

# CUE

Technical Theatre Review



September – October 1980

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# CUE

## Technical Theatre Review

### 7. September–October 1980



Our cover picture shows the Fashion Fair at the Port de Versailles exhibition centre. If we cannot teach Paris anything very much about fashions in clothes we can still surprise them when it comes to putting the show on and lighting it. In this issue Richard Andrews describes working visits to Paris and Dusseldorf as well as a 20 week tour in Britain launching the new Vauxhalls.

## Quid pro quo

'Nice to see that Lord Goodman has weighed in as Chairman of the Association for Business Sponsorship of the Arts, a body formed, presumably, to find out on behalf of commercial interests what is the quid for their quo, and, if not, why not? We hope they won't want to do for the theatre what Kerry Packer did for cricket, 'though, come to think of it, *some* theatres and quite a lot of 'leisure complexes' in civic centres do look as if they could do with a good dose of floodlighting. One thing AFBSOTA might question administrators about is under-utilisation of good selling-space. Apart from schools, it is hard to think of buildings less inhabited for most of the 24 hours than your average theatre. And it can't make sense, in commercial terms, to have all that square-footage of stage and back-stage and front-of-house, and all that excellent equipment, just standing there, if the only living things around most of the time are the caretaker and his cat and the lady in that depressing confessional labelled 'advance booking'.

The Business Sponsors etc. will think, surely, of conventions, seminars, shareholders' meetings and salesmen's symposia – too often still held in hotels where the 'full conference facilities' promised usually consist only of a set of spindly, gold-painted chairs kept in an annexe to the ballroom, and a Carousel is expected to manage a 70-foot throw under a ceiling 8 feet high.

But perhaps they will also suggest trade-fairs in foyers, music in the mezzanines, Bingo-mornings in the balconies, and on Sundays, revival meetings on the revolves.

It could be good business. It might be fun.

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# Trade Off

**How the world of Trade Shows is using the techniques and facilities of the theatre, to their mutual advantage.**

RICHARD ANDREWS

My recent experiences in the two major areas of Trade Shows – cars and fashion – have brought home to me how commercial companies can benefit theatres while helping themselves, and how British expertise can 'beat the natives' in Europe.

Taking cars first, I was involved in lighting the 'Vauxhall Enters the '80s' road show. This was a twenty week tour, visiting twenty one towns and cities throughout the UK and Ireland – Aberdeen to Worthing, Canterbury to Port Talbot – with between one and five performances in each place. As originally envisaged by Vauxhall, the venues would have been the standard banqueting/conference suite in a major hotel. This would have had the usual facilities: a 10ft high ceiling, situated next to the kitchen, with a flat floor, half a dozen pillars, lack of suitable power feed, access via a 6ft x 6ft service lift, a resident electrician/engineer you wouldn't trust to wire a 13amp plug, and a charge of about £1,500 per day. Costing the supply, rigging and operation of lighting and sound (Vauxhall themselves providing AV equipment), it immediately became obvious that the figure was going to be high. This was largely made up from the time and labour involved in get ins/outs and rigging. As anyone who has worked in this type of venue knows, erecting the suspension system, and laying in cables alone, on any decent sized rig, takes quite a while. It was therefore suggested that Vauxhall consider using theatres wherever possible. The advantages were many. Firstly, most theatres, including existing equipment and day staff wages, cost less per week than the average conference room per day. With less of our own equipment to be rigged, no board to be installed, and no cables to be run in, fit up times were much shorter, and used fewer people. There were the additional facilities available – flying, revolves, lifts, etc. The atmosphere for the audience was obviously better, and most theatres had catering departments capable of providing the hospitality required. The benefits to the theatre, apart from the obvious one of income, were publicity and the possible introduction of a new audience to the idea of theatregoing.

Site visits undertaken jointly with Vauxhall established how the show would fit in, what special facilities could be used, and what additional equipment would be needed. The show was deliberately kept flexible, as theatres ranged from 350 to 1,500 seats, with all types of stages. Whatever was available was used. There were between three and six cars on stage, according to the size of the venue. The setting was the theatre masking – usually blacks – with a 22ft x 9ft projection

screen upstage. This was serviced by four pairs of Kodak SAV 2000 carousels, controlled by a Director 24 microprocessor unit. The screen was either flown, or stood on legs, with front or rear projection used as was appropriate. The show was also called from both the stage and FOH during the tour. There were about 100 lighting cues, and special effects including the remote flashing and dipping of the head and side lights of the cars. The 1½-hour show started with an AV presentation of the

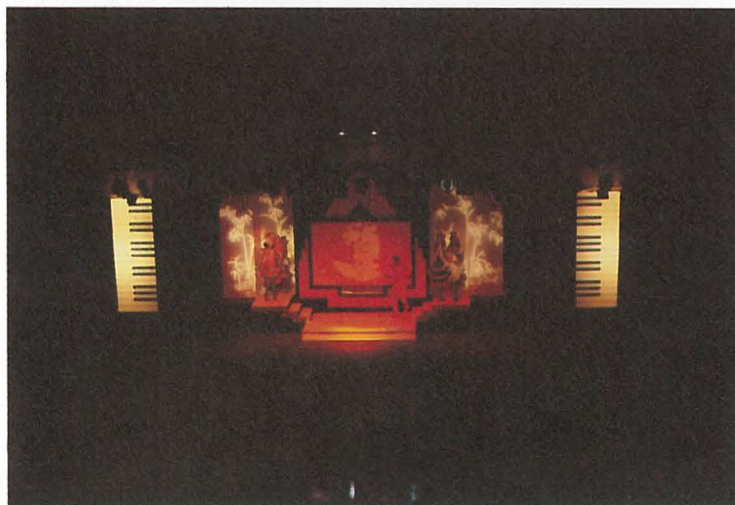
Each date followed this pattern:

