying about the 60-odd cues in the show, but his nightmares didn't come true, apart from one notable occasion when the tabs stuck!

By contrast, the Mini-2 at Fallibroome County High School in Macclesfield is used in a purpose-built drama studio. Graham Lawson, Head of the Physics Dept., whose interest in lighting has led to his involvement with school productions, showed me round. A large floor area, surrounded by rather forbidding grey breeze-block walls, is transformed during both plays and drama lessons into an exciting and magical place by the use of the lighting equipment.

Frank Walker, Head of Drama, often adapts text specially for his pupils to perform (such as Waugh's 'Decline and Fall') and they also tackle such ambitious projects as the musical 'Trelawny of the Wells'. The children are taught technical matters as well as acting, voice, dance and so on, and lessons often include practical rigging or operational exercises. Frank likes to use the lights during lessons for the same reason that they are used on stage – to create that special atmosphere that is such an indispensable part of all things theatrical.

Graham's physics background means that he has the job of servicing the board when necessary, and he added his own innovation of LED indicators showing which



and Douglas favour warm, amber gels ('To make the costumes look better.') Their luminaires are the usual assortment of 23s, 123s, ground rows and pattern 60s, and David has arranged the basic rig to keep light off the backing, preferring blacks to a cyc to give more feeling of depth.

My last call was to Harefield preset is in use long before Rank Strand started putting them on. Graham has also fitted house light controls to the board, so that they can be operated from more or less any position in the studio, depending whereabouts the action is taking place in that flexible space.

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County High School in Wilmslow. John Barlow, another Head of Physics, introduced me to Mike Johnson (17), one of the senior boys in charge of the school's stage electrics. Their Mini-2 is housed in a purpose-built control room for projection and lighting, placed strategically to give a bird's-eye view of the stage by stealing a bit of the library! Mike explained that the volunteers are asked for from the second year upwards, for the drama society's actors and technical staff, and the techs (as usual) end up generally looking after the theatre – not only for plays, but discos, screen lighting for film shows, important lectures, and even PTA social functions.

One of their recent successes was 'the Swording of Baron Boligrew' which involved plenty of special effects, and they hired in some beam-lights to create shafts of sun through the smoke of battle, being pumped on stage by a couple of fourth-year stagehands. What was possibly Mike's last production for the school (fifth-year and upper sixth pupils are advised to concentrate on their impending exams rather than the

theatre), was 'Romeo and Juliet', for which he designed and plotted the lighting in consultation with the producer. After the inevitable first-night error, plunging the play's second scene to a premature blackout by getting his masters mixed up, Mike and the rest of the cast and crew enjoyed a successful 3-night run.

Theatre lighting, Mini-2 style, is definitely alive and well and living in our schools. One of John Barlow's protégées has recently gone on to do a professional stage lighting course, and he is doubtless one of many of our future lighting operators and designers who have discovered their metier at a relatively tender age. As David Nason put it. 'It's important to interest young people in live theatre at as early an age as possible. For many of them, their first experience is of seeing a school show, and if they then get involved with working on the productions, it gives them an appreciation of what's happening both on the stage and behind it when they go to visit a professional theatre. In that way, we're trying to pass on just a little of our theatrical heritage to the younger generation.'