

'Woody' of Strand



Way up on the top floor of 29 King Street in Covent Garden long years ago was a small room with a couple of doors because it also had to act as a passage, jammed together in this 'office' were the staff of the old Strand Electric's S.O. dept. These initials stood for Sales Other and meant *any* lighting *anywhere* except for theatre lighting in the U.K. – that, the real stuff of Strand, was the province of T.L.D. (Theatre Lighting Dept.) the pride of the firm in a suite on the first floor, under the famous L.G. Applebee. Those immediate post-war years represented a return to the tradition in which Strand made and designed for the home market which it actively pursued; while any exports, some like S'Carlos Lisbon very large indeed, were the result of someone somewhere asking for a quotation please!

What changed all this was the entry of James Templeton Wood upstage – in Manchester to be precise. There in Oldham

Road he joined Percy Corry as assistant manager Northern branch; not exactly, in 1946, a natural launch pad for the Continent of Europe. Around a year later Woody could be found in the disused, or rather the used-as-a-hire-scenery-store, chapel next door making an electronic dimmer. Thanks to the Thyristor, chopped-waveform all-electric dimmers have been taken for granted for a couple of decades now; but in those distant days 'chopping' meant Thyratrons. Only Woody, who had been in Radar and had risen to Lieutenant-Commander during the war, could find valves familiar territory. Inevitably Woody came to London but did not join R & D as would seem logical but landed a desk in S.O. dept.

The early days of Woody's Electronic have been told in some detail by William Bundy in the ABTT's *Sightline* (Vol.17 No.2). As Bill was Woody's installation engineer at that time, one gets the true atmosphere, from inside, of the pioneering which hung overall. And both the equipment itself and the locale of the first installation represented pioneering indeed. In 1949 Iceland was not a natural to try out for the first time a 144-way 2-preset based entirely on the young technology of electronics and thyatron valves. Even the design of the three dimmer banks, based as it was on sheet metal construction instead of channel and angle iron, was new to our works. And dimmer levers and tablet switches were all special.

Whatever the virtues of the thyatron dimmer, there was no doubt that the duplicate 2-

preset desk with cross-fader between was just what stage lighting people wanted and orders both here and abroad came quickly. Too many and too soon in fact and as with the ill-fated Comet aircraft we were ahead of the technology which would ensure reliable and efficient performance. Nevertheless some of the jobs – notably that pioneer in Iceland and the 1951 Stratford-upon-Avon – went on giving satisfaction for a couple of decades. The Electronic made contacts for Woody in Scandinavia, Holland, France and Germany and his change of role was automatic. Somehow or other Export began to take off: in spite of his being buried still in S.O. dept, that 'somehow' was undoubtedly Woody.

When at long last things could be regularised, the editor of TABS, after much thought, tactfully announced in April 1959: 'Mr. J. T. Wood becomes Manager of the Export Department. Mr. Wood was Sales Engineer for Europe and has spent the greater part of his thirteen years with Strand Electric abroad.' One of the things to bear in mind was that travel was by no means as rapid as now. With piston-engined aircraft a journey really was a journey and for quite a time the turbo-prop Viscount represented a dazzling increase in speed with the Comet, in which Woody travelled several times, the equivalent of the Concorde, Woody was Strand as far as the agents and customers on the Continent were concerned. Across the Channel he became a different man – he blossomed. And this in spite of the fact that his only reasonably fluent second language was

French. Although Woody had a very informal way of going about things, he had a clear idea of the protocol in some countries and adjusted accordingly. He never made the mistake of over-familiarity. Yet with the band of Strand agents, which he had got together, he was on family terms – a colleague and friend. He had an extraordinary memory with the disconcerting ability to pick up any conversation just where it had been broken off maybe weeks or months ago – or after retirement probably a year or more. He, unlike most of us especially when we get old, never seemed at a loss to put a name to a face.

Personally, although I journeyed abroad with Woody several times over the years it is the first, in 1956, which sticks in my mind. We covered Germany and Austria in Gerd Ohlmer's V.W. 'Beetle'. Three men in an upside-down boat so to speak; but in place of Montmorency the dog, we had Pattern 93 spot to cope with. We even repeated exactly the immortal trio's Datchet search for somewhere to sleep – but in Bad Ish! Success followed such pioneering and later Gerd, with Woody's support, started the W.German Strand Electric firm in Salzdahlum. However, space only allows the final scene in the medieval church in Littleton Surrey. The memorial service over, a group of Strand types could be seen around the console of the new Dutch electronic organ keenly discussing with the organist the *demerits* of its stop-tablets and piston action – Woody would have appreciated that!

Fred Benthams (October 1985)

CADENZA P A NEW EFFECTS PROJECTOR FROM STRAND LIGHTING



Strand's Cadenza EP 2000W Effects Projector, now in production is the successor to the now obsolete Pattern 252.

As the name implies the Cadenza EP follows the styling and appearance of the Cadenza 2000W series spotlights, and in fact the main housing closely resembles the Cadenza Fresnel. Measuring 400 x 415 x 370mm and weighing 14.5kg (excluding effects disc) it is smaller and lighter in weight and, more importantly, the light output is approximately twice the intensity of the 252 it replaces. Moreover, its smaller size does make it more suited to the cramped conditions of a circle front box.

Thunder and Fleecy Clouds, Snow

and Flames are but a few of the effects that are available in Strand's comprehensive range of disc type Moving Effects Attachments. Of more than passing interest to existing users of Strand's moving effects is that all accessories currently listed for the Pattern 252 will fit the Cadenza EP.

The introduction of the Cadenza EP closes the one remaining gap in Strand's extensive range of Profile, Prism Convex and Fresnel spotlights – a new series that began with Minim, Prelude and Harmony in the Autumn of 1981, subsequently extended by Nocturne and Coda floodlights, 2000W Cadenza's and Solo followspots.