- |       |     |                           |
|-------|-----|---------------------------|
| Day 1 | AM  | Get in                    |
|       |     | Placement of cars         |
|       |     | Rigging/Flying            |
|       | PM  | Rigging                   |
|       |     | Focusing                  |
| Day 2 | AM  | Lighting                  |
|       |     | Car cleaning              |
|       | PM  | Run through with company  |
|       |     | adjusting to venue        |
|       |     | Run through new technical |
|       |     | effects – revolve, etc. – |
|       |     | tape only                 |
|       | EVE | First performance         |

The big advantage of working to a tape was that we could run sections again and again, without the company having to be there. One problem was that we were unable to focus lamps without the cars in position, but once they were in position, it was difficult to get to the lamps. Moving steps and scopes round £10,000 worth of



*Vauxhall were enthusiastic about using theatres and soon picked up the tricks of the trade.*



*Our gobos and other effects created a tremendous reaction in Dusseldorf.*

sights and sounds of the ninety years Vauxhall has been operating, interspersed with dance numbers in the style of each decade. This was followed by a spot from a top entertainer. The show ended, again using AV, with the presentation of the current model range, culminating in the launch of the new Astra.

car can be a bit unnerving. However, since I had previously worked on a show at the Jack Barclay car showroom in Berkley Square, missing Rolls Royce with scaffolding poles by inches, I was used to it. Even so, for the second half of the tour, the Royale always had to face stage right, because of a scrape down one side – not



# “Finally, I’d like to pay a tribute to the people who made it all possible -Lee Filters.”



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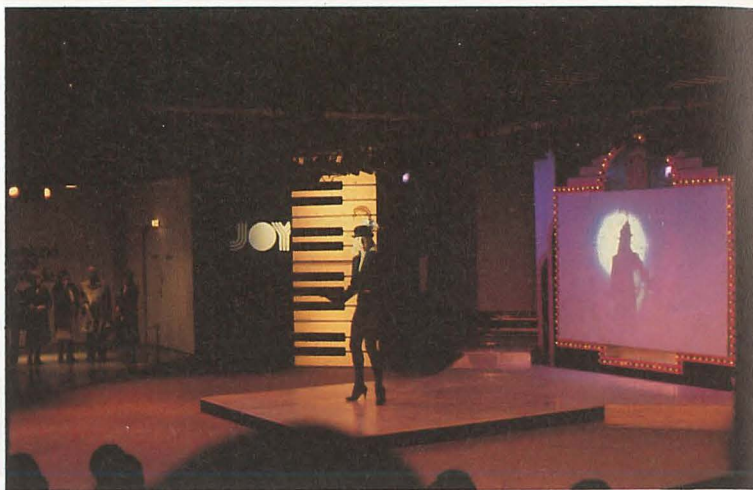


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caused by the lighting department I hasten to add! Getting the cars in and out was sometimes a problem, in spite of the meticulous measurements taken on the site visits. At the Connaught, Worthing, both the dock doors and the bumpers had to be removed before it was possible. It always amazes me, how professionals can manoeuvre cars in the most confined spaces, without a scratch. Even so, it was not always possible to place cars as originally envisaged. Sometimes we ended up with a completely different arrangement from what was expected. At the Wakefield Theatre Club, we finally had a car on each of the two disco dance floors, at the rear of the auditorium!

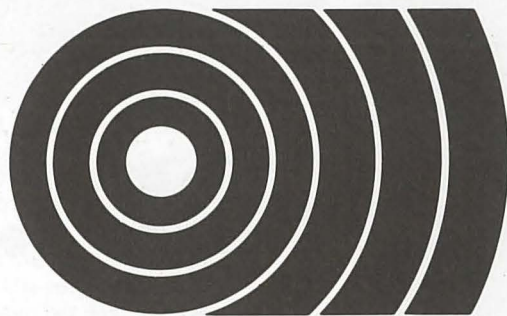
A source of infinite amusement to me, since I didn't have to worry about it, was the removal of the covers. Up to the point in the show when a car is presented, or 'revealed', it has a white cover on it. This has to be tastefully lit, so that the audience doesn't notice that there are cars all over the stage with white covers on them. I was once told by a producer, that a car with a sheet over it was supposed to be a rock. 'Couldn't I make it look more like one?'. Vauxhall were determined that the Astra cover should whisk away, as if by magic. At each venue therefore, yards of fishing line, stage weights, and eye hooks screwed to every conceivable corner of flatage were employed to achieve this. After hours of

experimentation, sometimes it worked!

Vauxhall were very enthusiastic about the idea of using theatres, and keenly took up suggestions of how to make the show a more theatrical experience. It developed a great deal from their original concept. They soon picked up the tricks of the trade. In no time they were calling Fresnels, *Frazzles*, and Mini Ellipses, *Eclipses!* Vauxhall certainly got more out of the theatres than they would have from conventional conference suites, and in doing so, saved £50,000 on venue hire alone. The theatres welcome the new business, and were generally very helpful and friendly.

Turning to fashion, experiences in Germany and France have proved to me the superiority of our equipment and expertise. When it was first mooted that we were to light a gala show, opening a fashion fair in Düsseldorf, we expected to meet the best in German technology and efficiency – and, of course, they would all speak English! Our site visit was quite a surprise. The Messekongresscenter is an international exhibition centre just five years old. We were to work in Room One, a hexagonal hall, with raked seating for 750. The lighting positions were three glass fronted slots in the ceiling. The first shock was that they contained ten year old Strand equipment – 243s, 223s and 264Fs. These had been specified and purchased when the original contracts for the building went out. All lamps were hard wired in – there was therefore no question of re-rigging – and were so close to the glass that it was impossible to put barn doors on. These remained in their boxes in the basement store!

