

CUE

Technical Theatre Review

September - October 1979



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Shown here is the original sculpture by Bohuslava Schnircha above the Prague National Theatre. The gold replica shown on the front cover was won by the British Team at the Prague Quadrennial of Theatre Design, see page 6.

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CUE

Technical Theatre Review

September - October 1979

Curtain-raiser

This is Cue 1. Overture and beginners, please.

Without wishing to dwell on or in the past it would be disingenuous not to take this opportunity to record this magazine's debt (and your debt) to TABS/Stage Lighting International, and all the people who contributed to it, over a run that makes that of "The Mousetrap" seem like a nine day's wonder.

With Rank/Strand acting as the benevolent angel, Tabs built up a record of backstage activities that ran all the way from vaudeville to audio-videoville, from Burlesque to Burl Ives, from Stratford . . . on Avon . . . atte Bowe to Ontario. Some back numbers, it is rumoured, now have a fascination for collectors akin to that of souvenir programmes for royal performances at Convent Garden or even early Pirelli calendars.

If, over the next thirty years, CUE doesn't manage to provide the same sort of inside information service it will all be your fault. Luckily, nowadays (quite apart from the milling millions of instant critics any performance on any stage anywhere provokes into attention, outrage or apathy) there are far more professionals, working within far more disciplines in technical theatre, to carry the can.

The trouble with the theatre today is that there's an awful lot more of it about. There just aren't the losses there were in the fifties and sixties to bingo and ten-pin-bowling. Despite V.A.T. (everybody out on the streets, Thursday, and deconsecrate Mr St John Stevas), despite the apparently inexorable alternative of subsidy or subsidency, theatres are being opened, re-opened or re-furbished all over. Locally and vocally the Save-Our-Theatre Movement is in full cry and fine nick. In the most improbable places leisure-centres are rising and, with them, civic pride, administrative neurosis, and, of course, the rates. Conventions and conferences (known to some of their audiences as the real meaning of the "theatre of cruelty") have become computer-controlled spectacles.

It's all theatre. It's all technical theatre. It's all show-business in the slippery grip of a rapidly changing technology. And thank your lucky apprenticeships, your friendly neighbourhood union, or your grasp of the principles of the alternative economy—it's all yours.

So are the pages of CUE. Look on them, and contribute to them, as the minutes of your meetings, your memoranda to management, your confessional or your club.

And remember, as Groucho Marx once said, "all the jokes can't be funny".

Autolycus

Have egg will travel

The British triumph in Prague is related in pictures and words on another page. Among those whose work was selected for the British Exhibit were Liz da Costa and Alison Chitty. To Alison Chitty we are additionally grateful for the pictorial record of the event she brought back: Clearly costume design is not her only talent.

Liz da Costa was delighted her work was selected to go to Prague alongside that of the longer established designers, and thinks it may have something to do with the fact that whereas other young ladies, asked what they want for Christmas, usually plump for frills, furbelows and gewgaws, she is more likely to demand a new electric-drill. This makes her very versatile, she thinks, where decor becomes structure and vice versa.

Liz has an amusing story to tell about her work for the Emma dance companies. She



Liz da Costa works for theatre and ballet. She produced the design for "Solo Ride", one of LCDT's most successful productions last year (Photo: Anthony Crickway).

was commissioned, for a piece called *The Lesson* based on Alice in Wonderland, to make a very large Hieronymus Bosch-type egg in fibre-glass. Having painstakingly hatched it in her back garden, she found it had become too large to go through her doorway. After friends got it through by brute force, it then had to be man-handled on to a car roof-rack, which must have puzzled the police. When finally they arrived at the home of EMMA in Loughborough the egg was coated in two inches of ice. "All rather hysterical", she says.

Out, out, damned spots

To start an amiable argument we talked to Toby Sedgwick, one of the moving spirits of the Moving Picture Mime Show, opening a new programme on September 10th at the Collegiate Theatre, London University's neat little stumping ground

off Gower Street. With his partners in mime (they came together at the Mime School in Paris) Paul Filipiak and David Gaines, he will be tackling, as the main work, the group's translation into mime of "The Lottery", a story by the Argentinian master of irony Luis Borges.

Their mimes, which are done in the classic "whiteface" or in intricately formalised masks, can suffer badly, Sedgwick thinks, if they get too tangled up in all the instant technology available in a modern theatre. Mime requires the ultimate in concentration and self-indentification by the audience, the minimum distraction from a flash-bang-wallop-oh-what-a-picture style of presentation. We asked him how many lights he thought appropriate. "Eleven," he said, without blinking. For how big an audience? "Four hundred," he said generously. And your worst theatrical experience, we asked. "Playing in what I think was a football stadium in Yugoslavia", he said, with a slight shudder. "But if you're at all subsidised (MPMS get a modest Arts Council Grant) you go anywhere, anytime for anybody."

Chief Technician to the Moving Picture Mime Show is Sally Muir, daughter of the ubiquitous and omniscient Frank; so we asked *her* how she squared up to the problem that seemed to be posed. "I try to get them what they want," she said loyally and in resignation.

It seems to CUE that, as in the case here, quite a few subtle pleasures are being denied to audiences on a principle of maximum utilisation of resources in production. Is there in matters of both lighting and sound a tendency to a doctrine of "if we've got it they'll get it and like it"? In film studios it is a standing joke, of course, that, as fast as the director kills lights to produce the gothik misterioso in a central image he feels he needs, his lighting/Camera man ("I'm just not getting it, Joe") just as quickly restores full illumination to all four corners of the rectangle. And there is always the case of the singer, with the delicate blue notes we admire so much on disc, who is reduced, by the volume of her backing group, to being just a frightened face at the level-crossing as a high-speed train goes by.

In mime, anyway, small is beautiful. Maybe there ought to be a lighting plot to match.

Sir John Tooley

John Tooley, the General Administrator of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, was made a Knight in the Birthday Honours List earlier this year.

He first joined the Royal Opera House in 1955 as David Webster's assistant, he was then twenty eight. Four years later he became Assistant General Administrator

and when Sir David Webster retired in 1970, John Tooley succeeded him.

It was a fortunate decision to appoint someone from inside who had by then had 15 years experience in the team which had built up a national company at the Garden.

It would be a mistake however, to imagine that since 1970 John Tooley has simply successfully presided over an established organisation, although this would have been no mean achievement in itself. Under John Tooley's leadership the Royal Opera has advanced artistically and technically to the stage where it is now recognised as an international company with a reputation second to none.

The artistic standards, the glittering casts and the seemingly inevitable successful foreign tours, are now so familiar that we take them for granted. None of these would have been possible however without the less glamorous but vital skills of sheer good organisation and business acumen. The latter must approach genius in Sir John Tooley's case when you consider the low level of support the Royal Opera House enjoys compared with any similar company abroad.

New life for old piers

Suddenly everybody who is anybody is rediscovering seaside piers. And only just in time. We are down to the last 47½ out of the 84 that once protruded their barnacled bills into the waters round our coasts. Or 48½ if you count the great, apocryphal Wigan Pier which has been a comedian's stand-by for many years, and is said to have been invented at the equally famous Wig an' Pen Club in Fleet Street.

With Dick Emery taking over from Frankie Howerd at the Wellington Pier in Great Yarmouth our own Francis Reid has been playing the Pavilion at Cromer. He writes about its happy resuscitation on another page.

Whether or not the "What the butler saw" machines have been converted for showing "Danish Dentist on the Job" seems to matter very little—piers and their shows have always been renowned for good dirty fun. One remembers with pleasure the pierrot troupe immortalised in "The Immortal Hour" ("they sing . . . and they dance . . . and they're terrible"), the lugubrious and permanently unsuccessful fishermen who remain impervious even to roller-skaters over their lines, the curious flavour that a first course of whelks gives to an ice-cream cone, the funny hats, the fortune-tellers, and the Fol de Rols. Everything promotes a willing suspension of disbelief that makes one ready to visit piers again.

Sir John Betjeman, who has (who else?) just been elected President of the august body dedicating itself to the preservation of this species of marine monster, the National Piers Society, likes them very much. He "thinks" he once mentioned the pier at Cliftonville in a poem that he has forgotten. Certainly, R. H. Barham (he of the Ingoldsby Legends) was one of the first poets to record *his* experiences on a pier (in his epic that begins "I was in Margate



last July, I walked upon the pier"). It is a tickling-stick in CUE's cap, however, to have discovered some lines, probably written *before* the time of Coleridge, that suggest some historic sympathy with the lighting and sound people engaged, through the years, to keep the pierrots pirouetting. They go like this:-

*On Wigan Pier did Shobiz Khan
A stately pleasure-drome decree:
Where Alf, the Chief Technician, ran
Through routines meaningless to man
Down by an oily sea.*

*So twice ten feet of upstage ground
With lighting-towers were girdled round:
And there were battens thick with floating
spots
Where crackled many a carbide-burning lamp;
And here was wiring ancient as old plots
To carry every flying watt and amp . . .*

*The shadows of Alf's dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the dock;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the Bingo and the Rock.
. . . It was a miracle of rare device
To see Isolde done in drag—on ice!*

Rambling along the Rambla

Barcelona is said to have 25 theatres. By expensive taxi it is possible to locate about six, most of which, despite their impressive facades and prestigious names, turn out in fact to be *salas de espectaculos* or, as we might call them, Talk of the Towns. Of the legit theatres the *Barcelona* itself is cheerfully staging a romp attributed to Frederick Soler ("*farsa erotica-escatalogica*" the publicity says, and we hope we don't know what it means), the *Apolo* is doing something called "*Seductora*" ("*extraordinario montaje coreografico*"), and the Lyceum, Barcelona's Opera House, is very firmly closed: despite its stake in the marvellous indigenous talents of Placido Domingo and Monserrat Caballe, and lacking any sort of subsidy, it only manages to open about four months of the year.

The work Christopher Baldwin (commuting from Builth Wells) has been doing, and which he writes about on page 18, is for the brothers Ramon and Antonio Riba, whose interests as impresarios and artistic directors extend from Barcelona and Madrid all the way to Mexico (where they are staging "*The Deluge*") and occasionally to London. Their latest venture has been the inauguration of the glamorous "*Galas*" in

Salou (down the coast by Tarragona), which is designed to replace, as a tourist attraction, their ill-fated *Scala-Barcelona* which burned down as the result of what the newspaper *Vanguardia* calls "*un entado terroriste*".

If, however, Barcelona is not really a city of theatres in the London or New York sense it glories in the technical and visual exploits of perhaps the most theatrical architect ever known, Antonio Gaudi, whose pieces of "scenery in stone" rear up all over, as palaces, houses, even shops. His astonishing Temple of the Holy Family, started way back in 1882, is now coming along fast, entirely according to the plans he left—even for details like the Paschal candle-holders. And no set-designer we ever heard of has equalled the inventive exuberance of his pavilions and artifacts and follies in, say, Barcelona's *Parque de Guell*.

Light on their feet

While lighting designers are justly singled out for mention, it is all too easy to overlook the unsung backstage technicians who rig and operate the lighting.

We spoke to Adrian Dightam, chief lighting engineer with the London Contemporary Dance Theatre, who was taking a breather after LCDT'S splendid three-week season at Sadler's Wells in the summer.

He was full of praise for the Dance Theatre, which he considers is unique in the care it takes in lighting. I've been with LCDT for five years now, he says, and for lighting techniques this is a very exciting company to work with.

The LCDT has been invited to do six weeks at the London Coliseum next year. Plans are already being laid for a new lighting rig which, Dightam says, should be quite revolutionary. John B. Read, who has worked for LCDT ever since it was formed 10 years ago, will be designing for the Coliseum.

Dightam admires the way John B. Read is always striving for new ideas, without resorting to any sort of gimmickry.

He thinks Read's design for the LCDT'S "*Masque of Separation*", which included a stunning passage in which the stage is filled with dark red and pierced with shafts of gold from the wings is one of his best.

What Dightam likes about the whole company is that everybody is very close, with a family atmosphere about it. That

goes for the dancers too, who are very aware of the lighting—very aware of where they should be at the right time in the dance.

In October LCDT will strike new territory at the Roundhouse. For Dightam working in the round for the first time this will pose some challenging lighting problems. Meanwhile he describes on another page some of the rigs and the day to day workings in lighting London Contemporary Dance.

Mystery in the air

Though he is probably too modest to admit it, lighting designer James Laws performed a small and extremely appropriate miracle in lighting a cycle of open air mystery plays in a field in Hampshire last month.

His illumination of the divine mystery was executed with the aid of four 30 foot lighting towers with two operators on each and the entire system linked to a transformer on a pole. The electricity board originally asked £1,000 for the supply, but in an act of unusual generosity, allowed themselves to be talked down to £800.

A mystery play was a medieval religious entertainment produced by tradesmen's guilds and based on Bible stories or the lives of the saints. It was the practice in large towns for each guild to contribute one play to the cycle, the best-known being the York, Coventry and Towneley cycles. Performances, which lasted from sunrise to sunset, were held in the open air on large four-wheeled carts known as pageants.

The actors were paid, but they were also subject to fines if they didn't learn their parts properly. The guilds had a very strict code of discipline. Men dressed as devils or "tormentors" in black buckram with nails and dice on them stood at the left hand side of the mobile stage (Hell was always on the left and Heaven on the right) concealing the crouching prompters. Today's tormentors are made of cardboard or wood of course, but the name has stuck.

In those days the mystery cycles included anything from 20-50 plays and were at the height of their popularity in England and Europe from about 1300-1450.

Last month's latter-day Jesus Christ Superstar production was a 10-day epic. The organisers chose the Lincoln Mystery Cycle consisting of 20 plays. James Laws said that the earliest references to it go back to 1471. Director Kay Northwood used a translation from old English by Martial Rose. Designer Clare Jeffrey was in charge of the three-level stage.

The setting was Elvetham Park, and the mysteries were performed without the aid of microphones by about 100 amateur actors.

The Lord of the Manor, Sir Richard Calthorpe, provided the site. And the ambitious project was backed by 10 others who put up £1,000 each. Now if that's not an act of faith, we don't know what is.

James Laws will be writing on how he lit the production in the next issue of CUE.

Autolycus column contributed by Mike Walker and Anthony Pugh.

Classified Advertisers

Due to lack of space we were unable to include classified advertisements in this issue and we apologise to all those advertisers we have had to disappoint. We shall however have a classified section in all future issues which as well as the normal trade classifications will include "WANTED" and "FOR SALE" Sections. The cost is 30p per word or £6.50 per column centimetre for classified display. Rate cards giving full details are available.

British Stage Designers bring home the Golden Triga

JOHN BURY, O.B.E.

This summer seventeen British theatre designers went to Prague and came home with the Golden Triga! So baffling is this simple statement that it is no wonder that the British press failed to broadcast the good news—for good news it was!

The Golden Triga—or Troika, if one speaks Russian, not Czech—is a golden reproduction on a fairly, but not very, small scale, of a group of statuary on the roof of the National Theatre in Prague. It is awarded every four years as the top prize to the best national team exhibiting at the Prague Quadrennial of Theatre Design. The Prague Quadrennial is again not an occasion which causes much excitement for the average inhabitant of the British Isles, but for the theatre designer it is the tops. There is a Biennale in Sao Paolo, but that's too far away; there is a triennale in Novy Said, Yugoslavia, but that's linked to the tourist industry. The Prague Quadrennial, however, is a most serious and representative exhibition of theatre design. Every four years designers from 20-30 countries,

state-aided or impoverished, converge on Prague and there, in the large exhibition halls of the Brussels Pavilion, exhibit their best work from the last four years. (The Brussels Pavilion is so called as it was brought back to Prague after housing the Czech Exhibition at the Brussels World Fair). After the Exhibition the generous Czechs, guided by an international jury, distribute gold and silver medals in all categories, and, last but not least, the coveted Gold Triga.

It's not just an East European affair, with all that that entails. The West Europeans: France, Italy, West Germany, Holland and Belgium play a large role—the USA, Canada and Mexico turn up in force. Japan appears, wonderfully in 1975 when they won the costume gold, and slightly disappointing this year. The third world is represented with a sprinkling of talent. Finally, there are the USSR and the East Europeans in their subsidised ranks, which include East Germany and Czechoslovakia, two countries who had it all their own way



Setting up the exhibition in Prague's Brussels Pavilion.



