

then handed over to Jim Murray an outside rep. to follow up. Jim was a very good man for those who enjoyed a casual approach over drinks. An early contact man; he used to do exhibitions before the war and got Strand the Queen Mary and Empress of Britain ships – or rather any stage lighting in them. But as soon as technical detail surfaced he was sunk and he knew it. Thus when the LCC engineers wanted to get an idea of what our equipment was like, Jim thought he had better get me to show off Strand prowess at the Palladium.

This I enthusiastically agreed to do. As soon as the party gathered around me at the console, Jim Murray vanished through the stage door across the road to the Dog and Trumpet and the job was mine thenceforth. There was at that time no question of a Light Console since there was only to be platform lighting but I did envisage a more sophisticated control panel with Compton luminous stops instead of the crude affair already quoted. The big worry for everyone was how the cold cathode fluorescent tubes in the main ceiling and under-balcony coves was to be dimmed in and out. There was also 45-kW of tungsten lighting – downlighters and other such – to be used with or without the cold cathode. G.E.C. Claude-Gen out at Wembley on the old exhibition site of my boyhood had to supply all that but the dimming system was expanded by trial and much error from a few large resistances giving only 4 to 1 until we had to make 55 special 130-contact resistances giving 600 to 1. The secret was strictly to limit the number of tubes per dimmer; then gang them together as necessary.

The great thing to bear in mind about the Royal Festival Hall is that, unlike the later South Bank masterpiece the National Theatre or the Barbican across the river in the City, it had a date on it right from the start. King George VI was to open it, and did, on Thursday May 3rd 1951. Officially Strand were sub-contractors to Cubitts the builders but my first duty lay with the LCC Engineers Dept way up on the 6th floor of County Hall who were acting as consulting engineers and clients in one. But the truth was that I got so completely involved in 'my' side of the hall that I was my own boss – an unpaid consultant so to speak. The engineers were my colleagues and the architects were the enemy. And the architects had a secret weapon which they were not loathe to deploy – the acoustics. They were in the hands of Hope Bagenal an easy going reasonable man who had been pioneering in this field for ages; but by the time of the Festival Hall he had an assistant Peter Parkin, who went around seemingly draped with

instruments and with a revolver loaded with blanks. 'Parkin says no!' was the architects weapon when all else failed. Thanks to Derek Sugden of Arup Acoustics I met Peter at lunch some thirty years later and was able to amuse him with this tale of terror!

What the architects objected to, and one of them was Peter Moro who has become a great friend over the years, were holes in the auditorium – every blessed aperture was a pitched battle. There was a wonderful space right along each side of the hall above the top row of boxes. On their plans they had labelled it 'lighting gallery' but what they would not agree to was apertures in the wall and panelling to allow light to get from there to its target – the stage. By now I had convinced the engineers that this would be no mere concert platform. As had been the case with all concert halls, theatre type shows would be bound to be put on sooner or later. Before long a manager was appointed and he confirmed this. In those civilised days there was no question of hanging things out in the open. All spotlights had to be concealed. When I arrived only four apertures either side had been agreed, provided they were closed when not in use. By the time I had finished a further seven a side had been added plus sixteen colour-change spots in a purpose built housing on the circle front. Over the stage two bars of colour-change acting-areas had been added and a cyc-flood bar. The whole being controlled from a Light Console at the RH end of the stalls cross-gangway; and a very special console it had to be.

The trouble was that the tiny room was only 3-ft back to front in which to house both operator and console. But it was the key position if one was to be part of the show; to enjoy what we had become used to at the Palladium. No question of being tucked away in some distant room however spacious in comparison. The 1951 season of ballet on the open stage fully justified the installation. Unfortunately ever since the stage has been mucked up with a temporary pros. for most such shows and this I dislike intensely – goodness knows what it does to that original team of architects! The Strand export department of those days owes a lot to the existence of the Festival Hall because ten years were to pass before the new theatre building boom in Britain was to get under way. But there was always the Festival Hall handy to show off and in 1954 it actually spawned an export super-jumbo-sized versions of its own installation – console and all – in Caracas. By then I was no longer a loner but had a R & D department and the television studio boom was on the horizon. So although Caracas was 'my' job, I cannot claim alas! that – I was There! ■

*TABS Vol. 41. No. 1 † Sightline Vol. 13. No. 2.

BOOKSHELF

BÜHNENBELEUCHTUNG

By Max Keller

Published by Du Mont Buchverlag
Cologne DM 78.00

It is a pity that Max Keller's new book on the technique of Stage Lighting is not yet available outside his native Germany, because his unique approach to explaining a personal style of lighting should not be missed by anyone involved in lighting for the stage.

'Bühnenbeleuchtung' compares with many similar texts in its categorical explanation of the theory, the description, and the use of light; in contrast, the key feature of Max Keller's work, which will place this book in a class of its own, is an added dimension so sadly lacking from many of the world's stages: light texture.

As the numerous and large colour plates show, the atmosphere of even a simple scene is transformed by employing the textural qualities of light; the contrast between the soft directionless illumination of a fluorescent wash, and the shattering potency of a shaft of daylight from a high power HMI spotlight. Thus, texture is not simply created by juggling position, intensity and colour: an understanding of the nature of the source of illumination has led Max Keller, the Lighting Master at the Kammerspiele in Munich, to employ many types of source in his work, and it is these secrets which he generously shares in his book.

As we would expect from such a comprehensive volume, conventional sources of light, traditional optical design and lighting techniques are described in full, and to a depth which is rarely explained (or understood) by other authors. But even the most technical subjects of spectral analysis of a variety of lamps, and the physics of optical performance of lenses are clearly described with the assistance of expert graphical presentation.

Colour is omnipresent in the style of Max Keller, and the effects of additive and subtractive mixing techniques are demonstrated, and to illustrate his point, the author cites the opinions of respected philosophers, scientists, authors and artists who have discoursed on the theory of colour: active versus passive; strong versus weak.

But far from being a philosophical textbook, the academic subjects are perfectly balanced by discussions on the practical elements of stage lighting – guidance on choosing the correct equipment, accessories and controls. The chapter on projection is particularly noteworthy as it unravels the mysteries of objective lenses, parallax correction, calculations and isometric sketches.

An excellent book, and one which I hope will be translated into English in the near future.

Andy Collier

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Dear Sir,

Having read, with great interest, the TABS supplementary booklet, 'Lighting the Amateur Stage' by Francis Reid, I have been following the suggestions for area planning and a play' as described on page 3 of part one.

I have to admit, though, that we do not appear to have any 'loose' peripheral areas on our stage. All our peripheral areas seem to be quite tight and firmly held in place.

We do, however, find it useful, when concentrating on action in the centre of the stage, to 'lose' peripheral areas. I hope Mr. Reid would approve of this.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank you for producing a very useful and interesting booklet.

Yours faithfully,

Alicia Pink
Hereford

Dear Sir,

The Chronology of Strand Firsts in the last issue of TABS made fascinating reading.

The 1956 reference to Riverside Studio 3 is particularly interesting since, as everyone knows, Riverside Studios 1 & 2 were in the main complex on the side of Crisp Road nearer to the river. Riverside Studio 3 was, however, the Chancellors Public House on the opposite side of the road.

It is to my eternal regret that I now find that for some totally inexplicable reason I was never privileged to attend a performance by the operator shown in your illustration, one Mr Paul Weston I believe, of a Colour Music rendition of 'Knees Up Mother No. 56'.

Yours nostalgically,

Nigel Wright
Northwood