The control was a custom built Siemens manual board, whose faders were 'upside down', and grouping/mastering facilities were of mindboggling complexity. Finally, neither lighting nor sound technicians spoke English, and our German was very basic. It took ten minutes to explain the concept of focussing! We resolved our problems by taking our own memory board and lanterns for all specific lighting, and only using the house rig for a three colour downstage wash. Our control was the Berkey Memory 2, 64 way suitcase board, with chase. This caused great interest among the resident staff, for its versatility



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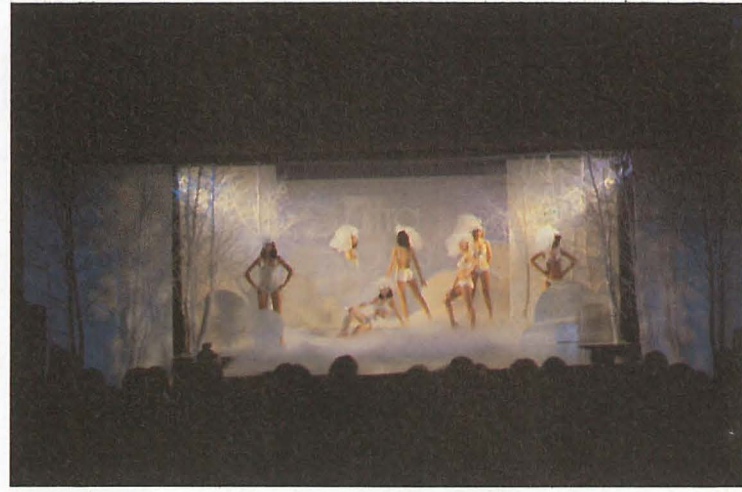
*We took our own lanterns and suitcase control with memory.*

in a small rugged package. There were a number of motorised lines in the ceiling, and from these were hung bars, on which our lamps were rigged. Once again the staff were very impressed by their first experience of Berkey Ellipsoids, Mini Ellipses and Fresnel. The results we achieved, particularly the gobos and other effects, created a tremendous reaction from the international audience. A frequent comment was 'we have nothing like this in our country'. As Herr Dörnemann, the technical controller of the Messecenter said: 'It was a terrific show, but without your lightening business - nothing'. The result was that we are now to make regular visits to the Messecenter to light two shows at each of the spring and

autumn collections, and are discussing the installation of a new permanent rig.

There is help available in communication if you are contemplating 'lightening business', or any other technical theatre work in Europe. Called Teaterword, it is a book which lists 924 terms in eight languages, and has 28 pages of illustrations, covering all aspects of stage and electrical work. It costs about £3, and is available from Nordiska Teaterunion, Birger Jarlsgatan 53, S-111 45, Stockholm, Sweden. It can turn an ordinary Chief Electrician into a Beleuchtungsbrigadier, and a Fresnel into a Steppenlinsenscheinwerfe.

A week in Paris, at a fashion fair in the Port de Versailles exhibition centre, gave



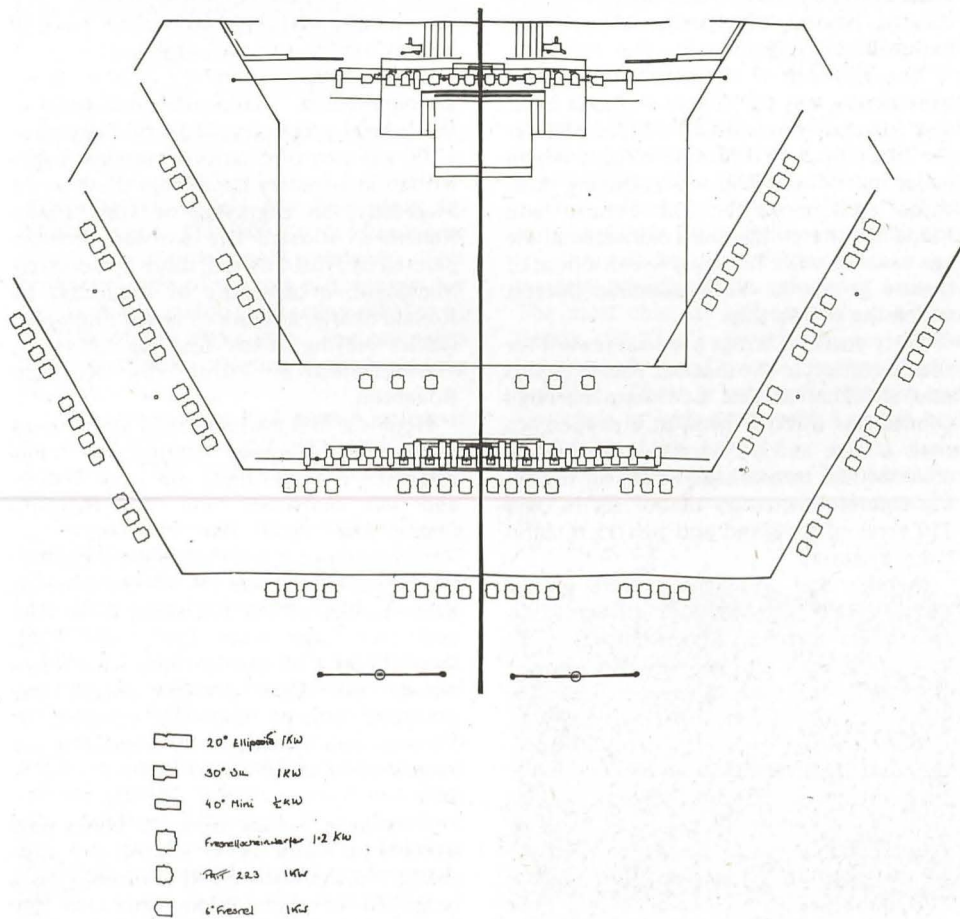
*There was always a queue after the Paris shows wanting to talk equipment and techniques.*