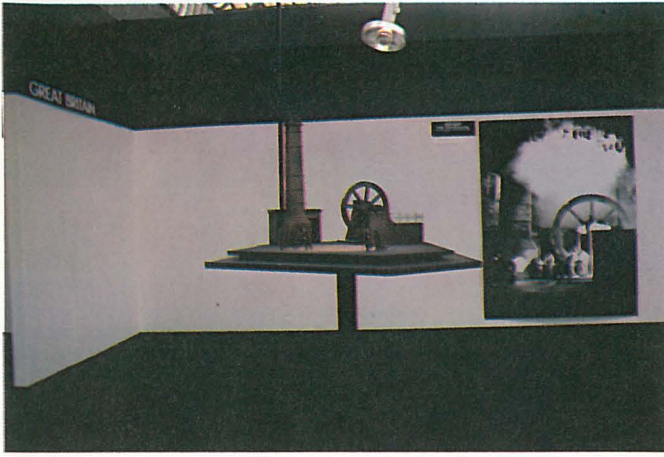
Mary Moore and Ralph Koltai getting their levels right.



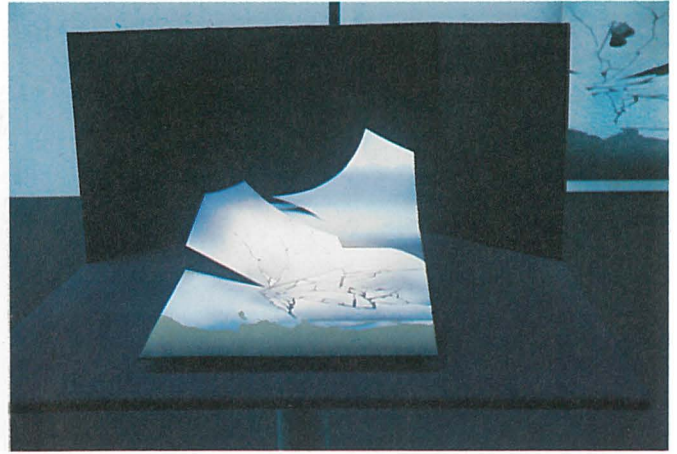
Some practical help with a screwdriver by John Bury, assisted by Nick Darke and Colin Chambers.



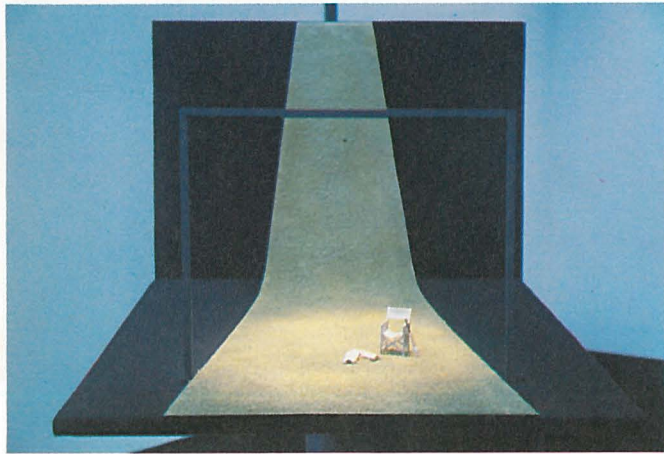
Czech workers busy with the decorations.



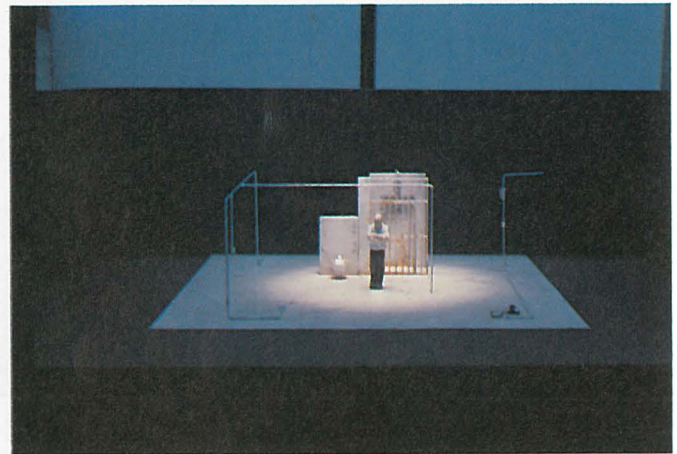
John Bury *Strife* National Theatre



Ralph Koltai *Brand* National Theatre



Mary Moore *Gimme Shelter* Royal Court



Chris Dyer *Jail Diary of Albie Sachs* RSC Other Place

in theatre design in the post war years, and only now have yielded their laurels to the west, the west in the form of Great Britain!

The British exhibit, put together by the Society of British Theatre Designers, was distilled from our very successful Riverside Exhibition of last February. The distilling process was entrusted to a small panel of two directors: William Gaskill and Christopher Morahan; two designers: Jocelyn Herbert and Ralph Koltai; and a representative from each of the Arts Council and the British Council. I chaired the panel jointly with Peter Gill, the Director of Riverside Studios.

We didn't want a large and representative exhibition. We had seen too many of these from other countries at Prague, and that way boredom lay! We had to risk offending people—we had to choose the unique. We found seven models and six sets of drawings—to these we added the work of three selected designers who genuinely had not been able to exhibit at Riverside. To this we added the wonderful puppets of Jennifer Carey and the exhibition was complete.

All we needed now was money. A grant of £3000.00 from the British Council was a great improvement on the £250.00 we received in 1975, but still not much compared to the sums at the disposal of other countries: only about a tenth, for example, of that available to our close rivals, the



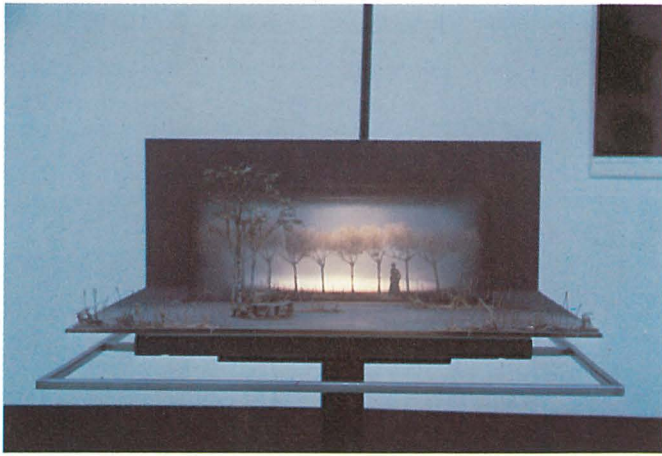
Alison Chitty – Costume drawings for *The Tempest* (Harpy) and *Fanshen* (poor peasants). Victoria Theatre, Stoke on Trent.



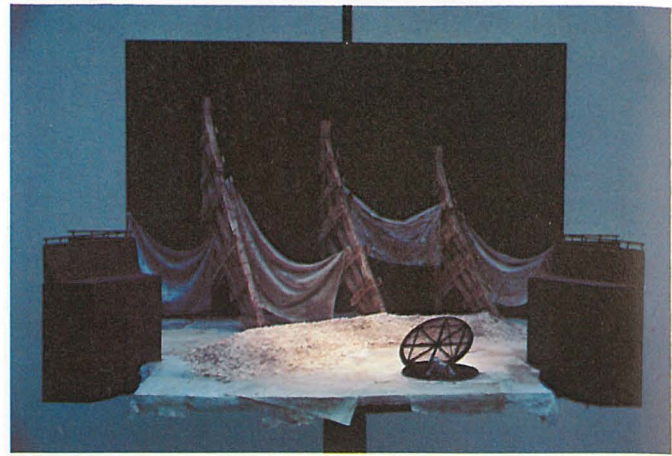
West Germans. Still, it paid for the transport, some nice frames for the drawings, and a distinguished set of labels. What more could we want?

All the designers provided the displays at

their own expense, and all except the few who raised travel grants paid for themselves to Prague. All that worries us is a possible complacent feeling in high places that if we were properly funded we wouldn't be near-



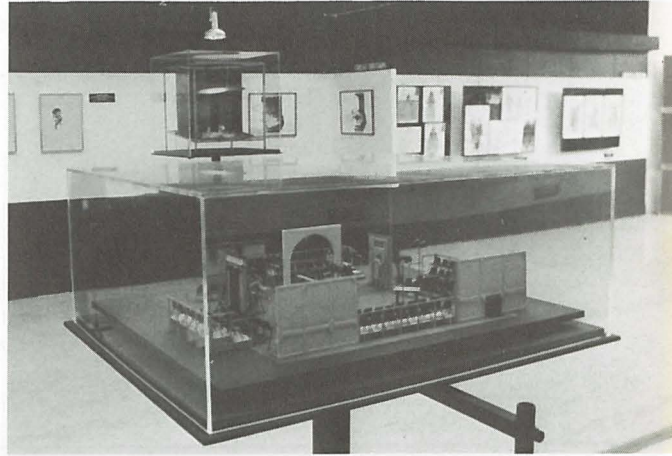
Robin Don *Eugene Onegin* Snape



Maria Bjornson *Sons of Light* Newcastle



Jennifer Carey *Puppets*



Peter Hartwell *Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* Riverside Studios



The prize giving ceremony was held in The Great Hall of the Waldstein Palace.



Curtain Call for members of the triumphant British team. (left to right) Ralph Koltai, Jennifer Carey holding the Triga, John Bury, Pippy Bradshaw, Deirdre Clancy, Mary Moore, Chris Dyer and Alison Chitty. Abigail and Matthew Bury are the admiring observers in the foreground.

ly so good! And may be, looking around at Prague, one feels they might be right! However, we feel the risk might be worth taking.

Our Exhibition is now back in London. It will be shown regionally this year and will be back in Europe next year. After that, Japan, Australia and the USA beckon—but theatre models are fragile and 1983 will be quadrennial time again.

*Photographs by Alison Chitty and Ralph Koltai.
Cover picture: Robin Don*

THE COMPLETE LIST OF BRITISH EXHIBITS:

MODELS

STRIFE: John Bury
 BRAND: Ralph Koltai
 CORIOLANUS: Farrah
 RAGGED TROUSERED
 PHILANTHROPISTS: Peter Hartwell
 GIMME SHELTER: Mary Moore
 MIDSUMMER NIGHT'S DREAM: John Napier
 JAIL DIARY OF ALBIE SACHS: Chris Dyer
 EUGENE ONEGIN: Robin Don
 SONS OF LIGHT: Maria Bjornson

PUPPETS & ILLUSTRATED BOOK

Jennifer Carey
 Ariane Gastambide

COSTUME DRAWINGS

Deirdre Clancy
 David Short
 Pippy Bradshaw
 Alison Chitty
 Liz da Costa
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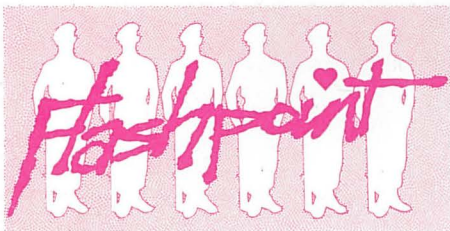
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Lighting by the Book

FRANCIS REID

The experience of editing TABS taught me—among, of course, some other things—that (A) the readers liked case histories, but that (B) the average lighting design is too detailed for explanation and illustration on the printed page. However, in the past year I found myself lighting a couple of West End shows which were not only small in scale but which, unusually in a business which thrives on exceptions, were lit almost exactly according to the book (or at least according to many people's books, including my own). One was a play, the other a musical . . .



Barry Parman's setting for *Flashpoint*, directed by Anton Rodgers at the Mayfair Theatre.












It would be difficult indeed to design a box set more boxlike than *Flashpoint*—a non-political (yes, non-political!) play about the army in Northern Ireland.

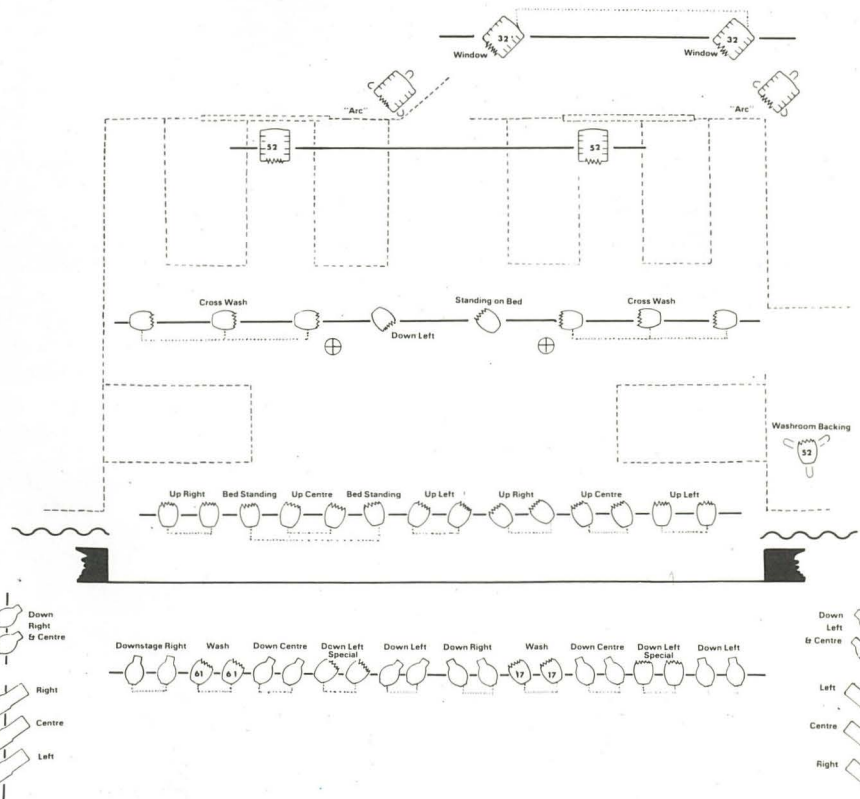
The box was a nissen-hut barrack-room with the side walls running up and down stage, and the end wall running across and to the front of the stage. The door was upstage centre with a window on each side, and the furnishings limited to beds and lockers positioned with appropriate military respect for symmetry.

Flashpoint is a naturalistic play and the lighting must relate logically to its apparent source: two naked bulbs hanging from the (supposed) ceiling. Their harshness provided the clue to filter choice for the lighting instruments—none. Apart from a touch of gold tint in the backlight and a touch of blue in a couple of front-of-house circuits, this was an open white play.

In the matter of light outside the windows, some licence was taken in the in-

terests of dramatic effect. The entire action of the play takes place at night, but night in an army camp is neither black nor blue—logically there would be some warm light from the street lamps, other huts, etc. However at the climax of the play when one soldier is holding his fellows as hostages at gunpoint, "arc-lights" are directed onto the hut and subsequently shot out. The impact of the scene is helped by maximum contrast and so the external light on the

-  Pattern 264 (plan) 1kW Profile
-  Pattern 264 (section) 1kW Profile
-  Pattern 764 1kW Profile
-  T Spot 1kW Profile
-  Pattern 23 (plan) ½kW Profile
-  Pattern 23 (section) ½kW Profile
-  Parblazer 1kW (120 volt) Sealed Beam Par 64
-  Pattern 750 1kW Beamlight
-  Pattern 743 1kW Fresnel
-  Pattern 123 ½kW Fresnel
-  Pattern 137 Fotofloods Random Flashed for Battle Effect



window panes was restricted to a deepish blue.

The Mayfair, unlike most London West End theatres, has a reasonable stock of lighting instruments and so it was possible to light the play entirely from the theatre's own resources. The Mayfair's front-of-house positions are good, with a bar over the stalls seating giving a particularly sympathetic face angle (being a tiny theatre—310 seats—ladder access to this bar is not a problem). As can be seen from the plan, six pairs of instruments on the first stage bar were focused in a conventional fan-setting on the upstage areas (left, centre, and right); and, similarly, six pairs from the foh bar covered the downstage areas. All six areas had a comfortable degree of overlap.

The midstage bar gave a cross-wash and the auditorium side-bars (again set in a left/centre/right two-direction configuration) helped to model the actors from the lower angle. The only instruments that could be called specials were some 123s focused to highlight a couple of key scenes

lights, and subtle changes of emphasis where the lighting balance was cheated so that the audience's concentration was controlled in a subconscious rather than conscious way. The plot worked easily on the Mayfair's two preset LC system, although *Flashpoint* was this board's last show—memory, in the shape of *Duet*, has now taken over.



"Look kid, I don't say this every day of the week, but you're going places. You got class and you got what it takes."

Thanks Sylvia. But I happen to think that I can stick right here with Johnny and still get my name in lights."

"If you stick right here with Johnny, the only way you'll get your name in lights is if you change it to Coco-Cola."

This kind of dialogue will be very familiar to anyone who loves showbiz as portrayed in the *I'm gonna make you a star* type of Hollywood showbiz movie. Alas, they don't make 'em that way any more, but you can still catch a re-run on television most weeks.

The programme of *The Great American Backstage Musical* listed the scenes simply as *Place and Time: New York, London and the battlefields of Europe, 1939 to 1945*. In fact the locations included backstage, onstage, the dressing rooms of tacky clubs and Broadway hits, tea at the Ritz and coffee at a Soda Fountain, entertaining the front line troops (direct hit, next scene field hospital) etc. etc. All the normal stuff that epic musicals are made of. But this was the Regent Theatre—a cinema with a small, no wings, no flies, token stage.

But designer Robert Dein worked miracles of scenic statement. Two portals of black glossed scaffolding lined with black bolton sheeting framed one of the Regent's peculiarities, turning it into an asset. If a small stage happens to have an attractive cast iron balustraded balcony running along the back wall and blocking a significant part of the stage's depth, there is no point in ignoring it. For it will not go away: you just have to use it. And so this balcony became many things. The miniature roll-up cloths for the club stage scenes were hung under it to convey smallness of scale. It became a cross-lit feature of the Ritz. It became the location of the Soda Fountain scene. It became a useful level for dry-ice tanks and flash-boxes. It was only hidden for the Broadway Spectacular scenes when a full height pair of silver lurex tabs made, by contrast, a very big statement.

Within this framework, small cut-outs, mini-trucks and essential furniture were used to suggest location. This scenery had to be small—there was little wing space to store it and, even with a cast of only six, an acting area of about 18 × 16 feet does not leave a great deal of room for lavish scenery.

There were three types of lighting required:

- (1) Straight "play" lighting for the dialogue scenes.
- (2) Atmospheric treatment for the musical numbers.
- (3) More heightened, exaggerated treatment of the musical numbers taking place on stages (the "musicals within a musical").

The lighting rig was a scaled-down version of the type of rig used on big musicals. Pale natural tints from the front, heavyish colour from the sides, and really saturated colour from above and behind.

The Regent is so small that all face light has to come from the front, but there are

"FLASHPOINT" — CUE SYNOPSIS

Q1	SSecs.	BUILD WINDOWS (BLUE)
Q2	SNAP	ROOM SWITCH ON
Q3	SNAP	WASHROOM ON
Q4	CHART	CONCENTRATE U.S.L.
Q5	CHART	RESTORE
Q6	CHART	BUILD STANDING ON BED U.R.
Q7	CHART	REARRANGE FOR SITTING ON FLOOR
Q8	SSecs.	FADE TO BLACKOUT

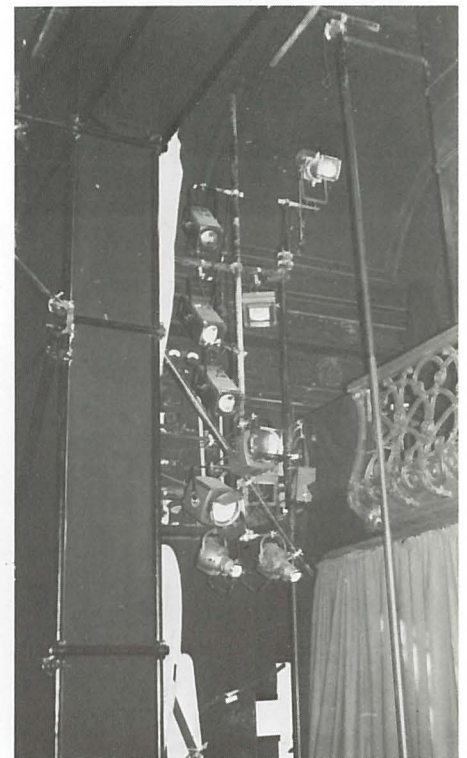
INTERVAL

Q9	SSecs.	FADE UP AS WAS
Q10	CHART	REARRANGE TO 3BARS + DSL
Q11	SNAP	"ARCS" ON
Q12	SNAP	ROOM SWITCH OFF
Q13	SNAP	"ARCS" OUT WITH GUNSHOTS
Q14	SNAP	ROOM SWITCH ON
Q15	CHART	ADD FOR INTERROGATION D.R.
Q16	SSecs.	FADE TO BLACKOUT

in the play—one played standing on the upstage right bed and the other in the down left corner. (Throughout, the terms right and left are used to indicate the actor's left and right, not the audience's.)

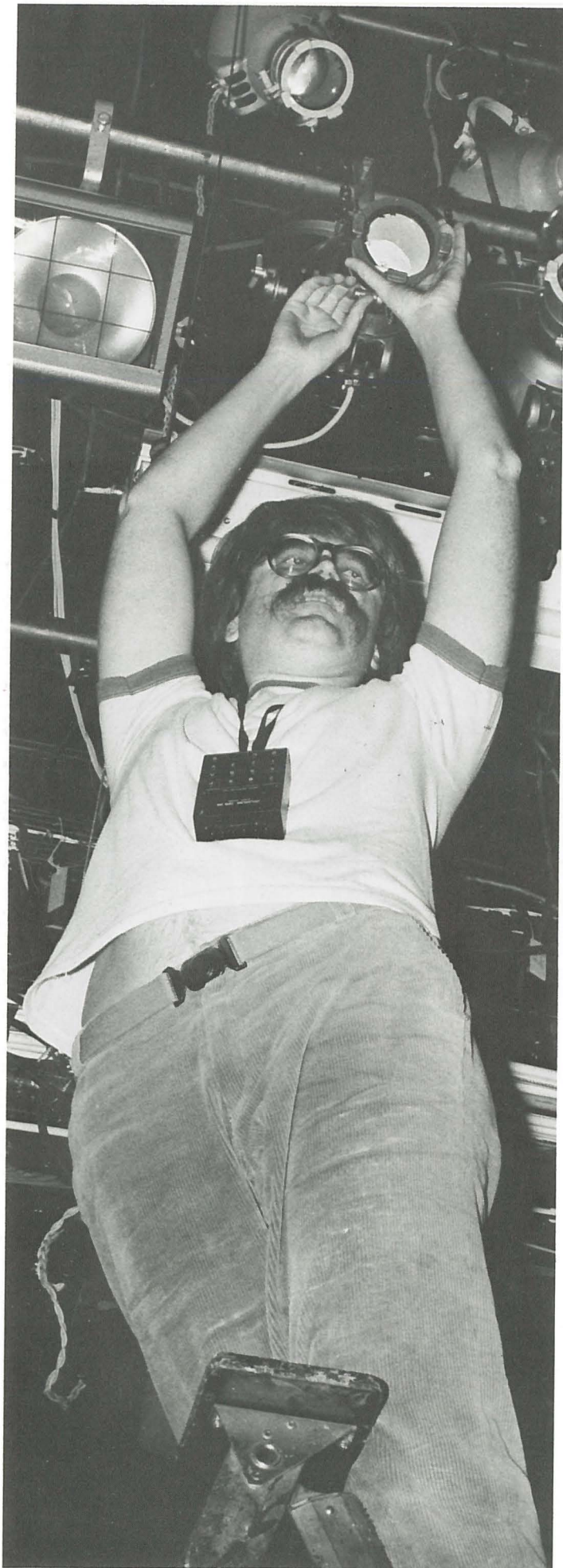
There were two upstage bars. The bar just downstage of the back wall of the set gave a simple wash of backlight on the actors, while the last one backlit the windows. The "arc-lights" were pattern 243 fresnels—on stands to give the appropriate horizontal angle for dramatic effect when the window was broken and the room lights switched off.

The cues worked on two levels: naturalistic switching of the practical room



Backstage at The Great American Backstage Musical, directed and choreographed by Robert Talmadge in settings by Robert Dein at the Regent Theatre. This picture shows the upstage right boom.

two ceiling bars over the stalls at a good face angle, together with another bar over the balcony and a pair of booms at the balcony sides giving good fill. The stalls ceiling bars were focused straight in with no crossing (yes, perhaps a little flattening but in this particular show it was more important to keep the dialogue scenes tight with minimum light spill on the black portal frames). On such a small stage there was



Even here on top of the ladder, you have full control over the light with AVAB's wireless remote controller.

WHAT THE WELL-DRESSED LIGHTING DESIGNER IS WEARING

The AVAB 2001 remote controller is a unique accessory to the AVAB 2001 microcomputer controlled light-board, manufactured in Göteborg, Sweden by AVAB Elektronik AB.

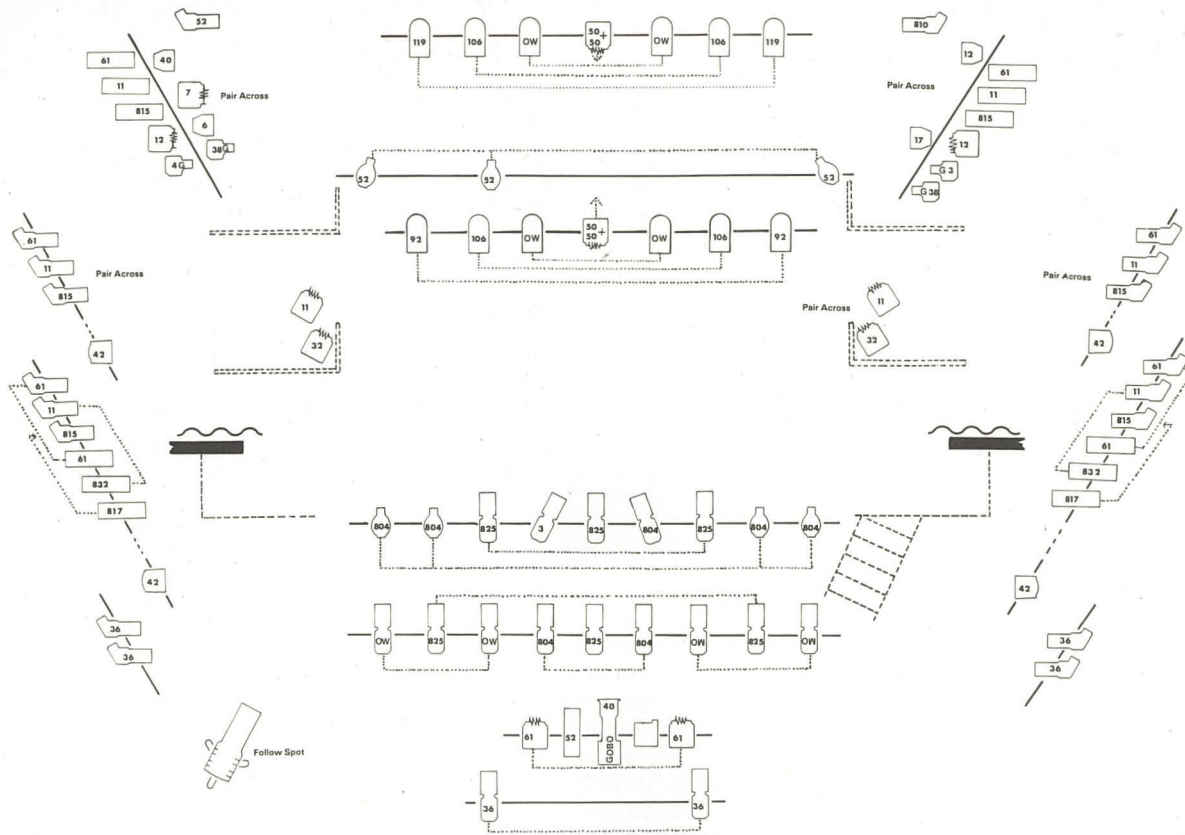
This device enables the lighting designer to create his lighting programme from anywhere in the theatre, even at the top of a ladder.

The AVAB 2001's most unique feature is no doubt its size: the entire board is housed in a rugged, lightweight, brushed-aluminium flight case by Haliburton, which measures 46 × 33.5 × 12.5 cm.

Its most important feature, however, is its extremely powerful operational programme, controlled by micro-processor, which gives it the flexibility and versatility of many boards several times larger in size. 2001 was designed to provide sophisticated theatrical lighting control both to fixed installations (where 2001 can be mounted into a console with any other system peripherals such as manual back-up or diskette external memory) and to travelling theatrical ensembles, who do not want to sacrifice intricate lighting to gain portability.



cue communications Ltd
 MCI House, 54-56 Stanhope Street,
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 Tel. 01-388 7867. Telex 261116.



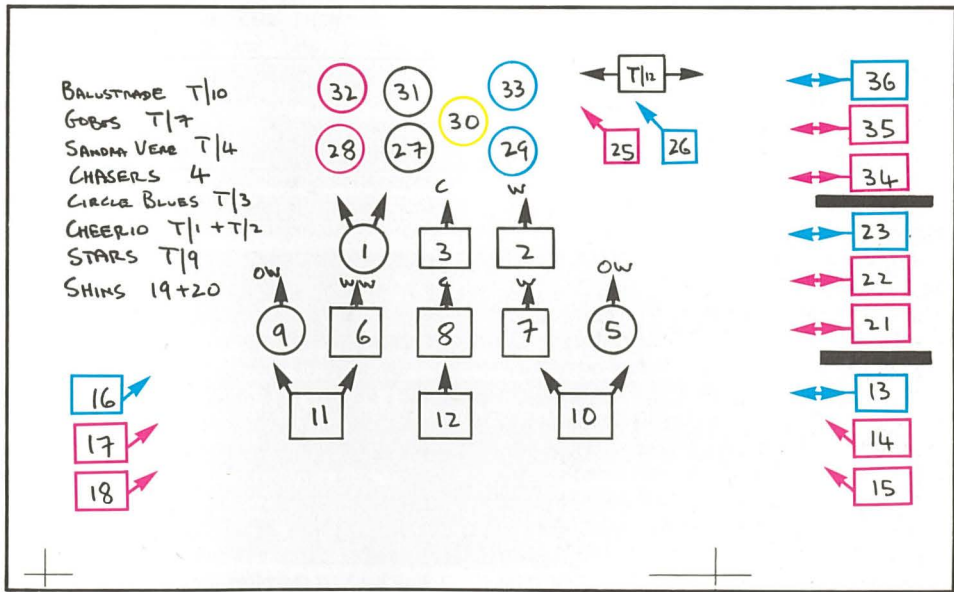
little point in splitting left, centre and right (or even just left and right—for the one scene requiring this, there were a couple of specials) so the area split was *inners* and *outers*, to give control of the degree of tightness of any particular scene. All these instruments were profile spots with pale tints.

The down and back lighting was provided by 1kW PAR 64 units (120 volt in series pairs) giving high intensity from saturated near-primary colours and creating that depth-enhancing haze, characteristic of backlight in general and sealed-beam lamps in particular. Surely the PAR 64 is one of the most exciting things to happen for years in the world of stage lighting.

Side lighting was from three booms a side—a pair in each onstage bay and a pair on the apron. These booms provided a cross-wash in three layers (downstage, midstage and upstage) and in three colours: blue, pink and amber.

The dialogue scenes were lit mainly from the front with just a low-level toning from above. The backstage working light scenes were rather harshly white, while other locations were given softer tinting. For musical numbers, side colour was added and the single follow spot used rather discreetly. For onstage “musical within a musical” scenes, the colour became much more contrasty and the follow spot more obvious. And some obviously “stagey” devices were introduced: such as chasers, dry ice, flash boxes, flashing photofloods, gobos and shin busters (beamlights at floor level).

To provide a link with the movies, the show’s credit titles were run on the Regent’s



The standard 1:25 scaled lighting layout plan can be rather unwieldy during lighting, technical and dress rehearsals. However the essential information can be condensed on to a standard 8" x 5" index card. A big show may need both sides, but The Great American Backstage Musical fitted easily on to one side.

cinema screen during the overture. This was achieved (at less expense than film and projectionist) by crossfading a pair of 35mm slide carousels from a bar on the front of the balcony—a useful position often omitted from new theatres because it would produce a bad (i.e. horizontal) face angle, but often vital, as here, for such jobs as picking up sparkle on tabs and projecting a silhouette gobo to cover a radio announcement.

The house control was a 36-way Mini 2 which carried the main load with a temporary 12-way Mini 2 carrying specials. These twin boards were handled by one (excellent)

operator from an end-of-balcony control position. There was no conventional lighting rehearsal—the show was plotted by a fast pencil during a cast stagger-through.

So! There we have two small shows which were lit according to the book and whose production schedules in all departments worked according to the book. To complete the picture it should perhaps be recorded that although they were both well received by the critics, neither show proved to be a big enough draw to achieve a decent length of run. Ah, well!