me a chance to see what the French had to offer. There were some half a dozen shows besides ours, so I was able to compare production, equipment and design. Once again our show was very well received. There was always a queue of people afterwards wanting to talk about equipment and techniques. As in Germany it was the 'theatricality' which so impressed them. The other shows tended to be a succession of disco numbers, with the whole rig chasing continuously. Incidentally, the high spot for me was the roller disco, where the men were all done up in elbow and knee pads and helmets, while the girls wore no protective clothing at all, and they were the ones that fell over. These shows were operated on a range of sophisticated, neatly packaged, portable controls and dimmers, comparable to the 40 way Green Ginger system we used. Their lanterns were the problem. All the rigs were made up solely of the hybrid lamp, which a number of British manufacturers are now trying to palm off on us. That is, a fresnel body, with a planoconvex lens. These seem to me to be a 'two for the price of one' idea, dreamed up by a marketing man to appeal to a budgeting committee - no one with any knowledge or experience being involved! The results in Paris spoke for themselves. There is just no way that those lamps could have given the coverage we achieved, in a deep colour, on a 7m wide stage, with just four Berkey fresnels. Nor, of course, the gobo projection either.

The overall conclusion I have arrived at is this. The more that trade shows borrow from the theatre, the more successful they are. The more that the theatre is prepared to offer trade shows, the more financially secure it can become.

*Production facilities consultants for the Vauxhall Road Show:*  
Cosby Controls,  
58-60, Kingston Road,  
New Malden,  
Surrey.

*Lighting design for Düsseldorf and Paris:*  
Mary Stewart David,  
46, Maryland Square,  
Maryland,  
London, E.15.





# Autolycus

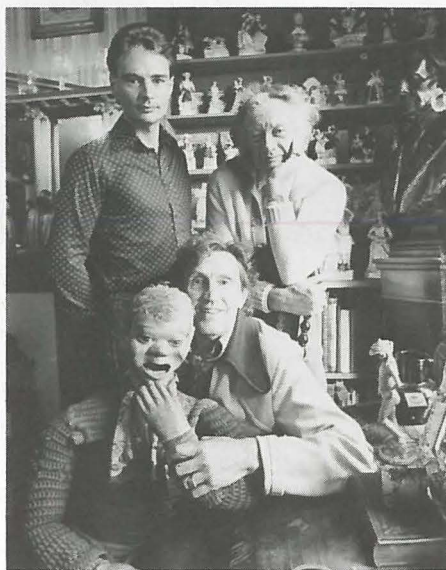
## Collectors' Corner

The faded Victorian gentility of the south-east London borough of Sydenham seemed oddly appropriate as the setting for England's best-known theatre collection. It put me in just the right frame of mind for the 'past'. And the past is what Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson have been dealing with for the last 40 years. Their vast and fascinating collection of theatrical memorabilia is so well-known that they themselves have become something of an institution in the acting world.

It is to them that actors, directors and theatre managements turn for information about past performances and productions. And more than likely Mr. Mander or Mr. Mitchenson will have that knowledge in their heads. They both admit to having photographic memories and, without hesitation, can reel off names, places, dates and even what so-and-so wore on stage in 1931. 'Sybil Thorndike said that if we hadn't been in this line, we'd have been detectives in Scotland Yard,' said Mr. Mander.

I had no difficulty in detecting their large terraced house. A brass knocker in the shape of Shakespeare's familiar balding pate told me that I was at the right front door. Mr. Mitchenson led me into a dark and peaceful world of endless leather-bound volumes, oil paintings, water-colours, prints, china and plaster figures, playbills, posters, programmes, commemorative plates and mugs, files, letters, busts, silverware and theatrical *objets d'art et trouvees*.

The music hall, ballet, opera and the circus were also represented and there were literally thousands of old 78 rpm records. All nine rooms in the house were fully occupied with treasures, as well as the passages and corridors, the staircase and landings, the cupboard under the stairs, the kitchen and the loo. Not a square inch of wall space was left unadorned. It was bewildering to know where to look first.



Colin Mabberley (left) and Joe Mitchenson. Seated front Raymond Mander with ventriloquist's dummy. (Photograph Raymond Mander and Joe Mitchenson Theatre Collection)

Somewhat dazed, I was guided into an Aladdin's cave of a sitting room upstairs to reorientate myself over a cup of tea.

The amiable Messrs Mander and Mitchenson clearly live and breathe for the theatre. First nighters *par excellence*, their enthusiasm is infectious.

They met in 1939 when both were acting. Mitchenson was the son of a drama critic and Mander was related to Miles Mander the film director. Both had already begun collecting; Mitchenson was gathering postcards and books on the theatre and Mander's interest had been cultivated at the age of seven when he was given an album of theatre postcards. Their common interest sealed the partnership.

Forty years on brings a special reward for their devotion to the theatre. Their house is now so cluttered that Lewisham borough council has offered them, at a peppercorn rent, a large and permanent home for the collection in Beckenham Place, an imposing eighteenth century manor set in over 150 acres of parkland and just 15 minutes from Victoria.

Mander and Mitchenson were gleeful when a television reporter inadvertently referred to it as Beckenham 'Palace'. 'We now call it Beck House,' said Mr. Mander in a mock-regal tone. 'Our whole idea is to make it a sort of Kenwood for south-east London. As well as housing our collection, the council has plans for an arts centre; an open-air theatre, concerts, restaurants, the lot.'

Beckenham Place certainly has the grandiose air of a museum. It is built in Portland stone to a classical design. Four Ionic columns support a pediment bearing

the motto – 'Nihil sine Labore' – nothing without hard work. It couldn't be more appropriate for Mander and Mitchenson's labour of love.