Lighting in the Rock'n Roll Business

DAVID KERR

Mention the Rock'n Roll industry to the theatre lighting purist and you are likely to find his pre-conceived notions on the subject are of long haired hippies who do not know one end of a pattern 23 from the other. In fact nothing could be further from the truth.

The popular music industry relies very heavily on live concerts by its artists to promote record sales and consequently there exists a highly professional international industry to organise and support tours.

Only a handful of bands actually own their own lighting and sound systems. The normal procedure when an act is to go on tour is for the promoters (recording companies) to approach the major rental companies and ask them to produce a set design from a given brief, to a particular budget. This will cover most aspects of the required stage craft and involve a detailed knowledge of the venues, stage machinery, lighting and control, sound, transport, manning and accommodation not to mention financial planning.

The cost of running a major tour is high and the schedule for most tours is pretty gruelling by any standards. Typically a tour involving a main band with a supporting act would start a tour in, say, Bristol on a Tuesday night with back to back 'gigs' in Bournemouth, Brighton, Manchester, Newcastle, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen, then the Hammersmith Odeon for 3 days—and on to Scandinavia, Europe, then to the USA or even Japan. Because of the need to amortise the tour overheads over as many venues as possible, in the shortest possible time, the rental companies have to be highly disciplined and efficient. This and the promoter's need for new and bigger stage effects has dictated the development of the industry and the products that it uses.

The current state of the art is summarised by Richard Dale, the Managing Director of RDE, one of the foremost UK rental companies.

"We have recently completed a tour for John Miles, where a 30 foot model of Concorde, incorporating aircraft landing lights, cockpit lights etc and back

David Kerr is Divisional Manager, International Lighting Division, Electrosonic Ltd.



John Miles — on tour — 160 lamps on 3 truss rig.

projected moving clouds were used on the show. As well as all the standard effects—160 × 1kW lamp rig, smoke, dry ice and thunder flashes. We often try to develop a visual connection with the artists product and this very often ties in with album sleeves, designs etc. The company incorporates both lighting designers and set designers and we use the services of local set builders as well as our own team to build the models for the creations. Having discussed with the client the concepts of their music, a design is taken to model form and, if approved passed over to the set builder for construction. Most major tours require a good deal of rehearsal time to get all the various elements of the show right, from lighting cues, to set changes.

Because of the client's need to impress the industry and constantly improve on past performances the emphasis is always on more technological inventiveness and imagination in designs. This often leads to some pretty outlandish constructions being toured on a night to night basis. As a result the industry has had to develop its own efficient and fast rigging techniques which are generally far in advance of conventional theatre practice."

The first development of lighting control systems specifically for this industry was some 13 years ago. At that time Electrosonic Ltd. was approached by *The Who* rock band and asked—to produce a 24 way 2 preset 2kW a channel touring dimmer board complete with special effects such as sound to light control, chasers etc., all to be capable of being driven from a 13A power supply! After explaining the difficulties due to Ohm's Law, a system design was undertaken. At that time Electrosonic were in the enviable position of manufacturing Thyristor dimmers and controls—mainly

for other manufacturers in the industry—but with no deep rooted pre-conceived ideas to restrict the design team. Therefore a degree of lateral thinking, together with a high standard of electronic design capability within the company resulted in a product that the client actually wanted and more to the point was reliable. The dimmer board is still in active use today!

The first professional rental companies for Rock'n Roll were formed around this time. John Brown started his company E.S.P.—which became the biggest and best known lighting rental company for several years—the formula at that time being very simple. Win the contract from one or two major rock band tours, arrange for the band (or its recording company) to finance the purchase of the major capital equipment, on the understanding that the rental company operates the equipment and when the band is not using the equipment, hire out the equipment and your services to other bands and acts and give back a royalty to the original owners of the equipment. Thereby obtaining the maximum usage of the equipment and maintaining the key staff of the rental company. Any excess profits being ploughed back into capital equipment purchase for the rental companies stock. That way ESP were able to expand and develop packages for dimmers, control desks, luminaires and rigs.

As the demand grew for bigger and better systems, so did the need for standardisation and compatibility.

Luminaires

The first area of standardisation was to be the luminaires. Here lamp source dictated the luminaire. The PAR 64 1000W 110V had been used in the USA as beam lights to great effect and was first introduced in the UK by ESP in 1968. This lamp is still the standard today—although until quite recently only 110V lamps were available—and were used on series pairs.

The lamp source was originally chosen because it had a very high light output. An oval beam which was pre-focused in the lamps own lens, from either very narrow ($6^\circ \times 12^\circ$ beam angle) to wide flood ($24^\circ \times 48^\circ$ beam angle). It was also very easy and cheap to build a housing for it. In fact until 2 to 3 years ago most of these lanterns were made by freelance metal workers. More recently the major manufacturers have tended to take over the production, due to the need to comply with more stringent electrical regulations, being applied by the G.L.C. and the inherent benefits of controlled volume production.

Suspension Systems

The next part of the hardware to be standardised was the suspension system. Two principal standards have emerged, the Genie Tower and the Truss system. The first is a free standing tower, capable of supporting up to 16 lanterns. These tend to be used in the smaller rigs, or for cross lighting on the bigger sets to supplement the main lighting from the overhead truss system. The Genie Towers are usually telescopic and can be extended up to a height of approximately 15 feet, either by a ratchet pulley system or more commonly by hydraulic systems or pressurised bottled gas. Each tower has four or more cross bars to support the luminaires.

The Truss system is a space frame construction in 10' lengths that houses all the cabling for the luminaires, together with 6 1kW lanterns. These Truss sections can be very quickly assembled at stage level into various formations, the most common being a box set. Once assembled they are flown into position using electric chain hoists.

All the wiring is run in standardised 6 lamp multicores back to the dimmer rack. Where it is easily plugged into the appropriate section.

Dimmers

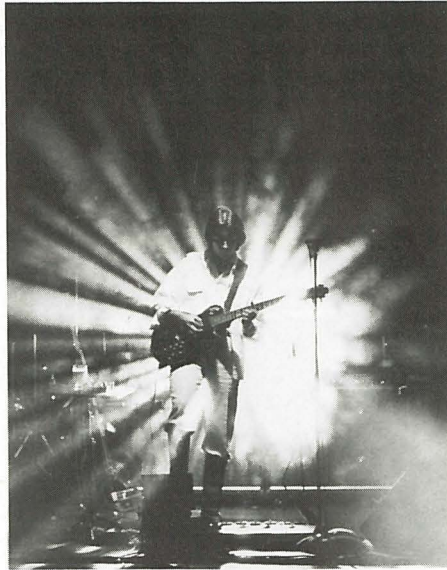
The first major *standard* produced in 1974, was *Portapak* — a 6×2.5 kW portable dimmer rack, to which all connections were by means of plugs and sockets. As these had to suffer being thrown into the backs of trucks at 4 a.m. by very tired "roadies" they were built accordingly and theatre hire companies and touring groups quickly latched on to using these robust little dreadnoughts.

With the trend to larger systems and increasing freight costs, a reduction in the size and weight of dimmer racks became necessary. *Flatpak* followed at a third the size and half the weight.

Now even more compact units have been developed by specialist contractors. These consist of an integrated dimmer rack for 80 dimmers with mains output patching and control input patching in one portable road box $4\text{ft} \times 3\text{ft} \times 2\text{ft}$.

Control Desks

Without doubt this is the most difficult part of the hardware to standardise. No computer memory board has yet proved suitable for the industry, probably due to



Steve Hackett — on tour.

the difficulty in providing the special effects from a memory and at the same time making it flexible enough. Also the question of reliability arises. In a touring situation if they do go wrong it is most unlikely that the crew on the tour would have the expertise to repair them.

The last two special touring control boards

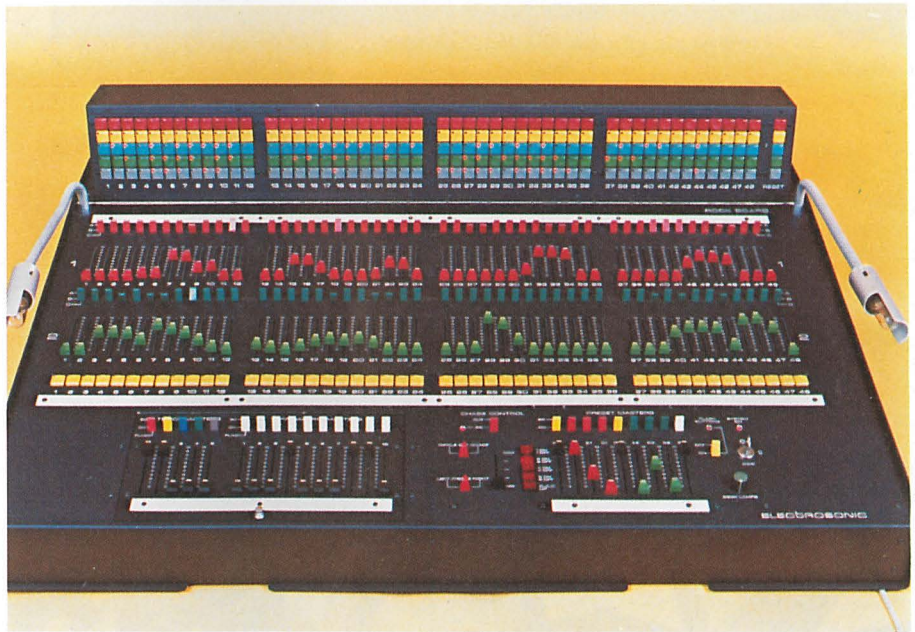
Pink Floyd had similar facilities to *Miranda*, with the addition of built-in intercom unit, programmable digital clock, real time clock, voltage metering and programmable colour cycle unit.

These control desks were a lot of fun to build, and looked impressive. But because they were one-off specials they were expensive to construct and incidentally difficult to service.

In 1976 a number of rental companies and lighting designers were approached to ascertain their requirements regarding features and facilities for a standard range of boards for the touring Rock'n Roll industry. James Moody, President of the Sundance Corporation, in the USA, was probably the most influential advisor for this new "standard" product.

This led to the birth of a range of standard boards aptly named *Rockboard*.

The *Rockboard* was first used by Zenith Lighting and after a few modifications to the original prototype, was launched as a standard product at the Wyndhams Theatre in London in 1977. At the time Francis Reid predicted that the *Rockboard* would be used by multipurpose halls in a permanent installation due to the frequency and variations of acts which need to be lit in those venues. In the event that prediction came true for the Civic Centre Peckham has a 36



Rockboard 60-way 2 preset 3 group 10 × 60 Pin matrix, 5 × 60 Touch matrix, 10 programme pattern chase, Flash buttons, Mimic display.

manufactured by Electrosonic were *Miranda*, designed and built for Theatre Projects Services to their specification and *Pink Floyd*. The brief for *Miranda* required the desk to be capable of working on a conventional theatre set, and on the most demanding of touring Rock'n Roll shows. It is a 40 way 3 preset 3 group board, with a 10 × 40 diode pin matrix for 10 groups of lighting together with routing for sound to light facilities. Also fitted was a 10 programme pattern chaser, with two 40 × 40 output routing matrix, together with a host of other facilities including a cigar lighter.

way *Rockboard* and the New Regis Centre, Bognor Regis is having one installed later this year. To date some sixty *Rockboards* are in use in Japan, Los Angeles, New York, Hamburg, London, Helsinki and many other cities throughout the world.

Perhaps the theatre had something to learn from the long-haired hippies of the 60s after all.

For their valuable assistance in compiling this article the author would like to thank Richard Dale (RDE London), Paul Turner (Zenith Lighting, London) and James Moody (Sundance Lighting Corporation, Los Angeles).

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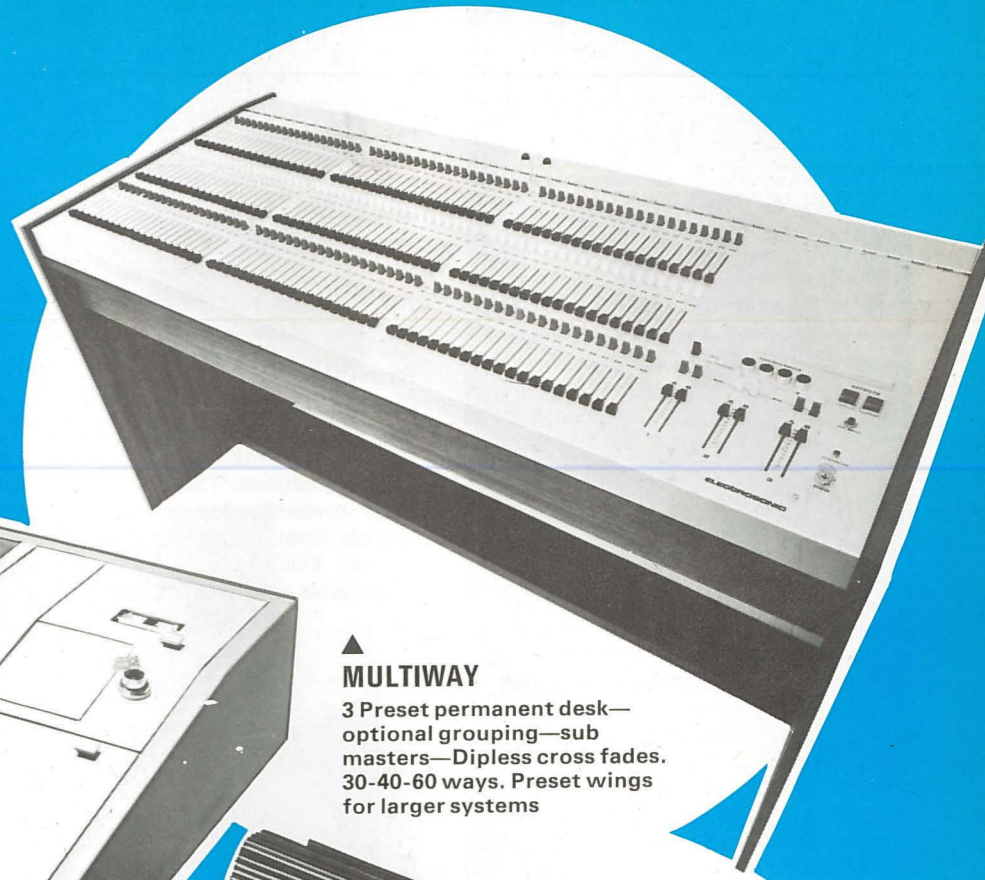
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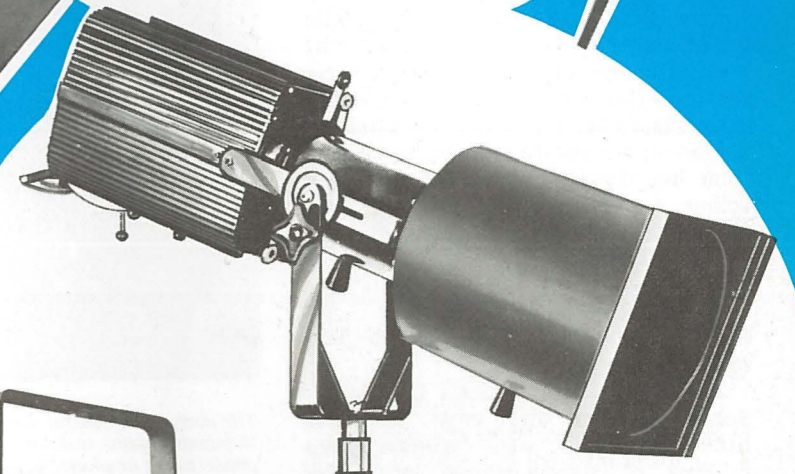
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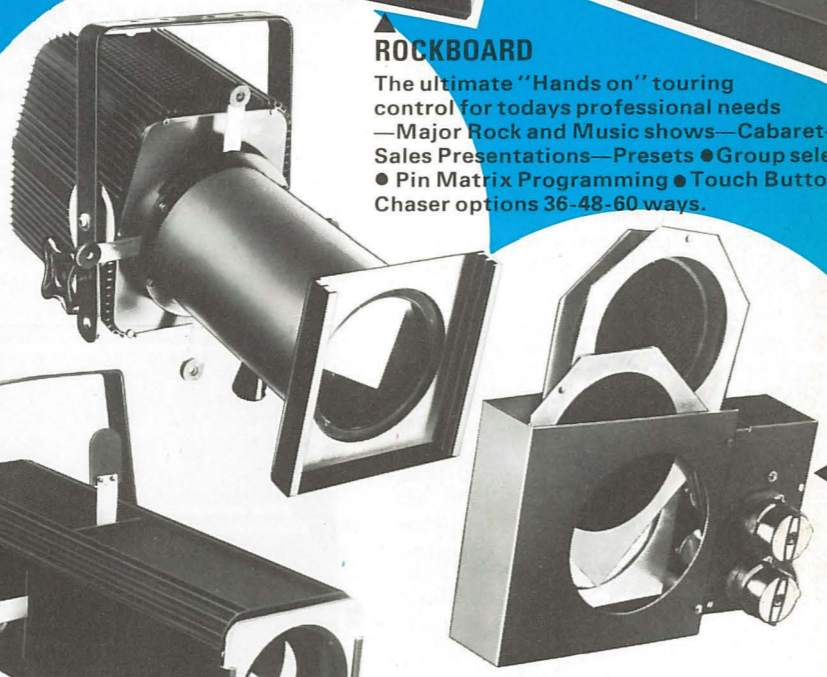


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Symphony in Red

CHRIS BALDWIN

Curiosity may fill the minds of visitors to some recently equipped Spanish and South American theatres. Switchgear, dimmers, lighting control, stage management desks, equipment racks and sound equipment all in matching RED and BROWN coachwork? Where do the gleaming aluminium flight cases that in 30 minutes transform into a complete control suite, in the auditorium or in a control room originate.

The equipment is familiar enough, top quality audio and lighting products of numerous manufacturers, but, all with deep red front panels!!! could it be someone has discovered that an operator is less prone to making errors, when operating equipment of this colour; NO nothing so complex. First the co-ordinated colour scheme was to identify the client's product in whichever theatre he toured, second to improve the cosmetic nature of wonderful but otherwise boring equipment and thirdly a bit of combined flag waving and client flattery. I clearly remember the look on the client's face when the first rig was unpacked in Madrid, not just the gleaming new equipment, but, the colour red, the client's house colour. A good start for all on site preparing to install and operate the equipment.

This installation in the Teatro Monumental-Madrid saw the start of a new approach to equipment for our clients Ramon and Antonio Riba, everything was to be portable.

The then owners of Scala Barcelona,* Spain's largest and most luxurious theatre restaurant, were expanding their business of staging shows into other theatres. Theatres with absolutely no equipment, everything from dimmers to dressing room speakers had to be provided and installed in a matter of a few days, our brief was to include everything, from the incoming mains.

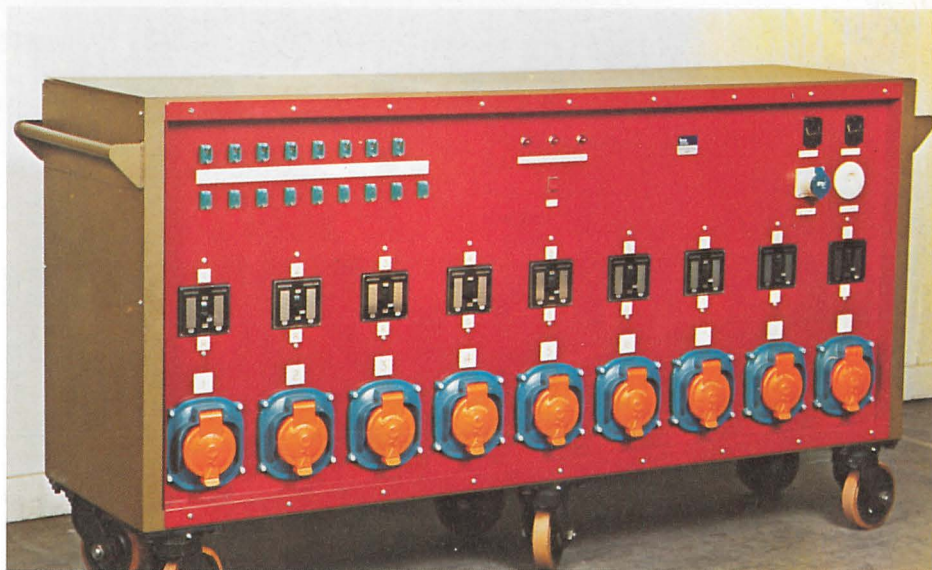
All the sound equipment excluding loudspeakers, was built into flight cases and every single audio connection by plug and socket using factory made up leads. This approach added to the initial cost, but, paid off in the long term. We were easily able to test the whole system in the factory, had a fast set up time on site, easy maintenance and if the operator prefers the patch panel on the left of the mixer instead of the right it is easily changed. Additional revenue is available in hire fees between shows and in packaging show and equipment to such far away places as the National Theatre of Buenos Aires where

the equipment originally supplied to Teatro Monumental in Madrid is currently installed.

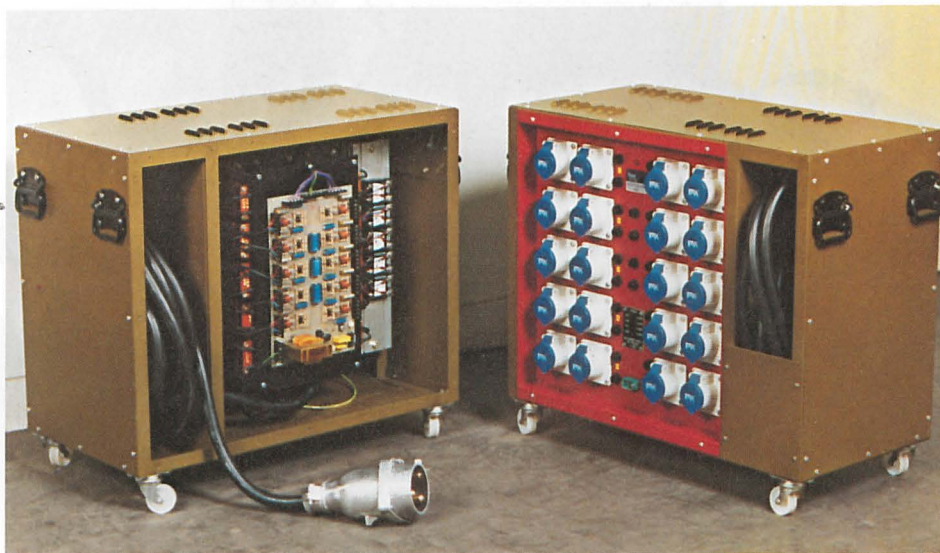
The advantages we thus gained through the portable rigs we have applied to the permanent installations, such as the recently completed "Galas" 1,500 seat theatre restaurant in Salou, where the dimmer racks, distribution rack etc. were supplied even with pre-cut power cables measured out to suit the equipment in the factory.

The sound systems supplied to these Spanish theatres are unusual in that they and their operator have to cope with different sound sources simultaneously for long periods. It is possible in Spain to present musicals without "live" musicians, or should I say with recorded orchestral and vocal soundtrack. The idea of a "canned" show probably does not appeal to the average theatre goer, but, this is not your average kind of show. The musical arrangements are carried out by a top quality

MD directing a 60 piece orchestra, whose best performance is "laid down" to be used night after night without variation. This, of course, means that the performers, dancers and technicians have a rigid musical line to work to, once the curtain has gone up; result; technically the same show night after night. This technique works particularly well with complex and exhausting dance routines, and makes for a more ensemble performance. Technically the show runs from a pair of 4 track tape machines, track 1 and 2 providing stereo orchestra, track 3 mono vocal and track 4 information to operate stage machinery!!! Additional stereo or mono material is added from two auxiliary machines, add twenty-five microphones, 5 radio mics, reverb and a good operator and "hey presto". The sound operator in these shows has to be slick and the machinery has to work quite hard too, the "fade in" or "fade out" is unused, everything is "cut-in on the beat".

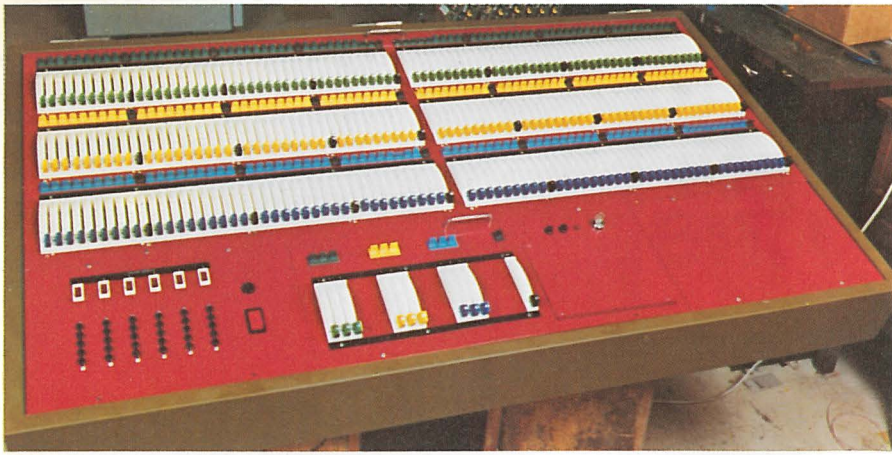


The mains and control distribution cubicle, the reverse side contains the 600 amp three phase input terminals, mains isolator and star/delta selection, enabling the system to operate on 220-240 volt phase/phase or phase/neutral supply. The front panel includes control signal connections to dimmer racks and control desk, Dorman Smith Loadline dimmer rack protection and power output sockets for the dimmer racks made by Thorn.

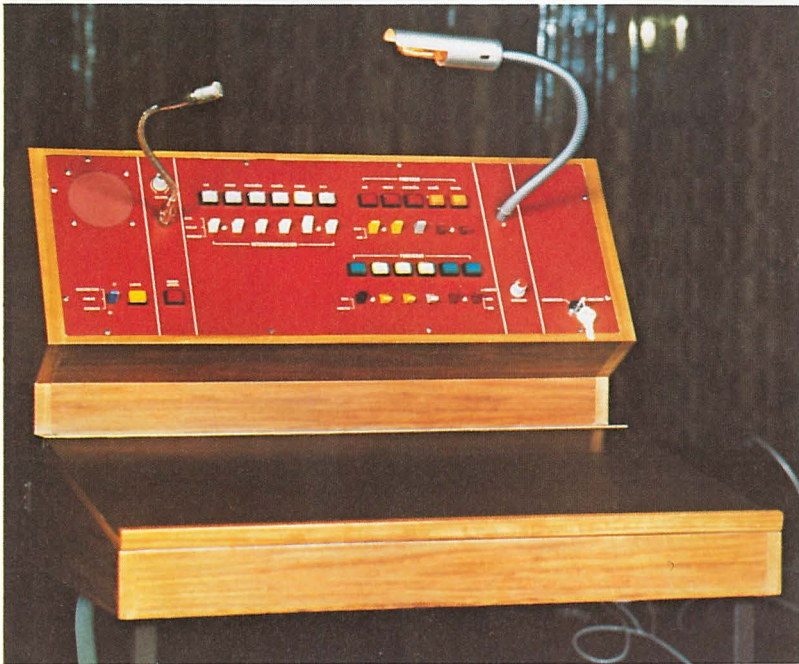


The ten way racks, each dimmer being double pole fused and provided with two CEE output sockets.

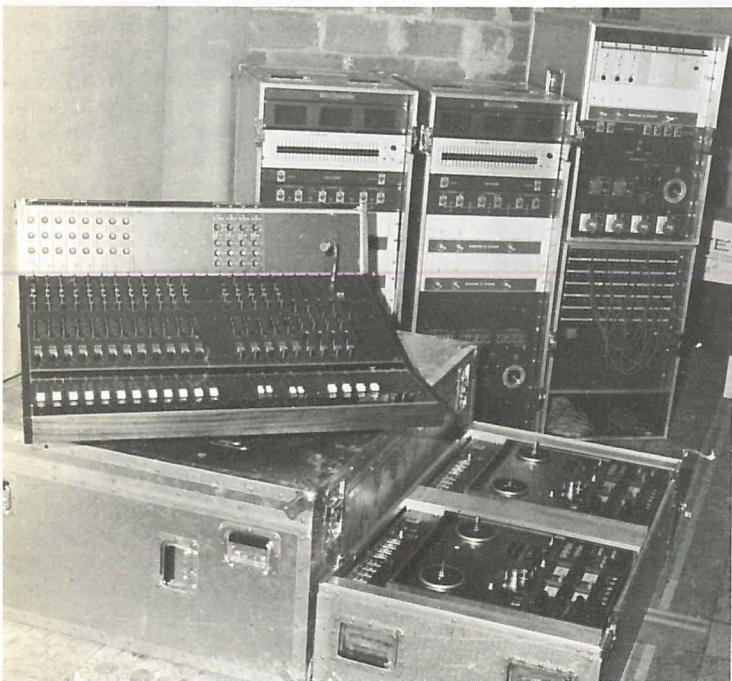
*Scala Barcelona was destroyed as a result of terrorist action in 1978.



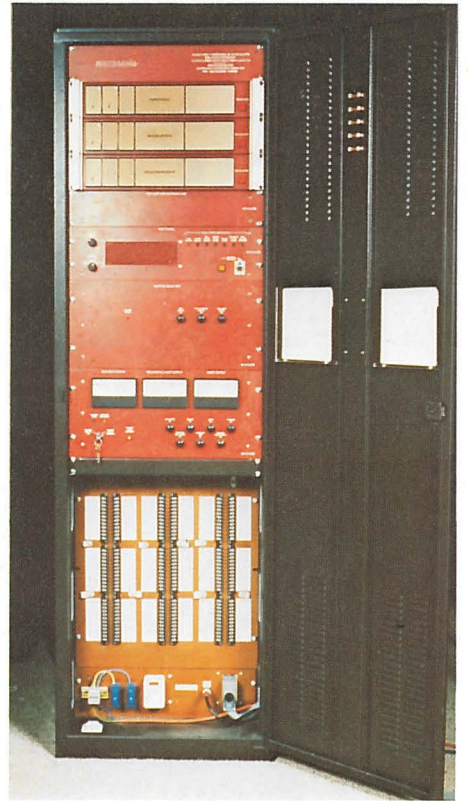
80 way GM control by Thorn Lighting



Stage Manager's desk including minimal cue light system, S.M. originated intercom system to all technicians, ring intercom, paging to artiste and foyers (Sound Logic).



Sound rig for Teatro Espanol made by Sound Logic and Rank Sound.



The communications rack includes a comprehensive test panel, all fuses front of panel mounted and a set of "as built drawings" in plastic holder inside door, nice one Sound Logic.

Needless to say the operators work during the daytime for radio stations, recording studios or TV stations. These operators however have some bad habits, like rewinding with the masters up, and they have difficulty learning to cope with the problems of acoustic feedback, so used are they to working in studio conditions.

As the quality of operators has improved so, I have noticed in the eight years I have been working in Spain, has the quality and range of locally made electrical and mechanical products. Naturally many foreign ideas are being copied, some are questionable such as the 140 to 400 way patch panel I recently encountered which looked fine until it was patched up. In other areas such as stage machinery Spain may, before long, pose a threat to the overpriced European and American suppliers. Where else but Spain would you find a theatre owner willing to be guinea pig to a hydraulic powered flying system, he had never seen in operation, installed in his new theatre without any manual back up? But of course it works, Spain is different.

Systems made by: Thorn Lighting. Sound Logic Ltd. T.P. Services.

Components by: Rank Strand. CCT Theatre Lighting. Altec. Amcron. Klark Teknik. AKG. Future Films. Audio. H & H. Revox. Teac. Sennheiser.

Theatre and Equipment Consultants: Installation Supervision: After Sales Advice: ACT Consultant Services.

The author is a partner in ACT Consultant Services, Castle Street, Builth Wells, Powys, Wales.