If they can keep to their timetable, they intend to start moving in August 1981. In the meantime they have set themselves the awesome task of raising no less than £250,000 to pay for the cost of removal and, most importantly, the cost of cataloguing the thousands upon thousands of items they have accumulated. 'I'm not very good at counting,' said Mitchenson, 'and as we've got six tons of files in one room alone, we now have a curator who is gradually sorting it all out.' The curator is Colin Mabberley who spends his day sifting and sorting, annotating and cross-referencing.

Donations from £1 to one of £5,000 have been arriving ever since an appeal was launched in May. On that occasion Dame Peggy Ashcroft, Sir Peter Hall, Lady Elwyn Jones and Prunella Scales, among others, all gave their seal of approval to the new venture. More recently, news of the appeal has been circulated to all the theatres in England. When the cast of 'Annie' at the Victoria Palace heard the call to alms they instantly raised £71 with a jumble sale between houses. Hattie Jacques donated her beads. 'That's the typical generosity of our profession,' said Mr. Mitchenson.

Financial help towards the cost of buying new items comes from the National Art Collections Fund, the Victoria and Albert grant in aid scheme and the Pilgrim Trust. The Trust paid £800 for two pictures of Henry Irving as Henry VIII and Becket now hanging on the wall. But many items are given to Mander and Mitchenson. The descendants of Forbes Robertson recently left his treasures to the collection.

All the great names in the theatre history are represented – an escutcheon carried in the funeral procession of David Garrick in 1779, a bronze of Charles Wyndham, pages written in a spidery hand from the diary of Macready, an engraving of John Philip Kemble as Richard III, two water-colours painted by Noel Coward, more by Somerset Maugham, a caricature of Maugham by Ronald Searle, a figure of Gwen Francgon-Davies playing in her first big success in 'The Immortal Hour' by Rutland Boughton.

Here is a first leather-bound and ancient edition of Thomas Killigrew's long-forgotten dramas, there are some plaster and wax characters from The Beggar's Opera and Peter Pan. Elsewhere are Venetian puppets, a ventriloquist's dummy, the original set-design for The Mousetrap, back numbers of The Era dating from 1863 and The Stage from 1880, even back numbers of Cue are in there somewhere among the dusty prompt copies, the theatrical stamps and the remains of Mander and Mitchenson's exhibition of stage designs which they took to Russia in 1978.

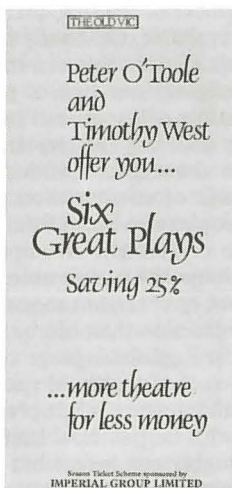
They have written some 20 books and contributed in one way or another to a staggering 700. As Dame Sybil Thorndike once remarked of them: 'The boys are our passport to posterity'.



### 'More theatre for less money'

A record sales drive by the Old Vic this summer has won it the admiration and that sincerest form of flattery, imitation, of its rival theatres. Associate director Jack 'Mr. Joan Bakewell' Emery launched a new subscription scheme by inserting 400,000 specially designed pull-out brochures into the regional section of the Observer Magazine (the only Sunday paper to offer this service) covering the Greater London area. He followed this up with a direct mail shot of some 250,000 to the same area. So successful was the magazine insertion that he used a further 200,000 on a repeat exercise.

The scale of the operation was the biggest ever launched by any arts organisation, he said. No-one had ever inserted a complete booking form into a colour supplement before... and the response was miraculous. For an outlay of £35,000 (which included such costs as redesigning the Old Vic house style) a total of 6,200



The Old Vic's bargain offer as seen in 'The Observer' magazine.

season ticket holders has been built up netting some £117,000 – a handsome return by promotional standards. This represents 40% of the box office target for the six month season (September till March) or 21% of the whole year. The campaign lasted nine weeks, starting at the beginning of June.

'Although no-one had done it before it still exceeded our expectation' said Emery modestly. 'We had aimed for around £70,000.'

Overall cost must be considered very reasonable when considering the excellent knock-on effect on general ticket sales for individual performances and general publicity.

Others have subsequently copied the idea without the same success owing to less well targeted marketing and use of material.

Finally taking full advantage of the publicity potential offered, Emery arranged for the 6,000th season ticket buyer, one Mrs. Judge of Lewisham, to be presented with a magnum of Champagne at the Arts Minister's office in Whitehall on August 5. Needless to say St John-Stewas crowded over such a spectacular promotional burst from this 'grand old theatre' as he put it. 'At a



6,000th season ticket and friends.

time when fears and doubts have been expressed about the future of our commercial theatre, the Old Vic has set an example for all businesses who believe imaginative planning and aggressive marketing hold the key to a prosperous future.'

Imperial Group deserve all credit for pumping £15,000 into the scheme and Timothy West, the Vic's artistic director, for assembling an extremely promising company for the season with Peter O'Toole as Macbeth, returning after a 15-year absence from the London stage, and Lynne Miller, Frances Tomelty, Brian Blessed and Maureen O'Brien in leading roles.

### Ill-considered trifles

It has been noted before and will doubtless be noted again that the shortage of information and general material on our outstanding cultural heritage, the theatre, is downright conspicuous. However, in the past year or so four new outlets for commercial theatrical sales have appeared on the London scene and go some way towards filling the vacuum.

The largest premises belong to the expanded Arts Council Shop in Long Acre which stocks books, periodicals and visual material covering all its spheres of activity. The most chic, or perhaps only the most trendy, is That's Entertainment in new lodgings at the Covent Garden Market Building. There it celebrates vintage and very rare as well as current London and Broadway shows (strictly for buffs) in the form of albums and posters. The latter can be attractively, if expensively, mounted for



Victorian revivals at The Theatre Shop.

hanging at an extra £5 to £7. More worthy of praise, perhaps, are the Theatre Shop by the Phoenix Theatre and Top Of The Bill at the bottom of Wardour Street by the Swiss Centre.