Give to Forms and Images a Breath

ADRIAN DIGTAM

"The lighting throughout the evening was exemplary. I do not know how LCDT achieves this, but I wish that every other ballet and dance company in Britain would go and study the subtleties and beauties of light in shaping bodies in movement which seem commonplace with LCDT." *Clement Crisp, Financial Times, 17 May 1979.*

Although that fabulous review says nothing about the technical side of our operation, it does convey exactly what we are striving for in the lighting of LCDT. Fortunately the lighting of our dancers is a high priority in our company's policy and it is very, very important to our Artistic Director Robert Cohan, and has been that way over the last ten years. In that time our lighting has become highly sophisticated. There was a time when we would light with 10 Patt.23's and a Junior 8 control. Today it is a 240 lamp (average) completely self-contained rig with its own 80-way memory control. But always the sole objective has been to light the dancer as beautifully and as effectively as possible—whatever the mood. I think it works! We are all aware that the lighting should not take one's notice away from the action, and that the review above may imply that this hap-

pens—but it does not. It's just that you cannot ignore it. A lady from the Guardian once asked what the secret was; I said there was no secret, but we worked hard (most technicians do), we gave lighting designers as few restrictions on the rig as possible, and within reason: e.g. if there is room on the spot bar hang a lamp, if the bar is full move upstage to the next one, if there are

no more bars—No! We bought the right equipment and put it in the right places and use hundreds of different filters. We are very careful about focusing. We spend a lot of time over it in the belief that a designer's lighting will only be as good as the technician's focusing (I was fortunate to work at the National Theatre for a while where the standard of focusing is very high—and it is this technique that I still practice today), and last but not least the three of us on the lighting crew take great pride in our rig and standards, and we strive to keep them up. The other "secret" is that we employ the very best designers in this field—and they of course make the main contribution.

This is a time of change for us—we are about to change the design of the rig totally next year. The present lighting rig has evolved over the past ten years to the two-part system that we have at the moment; a basic rig which stays the same wherever we go, and a "specials" rig for those lamps which are hung specially for a particular dance. The basic rig is made up of twenty ADB 1kW fresnels spaced over four spot bars which give a downlight coverage over the whole acting/dancing area. These are coloured in that old dance favourite—Cinemoid 61. There are also nine ADB 1kW fresnels with CCT auto-colour changers spaced over the first three spot bars; which give an alternative coverage to the former—the colours used are 17, 817, 858, 842 and open white. On both ends of each of the four main spot

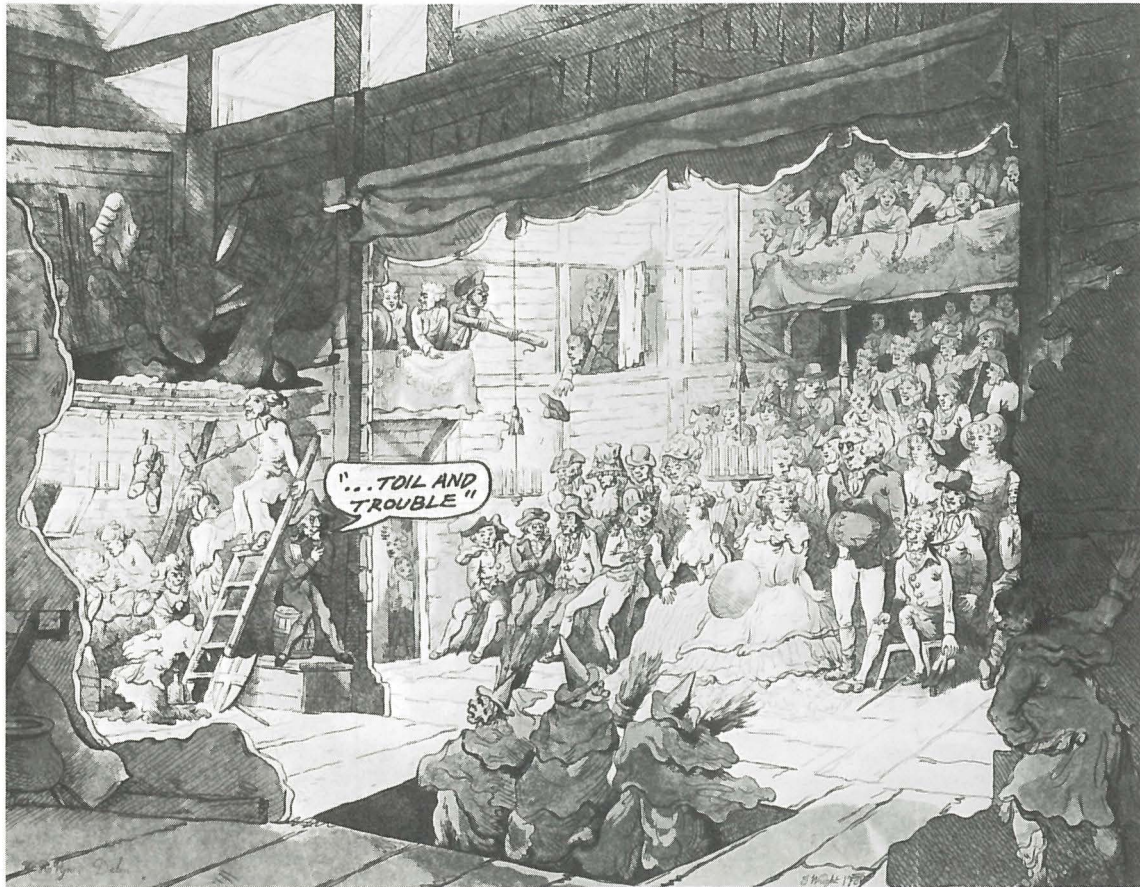


ICE. Choreography: Robert Cohan. Music: Morton Subotnick. Design: Norberto Chiesa. Lighting: John B. Read. (Photo: Jem Wilsher.)



MASQUE of SEPARATION. Choreography: Robert Cohan. Music: Burt Alcantara. Design: Norberto Chiesa. Lighting: John B. Read.

If we'd been around then, we'd have invented footlights!



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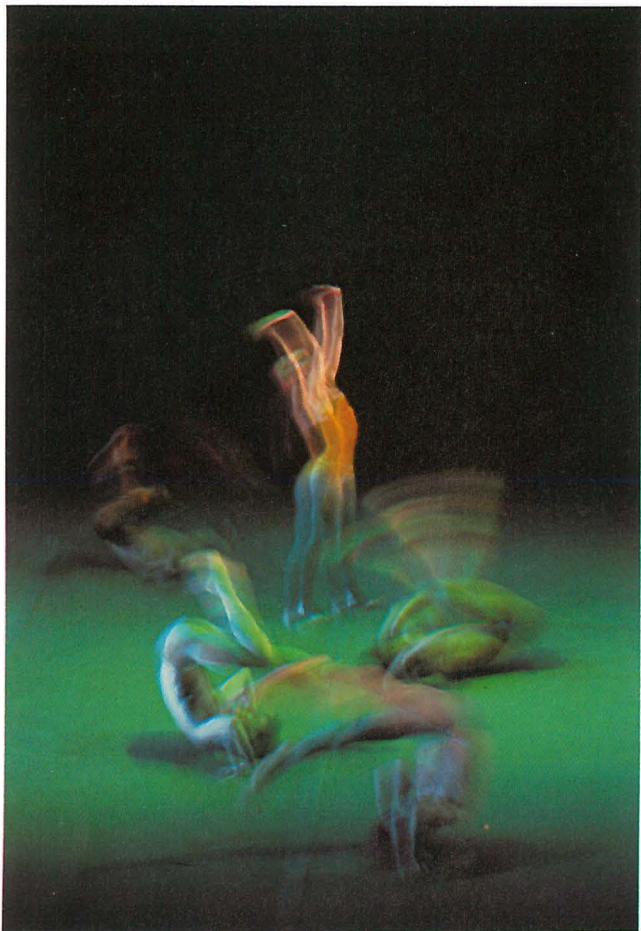
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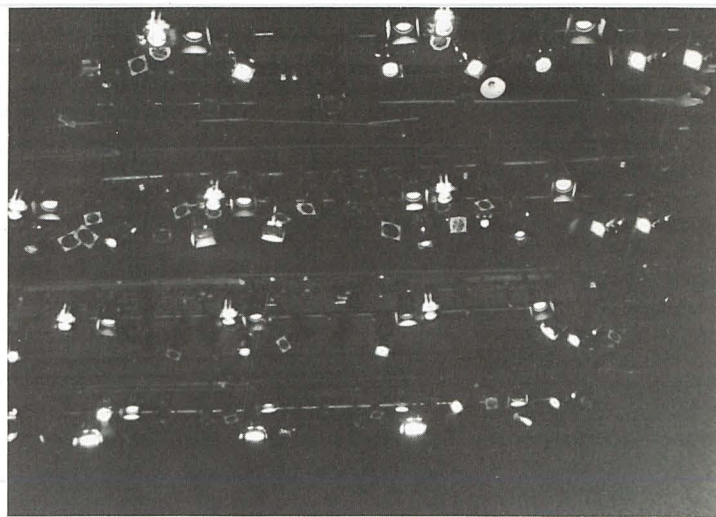
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**THEATRE
PROJECTS**



FOREST. Choreography: Robert Cohan. Music: Brian Hodgson. Design: Norberto Chiesa. Lighting: Charter.



If there is room on the spot bar hang a lamp, if the bar is full move upstage to the next one.

bars are three Silhouette 30's, focused as a cross wash. These colours change for each dance. And finally on the fifth bar there are three Berkey 2kW fresnel film lighting units, which provide a full backlight coverage, usually in 41. On the floor, there are four booms on each side of the stage. Spaced at 2.30m apart, each boom consists of one ADB 1kW at 1.5m lens height, 1 ADB 1kW at "shinbuster" height, and two Patt.23's between the ADB's. On top of booms one and three both sides are two extensions taking the height to 4.20m where there is a Berkey 40° profile unit. As you can see from this description there is a large amount of equipment on the floor—most of it at head height and below. It is this that "models" the dancer and makes him look so beautiful. That then is the basic lighting rig. On that rig the units that can colour change for each dance are all the lamps on the floor, the Sils' on both ends of each spot bar, and the backlights. In the old days this used to suffice to light anything on, the only "specials" being hung were the odd unit for a pool here and a gobo there. However after a while as designers and the dances became more complex—the specials increased, and quite rightly so, otherwise our lighting would have stagnated in its own limitations. This is where the "few restrictions" part comes in; a lighting designer works best on a tiny rig or a gigantic one. The trouble with a medium sized rig, with limited colour change and focus possibilities is that it can tend to look the same, after a couple of years, whatever you do with it. So trusting in designers good sense when asking for additional equipment, and liking big rigs anyway, we never say no! Providing there is room to hang it or put it on a boom or stand and "patch" it—the unit goes in. The same goes for colour calls, no restrictions there either, consequently we carry six ranges of filters and employ assistants with Stanley knives as fingers. This has led over the years to a very large rig as many Chief's around the country will know (I can hear the groans now). When we go abroad, especially on the Continent, the local crew very often fall about convulsed with laughter when the lorry doors are opened, only to stare in disbelief

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Showing basic booms rigged with additional specials for ICE (Photo: Jem Wilsher).

when they realise that we do intend to use all this equipment and haven't just brought it over as ballast.

However in spite of the size of the rig it does not take too long to get up, and because we have our own memory board—a Thorn QT120 with “floppy disc” (a great system)—we do not have to spend hours lighting; we only have to look at it during the dress rehearsal, and balance a few things out. The item that takes the longest amount of time at the moment is focusing, about five hours at the start of a new date and three on a change of programme. When doing performance weeks we work very long days but never any all-nighters. The money that has been available to the lighting side over the past few years has all gone on the most important facet of the rig the luminaires and the control. There has not been the same amount to spend on the rigging and cable side. Consequently this is not as sophisticated as we would like it to be. We cannot yet afford to crate all the spot-bars and we do not have room on the wagon for this yet. We have many TRS cable tripses but no multi-cores; our patch panels are home made affairs—but we have it all organised in such a way that if necessary it is possible to get it in, up and on in about 16 hours. In a performing week we do two programmes changing over on a Thursday. Each programme has three twenty to thirty minute dances in it. The average amount of specials for one dance is about thirteen overhead and four on the floor—therefore for one programme there will be forty to fifty lamps hanging overhead in addition to the basic rig, plus another ten to fifteen on the floor. There are eighteen circuits available for “specials” for each dance as we have a three and four way “patch” system (although this can be increased to twenty-five circuits with the loss of some of the upstage basic circuits). All the “patching”

is done during the intervals or before the show. There is no in-show repatching so as to avoid errors. There are two intervals of twenty minutes each. During these all the spot bars come in to floor level to facilitate colour changes. All the lamps on the booms are colour changed, and there can be anything from one to twenty units to be re-focused on the floor. But there is rarely anything to re-focus on the bars as we think it is better to hang a lot of equipment and have a patch system—than have long, long intervals whilst re-focusing off the telescope. We try very hard to stay within the twenty minute interval time.

Next year, if all goes well, we should be performing at the London Coliseum within the English National Opera seasons—rather on the same basis that the Royal Opera and Ballet work together at the ROH. Our rig at the moment is designed for a 11m width and 10m depth stage and a theatre to ourselves for one week. This would be completely changed at the Coliseum. The width is around 15m and the depth seems about two miles!! Also the rig will have to go up and down in around 2 hours from the time the lorry doors are open. As well as having to work within the ENO opera seasons with their massive sets etc., etc. To cope with this John B. Read (our main lighting designer) is designing a new and much enlarged basic rig, which will be much more flexible than the present one—so, we hope, cutting down on the need for so many specials. All the spot bars would be divided into sections and flight-cased fully rigged, same with the booms. The control would be up-graded to 120 dimmers with a sixty circuit patch system. The whole system would be completely fed by multi-cored cables; connections to dimmers would be by multi-pinned connectors. If all goes to plan we could have a very nice system here. Maybe when we have done it in 1980 the editor will allow me to describe it in more detail.

What They Said About Us No. 11 Edgar

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Instantaneous Costume Transformation

In Summer 1976, Tabs published a translation by Christopher Baugh of a chapter from Moynet's treatise *L'Envers du Theatre: Machines et Decorations*, published in Paris in 1875. This chapter was entitled *Lighting the Stage by Tallow, Candle, Oil, and Gas*. The entire book has now been translated and augmented from other contemporary sources by Allan S. Jackson and M. Glen Wilson, and published by the American Theatre Association as Volume 10 in their Rare Books of the Theatre Series. The book reproduces some 200 illustrations and the scope of Moynet's text is indicated by the chapter headings. Among the many joys is a detailed backstage tour during the performance of a play which appears to depend rather more upon its spectacle than its dialogue. But this is not just a history book; there are some tricks that we could re-adopt. Many recent pantomime productions have lacked the in-

genious magic of this simple costume transformation. . . .

"If you examine with care the costume in which he is dressed you will discover that it is in two pieces that are held together by means of a strong thread, starting from the foot and extending to the shoulder by a series of eyelets and going down along the arm. This is a catgut, the lower end of which is provided with a ring, and the other end stops in a slip knot or bow that the actor can undo at will. The costume, whatever pattern and design it may be, is then made of only two pieces, front and back. If the character places himself on stage at a predetermined point, usually marked by chalk, a little trap opens behind him, and at the agreed signal the actor concerned unfastens the buttons or bows that keep the costume up. The costumer, from underneath, pulls down the rings and the catgut strings. The costume falls by itself and is quickly yanked down the trap, and the actor appears transformed . . . for example . . . As she (the old woman) places herself at the appointed and marked spot, the trappillion opens, the hand of the stage hand seizes the rings placed at the end of the catgut strings. On the cue the actress throws back the hood mounted on a steel wire frame to protect her coiffure, and the transformation takes place, as you can see, instantly. A fairy would not be able to operate without a wand. See with what

adroitness a stage hand passes to her the sign of her power. He makes it arrive in her hand through a little practical opening in the floor of the stage."



This engraving and our excerpt from the book is taken from the chapter entitled "Performance of a Spectacle Play viewed from backstage".

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Saved from the Slot Machines

By autumn 1977, the decline of Cromer Pier's *Pavilion Theatre* was complete and its fall was imminent. It awaited the ultimate fate of a pier theatre: stage and seating out/slot machines in. The theatre's owners, North Norfolk District Council, were understandably reluctant to apply this final solution. Without live entertainment, could a holiday resort retain its self-respect? The Council decided to call in Richard Condon, the Irish Magician who has turned Norwich's Theatre Royal into a place that audiences are eager to fill. Could Dick rescue a tatty 400 theatre stuck 100 yards out into the North Sea on a rather exposed part of the east coast?

The short answer turned out to be *yes!*

sightlines, the entire floor carpeted, and attractive comfortable seating installed. The red of the seats and carpets was echoed in the warmth of the walls, with the proscenium arch picked out in black and some side roof sections taken into cream. To compensate for the surrounding seas, the whole idea of cosy warmth was stressed more than it might have been if the theatre had been on land. This worked: so did a bright foyer with all-day catering, including salads and sandwiches featuring that local delicacy the Cromer Crab; and a bar designed to attract normal pub trade in addition to theatregoers.

The stage has no flies and very little wing space. The winch suspensions for the



Richard Condon's *Seaside Special 1979* at the *Pavilion Theatre, Cromer*. Directed by Yvonne Marsh with choreography by Pat Adams, scenery by Inigo Monk and Ted Woodley, costumes by Jenni Goodwin and lighting by Frances Reid.