The Theatre Shop puts the accent on memorabilia: original designs, Victorian and Edwardian programmes, handbills and prints as well as an invaluable selection of regional theatre information, a theatre ticket service and gift vouchers, redeemable in tickets or merchandise. Behind the venture are ticket agency doyen Eric Kilner and producer Bill Freedman, together with Gerald and Veronica Flint-Shipman of the Phoenix Theatre.

A less specialised and more commercial approach is adopted by Top Of The Bill, which majors on merchandising – reminding us how little this area has been exploited by managements. The shop is managed (like the Theatre Shop, until mid-evening every day, we note with approval) by the theatrical team of Robert Fox, Eric Parsons, Richard Seddon, Andrew Treagus and Robert Knight, all former stalwarts from the Michael White production stable or backstage men in their own right. The ingenious miscellany on sale runs from T-shirts and sweatshirts (their long sleeved versions), to posters, badges, souvenir programmes, LPs and tapes, specialist papers, cinema and theatre books through to greeting cards, mugs and song-books... and a perky red and white bag to pop them into.



Pop art at the Top of the Bill.

These four main outlets may stimulate a wider public interest while we await with impatience the eventual opening of the Theatre Museum in Covent Garden. But there is still no serious attempt at providing exhibition space for props and costume designs. Only Charles Spencer and Marina Warner's tiny Decor Gallery in Knightsbridge opens a window on the past and affords a glimpse of historic achievements in this field. This is not simply wasteful, it is discouraging to designers because it denies them permanent recognition in one of the few fields where British artists lead the world. How many more international design awards must we walk off with before we learn to encourage our natural talents properly?

Autolycus column contributed by Mike Walker and Anthony McCall.



# The Dynamics of Lighting Control

DORIAN KELLY

a personal view of the art, craft and science of operating a lighting control.

Dynā.mics: of motive force; of force in actual operation: matter or mind as merely the action of forces. (O.E.D.)

Light, properly manipulated, has an intellectual and aesthetic effect on the brain that we cannot yet measure in terms of the real world, but one, nevertheless that can be interpreted as a degree of 'rightness' or harmony with the inherent or imagined spirit of the performance. This relates not only to the state itself, and its built-in psychology (blue is calm, relative brightness has a focussing effect, etc.), but also, and increasingly more apparently, to the precise way that the changes between the states are performed – the FADE DYNAMICS.

Now this is something rather different to cue speed or fade rate: more than just an obscuration here and a revelation there: and certainly more than merely making sure that the right light is in the right place at the right time. These are all vitally important. But the dynamic of a fade is something else. It is a way of working directly into the emotional centres of the mind itself. It is a process of constructing an empathy with the desired aims of the production by the manipulation of our attitudes towards a whole mass of our remembered experience and conditioned expectations. It is a means of reinforcing embryonic emotions and causing them to sweep through an audience: or of killing those emotions stone dead. Above all, it is sublime and can only be employed by one who can be, like a good actor, his own best audience and critical observer, and can simultaneously manipulate and be manipulated by his own actions.

We live in a world structured in a very different way to the one that our forbears perceived. The softly changing shadows and subtle intensities of nature, and even its raw power have been replaced by the aimless freneticism of our cities. Even in our homes television, especially television advertising, has brought us the concept of dynamic vitality as the normal mode of life. In fact television has made the fadein, fadeout and crossfade so much a part of our lives, that we almost seem to miss the ability to perform them in our daily routine.

This is our new nature; another nature, another mirror. Just as all great art in any sphere must spring from careful balances of dynamic and kinetic energies, so must we fine-tune our subliminal responses by the same care in our use of fade dynamics.

Much research has been done into the nature of how the brain perceives light and translates it into usable information, but virtually none into how the mind derives its

aesthetic satisfactions. It has been shown, however, that electrochemical activity in the relevant parts of the brain occurs only when the perceived patterns are undergoing change of some kind, the three most important being changes of intensity, colour and direction. During periods of 'no change' the neurons of the brain appear to function only in a low-level sample and hold mode which after a moment decays into a condition whereby image retention and concentration become difficult, and eventually impossible unless there is sufficient movement in the eyeball or the subject to refresh the image. (This is not the well-known persistence of vision effect, although it is related to it.)

It seems to me therefore that the majority of the effect that lighting has on us must occur during any change of intensity, colour or source, i.e. during the fade which establishes the state, or as a function of the apparent contrast between the present state and any previous state, including house-lights and tab lighting; or as the result of the physical substitution of one lit area by another. In the first few moments of the static state the brain must extract any available information, such as the time of day, the apparent source of light, the mood of the piece, weather conditions, and any of the usual parapsychological information built in by any good lighting designer. After this time the static state has one function and one function only. This of course is visibility. This function continues until the next dynamic occurrence.

What constitutes a dynamic occurrence? The answer is, virtually anything if it involves causing an apparent change of intensity, position or colour, and in practice this can mean not only a deliberately contrived change of light, but also an apparent change of light caused by actors or scenery moving in and out of light, a piece of live flying, or a change in colour contrast caused by the appearance of a costume of uncomplementary hue, or reflections from a piece of insufficiently broken-down glassware.

It devolves upon the board operator, as principal agent for the visual scene, to reproduce with total accuracy all the lighting balances as set by the lighting designer and, very importantly, to create and control the dynamics, and therefore to control the responses of the beholder. It is also necessary to monitor closely all the dynamic occurrences from other sources and adapt to them at least to the extent of minimising the unpleasant ones, and to attempt to integrate the rest into the scheme of things. A sensitive operator will instinctively feel the 'waves' made by the artistes,

the orchestra, the sound and the audience and modify his response so that the whole becomes something very much greater than the sum of the parts.