Dick planned his attack on three fronts: (1) Audience Comfort, (2) Intensive Use, and (3) Publicity. To back him, the District Council found money to refurbish the theatre, underwrite the shows, and tell everyone the good news.

There was a lot to be done. The bare floor was flat and the seats were even more uncomfortable than they looked (if that were possible). The toilets were, to put it politely, inadequate; and the bar was a haven for the teetotal. Stage and backstage were cluttered with the remains of shows long past—as if no one had bothered to do a get-out for a decade.

So, for a start, skip upon skip of rubbish was removed. Then the rear of the auditorium was stepped to improve

lighting bars were overhauled and rope sets re-positioned for tab-tracks, masking legs and isora backcloth. For scenery suspension a series of Henderson Tracks was installed. This solves the problem of storing and handling scenery with a small performance crew (the principle is rather like Georgian changeable scenery without the lower grooves—wings slide on downstage and the "backcloth" is two flats coming on from the sides and meeting at centre). The stage already had a small apron and a further small centre thrust section was built to bring stand-up comedians into a more confidential relationship with their audience. No pit is necessary as the organ, piano and drums can nestle at the side of this new thrust section.

The old 24-way bracket-handle dimmer board and 6-way teak slider were retained for budgetary reasons, although the success of the 1978 season made it possible for this to be replaced by a CCT/Electrosonic *Linkit* system for 1979. As the old board blocked the prompt corner, it is now considerably easier to make an entrance. To simplify staffing, the new lighting desk is normally backstage, but it has extension cables for auditorium use when necessary and this has proved to be invaluable during rehearsals.



Henderson tracks for scenery suspension solved the problem of storing and handling scenery with a small performance crew.

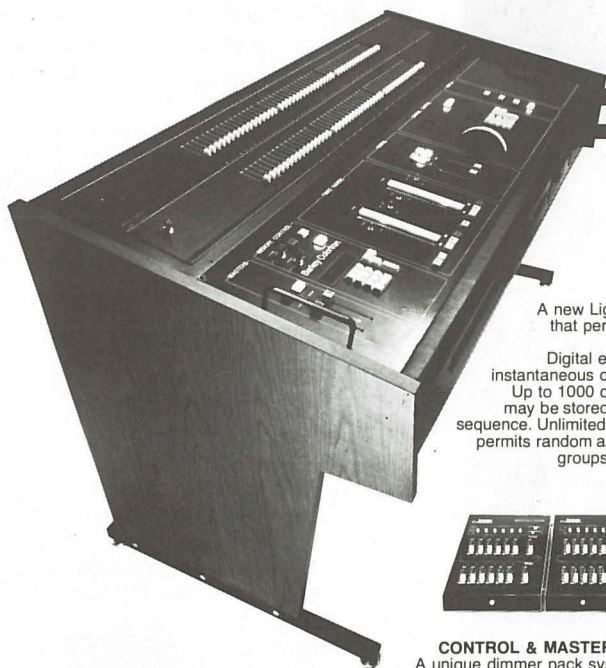
The theatre re-opened in 1978 with a flourish. A barrage of local press coverage built up during rehearsals and on opening night the regional news magazines of both television channels gave extensive film reports. A huge crowd gathered on the cliff top overlooking the pier to watch the first night audience arrive to be greeted by a brass band. A maroon rocketed into the sky to signal curtain up on another restored theatre.

And at £34,000 this restoration was a very cost-effective job.

The initial impetus created by the project has remained and Cromer has now succeeded for that most difficult of seasons, the second. During the summer, the *Pavilion Theatre* is used extensively, with a revue in the evenings, children's shows morning and afternoon, and concerts on Sundays. Heating has now been installed (somewhat rare in summer theatres)—both to preserve the new furnishings against the winter chills and to allow an extension of the season with concerts and local amateur productions in spring and autumn. The future looks good and posterity will be grateful that a traditional pier theatre has been saved from the slot machines.

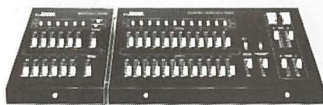
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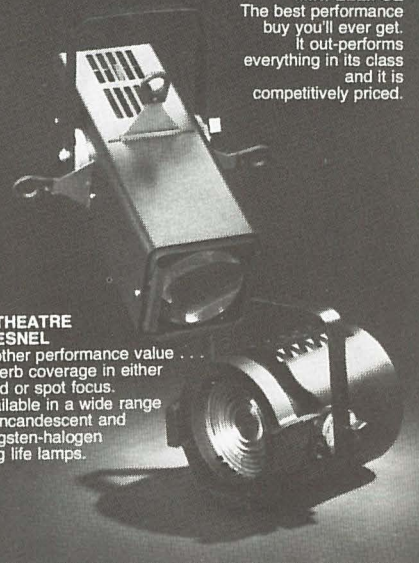
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PRODUCT NEWS

Stage Equipment take-over

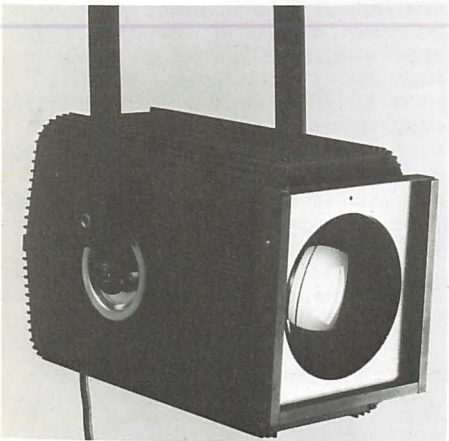
Rank-Strand, who took over Tele-Stage Associates earlier this year have now acquired another stage equipment company in the same area, Mole Richardson at Thetford. The proximity of the two companies should solve the different problems faced by each. While Mole Richardson reported a heavy loss last year and have spare capacity at Thetford, Ranks have been facing a problem of an increasing order book and insufficient capacity at Bury St. Edmunds to cope with it. Mr. R. D. Rae, the founder and present managing director of Tele-Stage, is now managing director of the combined organisation.



CCT Minuette Fresnel.

New lights

CCT has been adding to their own range of luminaires. The latest additions are to the 500W Minuette range—a profile and a pebble convex. The latter gives a soft edged 12° to 65° variable angle beam. Later this year CCT will be launching two 650/1000W spotlights in the Starlette range. A fresnel with a beam angle of 15/65° and a pebble convex with a beam control of from 12° to 65°. CCT gave up the ADB agency last year. On the control side CCT are now marketing Electrosonic controls worldwide.

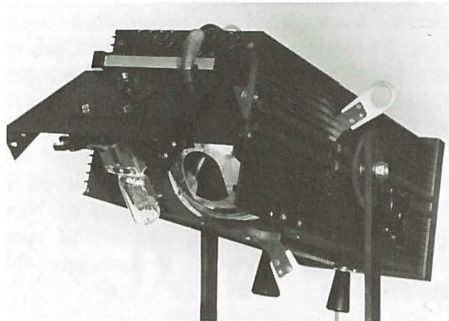


The new CCT Starlette pebble convex.

Contel and BPS to market ADB products

The agency for ADB, the Belgian light and lighting control manufacturers, is now held jointly by Contel Limited of Stroud and BPS Control Systems Ltd of Cheshire. Last year Contel established a combined trading and marketing operation with BPS which greatly increases their geographical coverage.

ADB have also been busy with new lights.



The Gamma 1kw profile showing the simple lamp access.

The Gamma 1kw profile was launched in May and a 2kw version is due out shortly. The range is available in three beam angle versions: 30° to 48°, 17° to 36° and 12° to 20°.

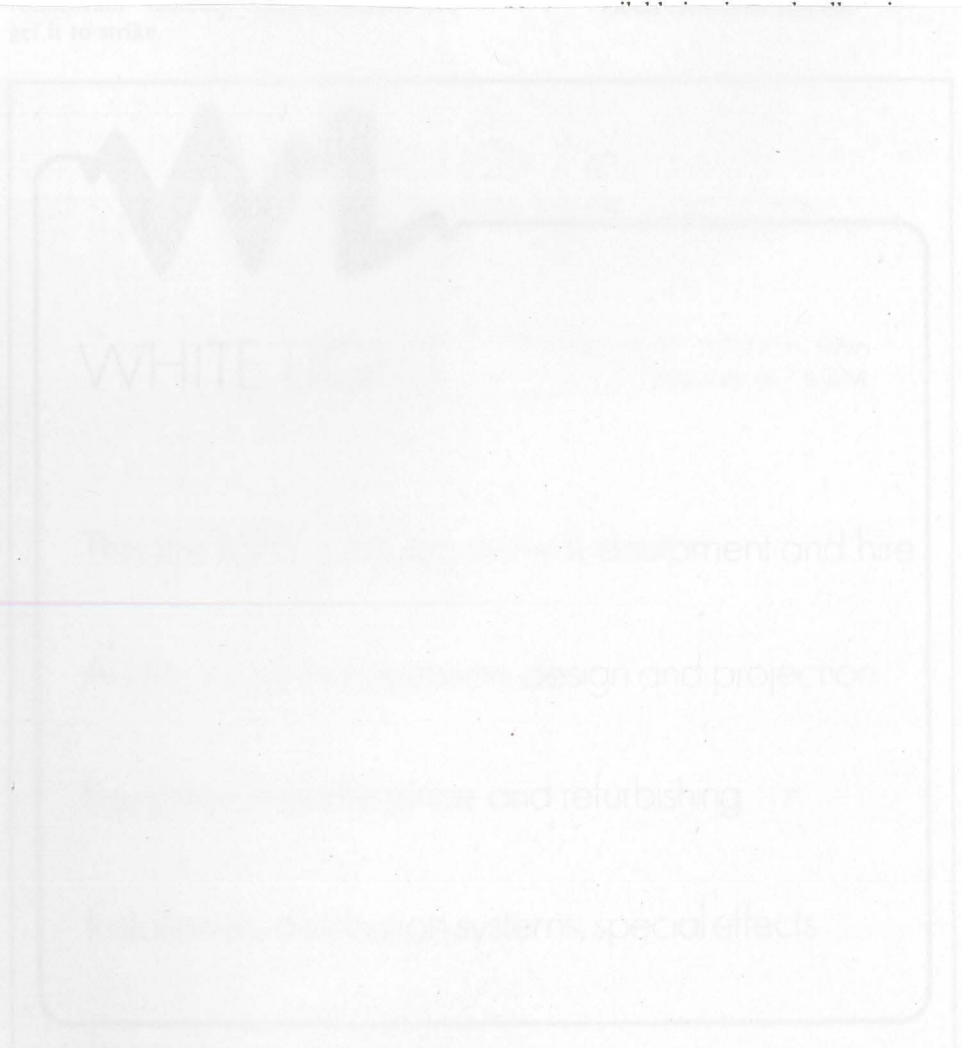
Both Contel and BPS are, of course, also manufacturers of their own control equipment and BPS recently announced a new compact and inexpensive memory system which has been specially designed to add on to existing installations. Only one production unit has been installed so far but units should be available from stock this month. This could be an interesting development and we look forward to learning more about the system in operation.

Old Lights

John Simpson, managing director of White Light, the Fulham based lighting sale and hire firm, has turned his equipment maintenance department into a profit earner by offering a refurbishing service. Lanterns are completely dismantled, sandblasted, re-enamelled, rewired and tested optically and mechanically. Seeing the operation makes you realise how really robustly some of the old lanterns were made—a Strand pattern 23, good as new, for £16 sounds good value.

Coloured Lights

Rosco' Colorine Lamp-Dip is now non-flammable. The 15 vivid colours and a thin-



CONTRACTS

Thorn have been awarded a contract by the BBC for their Thornlite 500 systems. These are to be installed at Television Centre, the Cardiff Studios and the Open University. The smaller Thornlite 120 is being supplied to ORF Vienna and Finnish Television.



Rank Strand Light Palette.

Rank Strand seem to be doing well in America with their Light Palette, another 500 way system, which is going into the Metropolitan Opera and the Kennedy Center in New York. In London the Old

Vic has had a Light Palette installed in time for this season.

Barbican Progress

Hall Stage Equipment is in the process of installing the stage machinery at the Barbican Theatre. The design specification is by Theatre Projects and apparently incorporates a number of unusual features. We hope to be able to report on the Barbican stage in operation next issue.

Talk of the Country

A rather different construction project is nearing completion at Frimley Green in Surrey. Bob Porter's Lakeside Club which was burnt down last November is scheduled to be in operation again in October only twenty weeks after the foundations were laid. The original club was voted "Club of the Year" in 1976, 1977 and 1978 but the new building, costing over £2m, promises to be better than ever. It is being equipped for T.V. use and trade shows. The budget for sound and lighting equipment is believed to be over £80,000. Cosby Controls of New Malden are the lighting and sound consultants and Frederick Bird Associates the architects.

APPOINTMENTS



Philip Rose: CCT Theatre Lighting Ltd announced the appointment of Philip Rose to their Board in July. Mr. Rose had been with Strand and Rank Strand since 1944; 15 years of his career with Strand was spent in the United States and Canada.

After his return to Britain in 1974 he became Director of Marketing and Research and Development and General Manager of Strand Sound. According to Derek Hindle, managing director of CCT, Philip Rose's new role will be to help with the company's development plans.

Jim Douglas, who was sound consultant at the National Theatre joined Green Ginger in July at their new base at Milton Keynes.

Correspondence

Dear Sir,

It is always good news to hear of a new venture in the entertainment industry, and it is my feeling that Cue Magazine will fill a gap now much felt since the demise of Tabs. Indeed, as the business evolves and changes, it would seem appropriate that the 'glossy' periodical should not be one aligned with any specific commercial interests, but should be in a position to take a broad and perhaps critical view of the whole stage lighting and production field.

To be specific, I see an excellent opportunity here for reader service activities such as product reviews and evaluations, which would make absorbing reading for technical people, when appearing in the magazine, and, if sold separately, perhaps in more detailed and analytical form, could be built up into dossiers which would be invaluable for such people as designers, consultants, students and technicians. There would also be good reason to establish a standard set of measurements and performance figures, so that prospective users could, for once, compare apples with apples, and not rely on manufacturers specs, which, understandably, will always emphasise their products' superiority in one particular facet, while placing less emphasis on their weaknesses. Perhaps, in time, such independently evaluated figures would be required to accompany advertising material, in the same way as petrol consumption figures are quoted on car ads? Who knows.

It would be interesting to know of the reactions of other readers on this subject, and gratifying if this letter should set the ball rolling.

With all best wishes for the long life and success of CUE,

Yours etc.,

Tim Burnham
Tim Burnham Associates Ltd.,
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Now is the time for all good men

MERVYN GOULD

The theatre world has many organisations, but surely room could be found for one more. I therefore propose to found, (with, of course, a little help from my friends) the *Technical Association for Touring Theatricals*—to be known as TATT.

The need for the new organisation should be obvious. In the days of Number One Tours, a company would tour a Company Manager, a Stage Manager, a Production Manager and an Electrician. Today, only subsidised companies afford this, but the lines of communication have not changed. What has changed is that a present-day Company and Stage Manager is expected to perform all four jobs; without, needless to say, a salary four times bigger.

Certainly, commercial tours are in jeopardy but we are fortunate that private backers are still prepared to send out shows. This is where TATT would come into its own. Firstly to help those poor people in stage management to cope with the extra knowledge required, both technical and personal; secondly to provide a forum for intelligence about dates; and thirdly to fulfill a social need.

Now, as to organisation. Equity are still struggling with the prospect of a branch and delegate structure: this would seem to be ideal for TATT. As most of the prospective membership are continually touring, a central base would not be needed. Control and formalities would be kept to a minimum, although a national network of meeting places and an information sheet are necessary. This is where we approach the crux of the problem, for usually such matters require (a) finance and (b) steering committees.

Now for the master stroke. You may, or may not, be surprised to realise that the basis for the whole operation already exists. Just think of the number of pro bars, or "little pub around the corner" from all stage doors. What a splendid national network of meeting places—and ones that are presently in use so that there would be no problem in obtaining the minimal quorum for meetings.

In addition, the time schedule for the agenda would be very flexible for, depending on whereabouts in the country, the hours available cover from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. and from 5 p.m. to 11 p.m. Also for those extra special meetings in times of theatrical crisis or technical need, certain of the meeting places provide afternoon and post-11 p.m. meeting times. But only, of course, for the more dedicated and regular members of the Association.

So far, so good. But what, you may say, about the need for circulating information and membership lists. The answer is in existence and lies on many bookstalls. A brief addendum to the Good Beer Guide should fill the bill, and the main information (i.e. venues and times) is already listed

in the main pages.

And what would TATT seek? Basically, I suppose, it would seek as many viewpoints as the number of members. Ranging from a demand to Equity insisting on shows being re-timed to fit into closing hours, to a need for NAATKE to stipulate that lighting bars must be not more than six feet off the ground (to obviate the possibility of members in a tired and emotional state falling off a ladder). On the more technical side, a need to return to variety-style lighting (easy to focus Frenca's, 43's or 49's on wing towers) combined with a return to direct-operated boards on the grounds that walking along a Grandmaster for each cue helps to remove a tendency to snooze, would be pressed.

A more valuable point would be the educational side of TATT. Informal lectures would be available on such subjects as when Sadler's Wells Opera toured such dates as Her Majesty's, Carlisle, the superiority of carbon arcs over CSIs in the matter of lighting a cigarette, how to refill a water dimmer in an emergency (do remember to shut off power before employing the kidney juice), and the correct place to thump a recalcitrant mercury bottle rectifier to get it to strike.

Possibly, though, the most useful side of meetings would be the dissemination of practical hints. A short check-list would include: directing focusing whilst that on one's back; what to do if the tallescope crashes over the floats; the best way to clamber up a raked stage on hands and knees (side-ways, to avoid the possibility of slipping back); the danger of lying spreadeagled centre stage during a get-out; and where to secrete bottles of Newcastle Brown in a CD.

"These are not practical hints" you snort?. But I assure you that all these are technical problems that I have seen met, and coped with very well, by people who would make excellent members of TATT. I cannot, naturally, give names and places in these pages since we must avoid an unseemly rush to certain meeting places by students anxious to further their education.

Naturally, as the Founder, I would expect some benefit from this Organisation. I respectfully suggest that the membership fee for TATT, carefully recorded in a little black book, should be the purchasing for me of a pint of draught bitter in whichever of the Association's meeting places I should care to visit—such a gesture being repeated by all members present. Hardly an excessive price to pay for such an idea and such an organisation.

Good Health to you all.



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DOROTHY TENHAM

If you work in a theatre you are part of a company of people who should all be working together as a team in the sincere hope of producing perfection in order to satisfy the paying public and themselves. The team has many component parts. It always has had and probably always will have. When I first worked in the professional theatre thirty years ago, to my 'new' eyes there appeared to be three main sections to this team. Section 1 was the FOH staff including the House Management, stage door keeper and cleaners; Section 2 was the actors and director, including the MD who, in those days, still played the piano in the Pit; Section 3 was the Stage Management and backstage staff and the workshop staff. The latter usually became backstage staff by working as showmen during performances.

I knew nothing about a company becoming a team and due to my lack of experience in these matters, was quite ready to accept the 'us' and 'them' attitude which existed between Sections 2 and 3. I was an 'us' and took it for granted that 'them' were there for my benefit. Over the years, I have come to the conclusion that the only reason that any theatre could ever boast a good company or a well balanced team was because

Section 3 were so busy and fascinated with their work that they couldn't be bothered to waste time and energy asking for recognition and abolition of the 'caste' system. In time, I too became fascinated with what 'them' did as their contribution to the perfect whole. I joined 'them' and have been a rebellious member of Section 3 ever since.

Why rebel and what against? The fact that Section 1, 2 and 3 existed at all when we should all have been using our energy towards creating a perfect whole. Unfortunately, my rebellion is still in progress. Far too many managements and directors still consider it right that Stage Management should be willing martyrs to their lack of thought and preparation and require 'them' firstly to know their place and secondly to produce miracles on behalf of 'us'. The challenge is still enjoyable and the sting is slowly disappearing from the tail — hence the fact that Stage Management is still a most exciting and satisfying career. Unfortunately there is still a great danger ahead. The people who work backstage are in danger of creating their own sections, dividing technicians from stage managers. I am able to hope now that the sections will very soon become only divisions of labour

within an accepted team.

The first issue of 'Cue' seems an appropriate place to offer this warning as the fault is, as ever, two sided. I have every reason to believe that 'Cue' will not just fill the gap that was left when Tabs ceased publication, but that it will help to bridge a gap never recognised by Tabs. I hope that 'Cue' will not be just about the goods being marketed and how advanced technology can improve efficiency, speed and comfort in the field of theatre machinery in general and lighting in particular, but will also glance over its shoulder from time to time at the 'people'. Whether they are called 'technicians', 'technical ASM's' or 'operators', it is people who connect the goods with the production.

It is the Stage Management who are still the clearing house between the growth of the show in the rehearsal room and the preparation of the technical work in the workshop. Only if Stage Management is doing its job properly is it possible for the technicians to prepare their work with purpose. Only if the technicians understand that their goods are required to be used by people, is their work and preparation of real value. Working in isolation is a waste of effort. We cannot afford to create our own version of 'us' and 'them'. We need each others skills and understanding if the team is to arrive at perfection. I would like to hope that this feeling of unity is what we wish to pass to the next generation — not just a series of beautifully presented brochures, charts and price lists.

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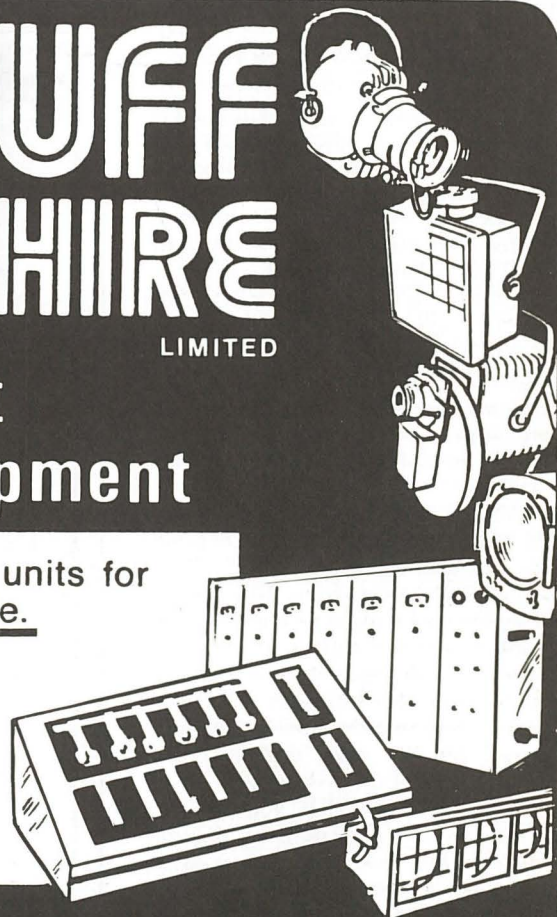
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Between Cues

The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

Plinge at a Showbinger

First night parties are getting bigger: soon the budget for the party will overtake the budget for the show itself. Already the cost of celebrating some West End openings must surely equal the annual subsidies of some of our regional theatres. To which there can only be one comment—*That's Showbiz*. But these binge's can provide opportunities for a shy retiring fellow like Walter Plinge. Now your Walter has often yearned to view the interior of the Lyceum Theatre. But could he of the leaden feet ever bring himself to enter a Palais de Danse? Correct! So how about a Lyceum party where the champagne flowed like a river in spate past mountains of cold cuts and feathery gateaux? Yes, an invitation definitely for acceptance. And an opportunity to observe that this theatre has not been despoiled. Apart from the careful removal of a couple of box fronts to accommodate stairs to the boarded-over stalls, the auditorium remains a theatre. The stage has a temporary ceiling to keep the ghosts at bay but otherwise the Lyceum graciously, if a touch reproachfully, awaits our eventual pleasure. But, having explored, Plinge did not linger. The party was in celebration of *Grease* and the sound (of a singer with the curious christian name of "Shakin" accompanied by a band with the courageous title of "Fumble" well this sound was amplified way above the thresholds of both pain and intelligibility. For the first time in the many weeks of our son et lumiere collaboration, the Musical Director and Sound Consultant were smiling in contentment. Was this the sound level that they had hoped to achieve in the theatre? If such was their ambition, then let us rejoice that it remained unfulfilled.

Balearic Horseshoes

Publishers of guide books and picture postcards do not, in general, regard old theatres as being part of an architectural heritage. The Balearic Islands are no exception, yet the traditional horse-shoe opera houses in Mahon and Palma are surely as interesting as some of the more obvious show-piece buildings. I did not succeed in penetrating the Mahon theatre—the film *Salon Kitty* was announced, but not until tomorrow. But the date (1824) and the British influence (sash windows) suggests that the interior might have some interest, even some clues, for the Georgian theatre buff—until one remembers that the British occupation of Menorca ended in 1802.

In Palma, the exterior of the Teatro Principal displayed scrubbed stonework and



Mahon without

fresh varnish. A ticket for a dancing school end-of-term one-night-stand revealed total restoration of a devastatingly beautiful Italianate Opera House. Five tiers of boxes. Everything red (seats, walls, partitions) except for the white tier fascias with their gold scroll-work, the painted ceiling and the centre clock crowning the proscenium arch. Oh, such a Teatro Principal should certainly be in the guide books and its picture postcard should be on sale—at least in the shop next door.



Palma within

Filtering for Posterity

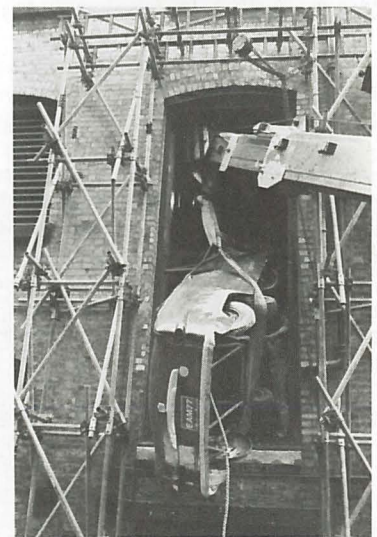
We understand that candidates interviewed for a recent vacancy at the Theatre Museum were asked *If the museum were offered, say, the entire Visconti "Don Carlos"—sets, costumes, props, documents, everything—how would you advise the Curator?* We think that this just about sums up the basic problem of running a theatre museum and we offer no prizes for guessing which eminent mustachioed gentleman from the Victoria and Albert asked the question.

Something Else

The young are using a useful phrase capable of wider adoption by us elderly theatric diplomats. *Something else* can have completely opposite meanings dependent upon subtleties of intonation. When Plinge appeared in his holiday sun hat, he was met with *Oh dad, that hat is something else*. Plinge has not succeeded in identifying whether the intonation implied approval, but he has his suspicions.

Greasy Get In

Unorthodox theatres are great. Provided that the shows are designed specifically for them. London's Astoria is such a theatre and has a number of features—such as a grid over the forestage—that should give it an interesting future. But a conventional touring house it is not. Of course we got the show on but then we always do. (One of these days, however, we must surely fail.) However in this case, as the photograph shows, before the show could go on there was some trouble in getting it *in*.



Eau for a Perrier

July in Bristol was the time and place for the *World Wine Fair and Festival*. By coincidence, some Shakespearean matters happened to require my presence at that time and in that city. Rehearsal pressures kept me from the tastings, but I did slip into the Bristol New Vic Theatre for Michael

S.M

Rothwell's one-man-show, *Eau for a Muse*, subtitled *An Entertainment based on Water*. Unlike some drama critics who were observed to prefer the management's interval hospitality room, I (conscious, as always, of my reporting responsibility to my CUE readers) entered into the spirit of the evening by graciously consuming the proffered bottle of up-market water from the sponsors of the performance—*Perrier*. An enjoyable anthological evening, but I think that on the whole I would prefer to ignore the advice of G. K. Chesterton

If an angel out of heaven
Brings you other things to drink
Thank him for his kind attentions,
Go and pour them down the sink.

Underground Light Music

I nearly did not visit Mallorca's *Caves of Drach*: the exotic colours of the picture postcards suggested that the stalactites and stalagmites were subjected to lighting with fruity filters. But the lighting turned out to be impeccably designed—and unfiltered so that the rock formations could make their own delicately tinted statements. The largest cave is a theatre, its stage a lake facing raked bench seating for an audience of a thousand. The houselights fade, there is a



moment of total black—such a blackout as I have long desired but never achieved—and then a barely perceptible glow appears from the depths of the cavern's lake and swells as three rowing boats glide across the still waters. The boat's gunwales are lined with white light bulbs which cast light on to rock and water but ensure that the oarsmen are invisible. In one boat a trio of violin, cello and organ (live musicians, no gramophone nonsense) play Greig and yes, the Tales of Hoffmann Barcarolle. The interplay of sound and light is pure theatrical magic. But let the official guide book make its own charming comment . . . *like a theatre stage where the birth of day must be put over to the audience, slowly and politely. This set of lights is now completely automatic. Before, some rheostat worked by hand provided these effects; but sometimes the day rose slowly and sometimes it rose later, depending on the mood and time of the one in charge of working the lights. Today, everything is perfect as corresponds with the natural jewel we have in front of us.*

Softly Spreading

As my years roll by I become increasingly uninterested in lighting equipment. After all, Lighting Design is mostly about where you put the lights and what you point them at—rather than which (or whose) lights that you use. Certainly the new memory controls have made life much easier once the putting and pointing is over. But these controls have now achieved detergent status: most of them will do the job equally well. The lights themselves just chug along from year to year with the occasional tentative gesture in the shape of a bit of cosmetic tarting-up. Certainly the arrival of the variable-beam-angle profile has been useful and the PAR 64 has added an exciting new texture of light to the palette (at least in the 120 volt version, not the grotty 240 volt spin-off). But by and large there is absolutely no reason to discard anything bought at any time within the last twenty years or so. However Rosco have now come up with the nearest approach in many years to a genuine U.S.P. (For those unversed in marketing jargon, these initials stand for *Unique Sales Proposition*.) Rosco's U.S.P. is a series of directional diffusers. Now directional glass frost is not new: It is a common device in theatres which follow the Central European tradition of focus spots with simple P.C. lenses. But the new stuff is a normal plastic filter which can be cut to give a directional spread in the desired plane with varying degrees of diffusion. The crews on recent Walter Plinge shows have become accustomed to experiments with off-cuts from his diffusion test kit and bits have ended up in all sorts of profile spots, particularly at the bottom of booms—and in the pair of 774s that some goon sold into an unsuspecting civic mini-theatre. So let's raise a cheer for a really new useful tool for the Lighting Designer.

Efficient Loudspeakers were in Attendance

With considerable typographical emphasis, an old Bury St Edmund's playbill in the gallery of the Theatre Royal announces that *An Efficient Band will be in Attendance*. The Actor's Company, for Wycherley's *The Country Wife*, substituted two efficient loudspeakers and placed them before the proscenium doors in recognition of the command offered by these forestage entrances within the intimacy of a regency county playhouse. That the music to be thus loudspoken should be by Mr. Handel was entirely appropriate, but that it should be in the sumptuous arrangements of Sir Thomas Beecham perhaps bordered a little on an alienation effect in such a house. We live, after all, amidst a growing awareness of the sensuous pleasure of pre-romantic sound—the authenticity of gut strings, natural brass and keyless wood which might surely seem appropriate for a Restoration play, adapted by a Georgian actor and performed in a Regency playhouse. But with houselights out and tabs away to reveal an attractive and practical set whose stylised timbers owed nothing to the painter's art, there was an indication that this production was to be no attempt at historical reconstruction of either Wycherley, Garrick or Bury St Edmunds. (Throughout, the proscenium doors remained dedicated to the gramophone rather than the actor.) However, in the search for acting style, this splendid production had developed just the right degree of robust heightened naturalism from a base of period formalities. And for this the Handel-Beecham was a precise musical mirror.

(*An aside*—the asides, particularly when delivered by Leonard Maguire, demonstrated just how much the Georgians in general and William Wilkins in particular knew about the art of theatre architecture.)

The Wycherley play, in Garrick's re-working was being performed in celebration of that most illustrious actor's bicentenary: that it should be accompanied by Handel in a Beecham re-working was entirely appropriate since this is also the year of the centenary of that most illustrious theatrical theatre musician. That the bicentenary was of a death and the centenary was of a birth mattereth not: long may the theatre continue to find motivation in its anniversaries. This is the silver jubilee of this Walter Plinge's stage baptism . . . and he needs, nor makes, no further excuse for turning columnist.

St. Edmundsbury Postscript

During the Wycherley performance, resolved to become more closely associated with this most magical of perfect playhouses. *And so it shall be.*

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