Just as the lighting designer is the expert in creating the lighting and colour balances and in defining the fade rates and dynamics, the operator should be the expert in working them to best effect and in interpreting the intentions of the designer. In an ideal world the operator would be a fully trained and experienced professional, not just (as often as not as the run progresses) any odd member of the L.X. team that happens to be available. Obviously there ought to be a bond of trust between the operator and the designer, but here a problem of communication often arises. In no other field of art does the creative artist find it necessary to abandon the product of his art into the hands of an unpredictable, motley bunch of people (who range from the utterly brilliant to the utterly incompetent) and expect to have them reproduce it as *an original work of art* eight times a week with no more instruction than can be defined by the use of the English language and a handful of numerals, if that vital spark of non-verbal communication is not present. I can remember with despair how I attempted to get a thoroughly competent but unimaginative operator to phrase a series of lighting changes to the cadences of a piece of poetry: a cue sequence which should have been magic but was eventually cut by me as meaningless because the operator could not see them as anything other than six cross-fades in a row to be done as neatly as possible, on cue, and accurately. What could I say to him, this wizard of the Grandmaster? What could he make of my odd, personal, private and very vulnerable knowledge that if the cues were to be done *just so*, I could help the poet to reach his hearers to the point of inducing tears?

Sooner or later, every operator of someone else's lighting has to meet with lighting so inappropriate, and so disgustingly ghastly that he has to either close his eyes and hope to God that he doesn't have any friends in the house, or refuse to do the cue. No operator can take the latter course and expect to keep his job under most circumstances, but occasionally one has the opportunity to do what one can to make the transition from one undesirable lighting condition to another relatively painless. What can you do when there is a requirement to fade down from 'too bright' to 'too dark' in too short a time? Obviously you must do the cue as given, *and as best you can*. If it becomes apparent to the lighting designer that the cue is not working he will take steps to correct it. If correction is

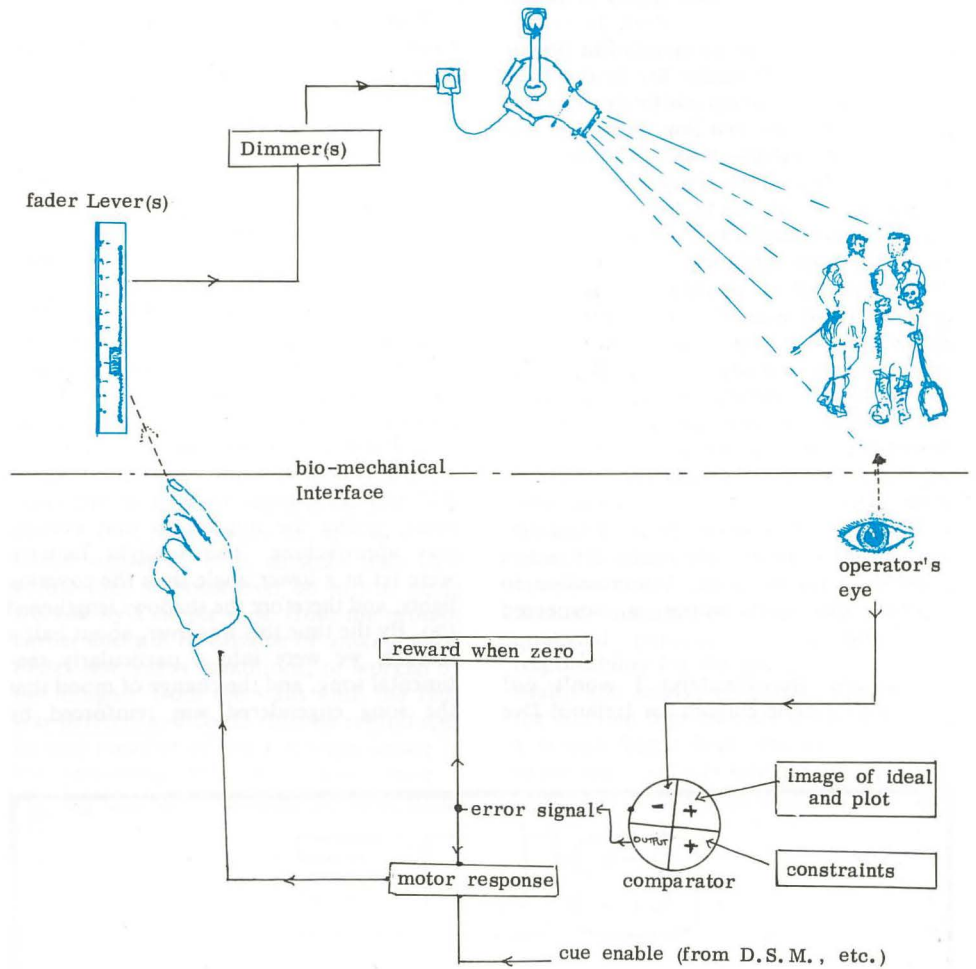


impracticable due to external factors, then start to use your professional expertise to make the fade as subtle and as near to the designer's ideal as possible.

There are a number of tricks we can employ to make an awkward fade work well. Sometimes it is possible to reduce the intensity of parts of the stage faster than others to create time and 'elbow room' to allow the final part of the fade (which is often the bit that shows most) to proceed in an unobtrusive manner. Properly handled, this can enable quite massive moves to have all the subtlety of a much longer fade. There are all sorts of cunning ways of getting a lantern out without the audience being aware of the change, and most of these rely on orchestrating the move to something external, taking for example a lantern down or out as the artiste steps out of the beam, which can be totally undetectable provided that it is done with care, and provided the beam does not hit anything else like the wall or a chair where its sudden absence would be noticed. Under this circumstance there must be *some* light left behind, perhaps from other sources, or, again it would be too obvious. Another way of cheating utilises the principle of distraction. An artiste screaming and jumping up and down stage left can be an opportunity to smoothly subtract light stage right, or the ubiquitous revolver shot, offstage crash, etc. can catch an audience napping. A third way is the use of mutual contrast. This is useful if an actor is standing in front of a window or open backlit door. As the actor arrives in position, some light can be removed from the backing and the human eye will interpret this as a dark adaptation effect, provided the amount of light on the face does not decrease.

Always remember that an audience is never supposed to see a lighting effect in operation, and indeed, will resolutely refuse to do so unless forced by you to see it. So look out of the window. You may think that that is an unnecessary thing to say, but you may be amazed by the number of people that don't. While your right hand is working the masters, or minding the ratefader speed control, your left hand should be constantly chipping away at the individual circuits, leading here, perhaps lagging there, taking the edge off any of the hotspots or shutter shadows that may appear during intermediate levels during the fade. And always learn the rig, as you have not the time to consult the plan during the fades, especially in the degree of darkness that you really ought to be working in.

I must stress, however, that following this advice needs care, and can lead to precisely the opposite effect from that intended! A noted director has defined operators as 'People Who Spoil Plays'. As a board operator myself (and not one, I hasten to add, who feels able to exclude himself from that description), I tend to agree with him to the extent that I feel it to be so ludicrously easy *not* to do the perfect fade. So very few people have any very high expectation of the operator's ability to do one, that when an operator is encountered that has any feel for the dynamics of a fade without having it spelled out to him, sur-



Kelly's Servo-Assisted Bio-mechanical Feedback Loop

prise is often expressed. In fact there must be lots of first class 'feeling' board operators in the regions where the pressures tend to encourage the right sort of thinking, but certainly in town they all seem to have moved to television or have been promoted on the 'Peter Principle' to chief penpusher and formfiller, and who then may well have taken to drink after failing to convince their replacements that a fade can consist of something more than a smooth transition from one state to another.

Well, what can a fade consist of? If you were to ask a musician what playing a scale is you would probably get a definition that was straightforward and educational, but would be saying nothing of the wealth of emotional associations that could be con-

tained in combinations of those few notes when played by an expert who knows how to bring them out. There is an exact parallel between the dynamic of a fade and the dynamic range of a piece of music. 'The Emperor Concerto', adjusted so that each individual note was given equal weight would be efficient, yet boring. The perfectly adjusted proportional dipless crossfade, whilst generally unobjectional, is a sad misuse of the power that an operator has to make a real contribution to the performance by the artistes, and the craft of the other technicians by reinforcing, orchestrating and occasionally counterpointing what they are doing.

Sean O'Casey's *Juno and the Paycock* is a good example that I can use to illustrate



this. A lighting change was plotted for the end of Act II. The lighting designer, Roger Weaver, had set two fine and subtle states, the first being more or less full stage, the sun coming through the window, the fire lit, the votive candle flickering on the mantelpiece. The second state, very dark and gloomy, nearly night, the fire almost out. The brief was: fade down in twenty minutes.

Now, let's look at the script. The Boyles, Joxer and Mrs. Madigan are in the living room. They are having a little drink, which leads on naturally to a few songs with that Irish sentimentality that is known and feared the world over. They are joined by a neighbour on her way to bury her son, shot by the Black and Tans. They discuss the shooting with bitterness. The neighbour leaves and they try to cheer themselves up, and eventually succeed with some atrocious homebrewed poetry. They put on the gramophone, playing a lively jig, interrupted by the funeral procession passing in the street below. All but Johnny, injured taking part in an earlier republican action, go out to watch. We hear the procession pass. This takes about a minute, while Johnny moodily watches the fire going out. A man has crept into the room. He orders Johnny to report to the Commandant to answer questions about a suspected informing.

JOHNNY: (passionately) I won't go!  
Havn't I done enough for Ireland! I've

lost me arm and me hip's destroyed so I'll never walk right agen! Good God, Havn't I done enough for Ireland?

THE MAN: Boyle, no man can do enough for Ireland. (he goes)

faintly, in the distance, the crowd is heard: Hail Mary, full of grace, etc., etc.  
End of Act II

You can see that during this twenty minutes there are a wide variety of moods, and that the amount of stage area in use also varies. Now the bulk of the fade has to take place after the family has gone out, and must be down to a very low level indeed in less than a minute. This is how it happened.

When the cue was given the only thing that happened was a hand move to take down the level of the lanterns covering the wall at an angle to the window. This enabled the light that was set to shine through the window to register the pattern of the window bars onto the set, where previously they had been largely washed out. The effect of this was to warm up the natural source of light, while removing the diffused component of light in the room itself, giving the impression that evening was approaching. The sunlight lanterns were set at a lower angle than the covering lights, and therefore the shadows lengthened too. By the time this was over, about half a minute, we were into a particularly sentimental song, and the change of mood that the song engendered was reinforced by

checking down, again by hand, most of the warm cover, leaving the fireglow, the warm low afternoon sun catching the two girl singers, the rest of the room cool and a little hard. A moment or two after the end of the song, the mood now subdued, the door is opened and the neighbour comes in. The door to the hall is left open, and light from a reflectorless pattern 60 fitted with 17 plus 60 casts a very long hard shadow into the room, and acts as a back keylight. Chiarascuro effect on the group, centre. During the rest of this scene the edges of the room and the area now covered by the spill from the hall are taken down a trifle and the sunlight lantern and any remaining sunlight cover are quietly removed. The neighbour leaves and closes the door. The artistes have naturally gravitated to the area round the fire, the warmest-feeling place in the room. A little warmth is slowly reintroduced into the centre of the room as the mood lightens, to the area where they are to dance.

They hear the funeral. At the exact moment that the needle is lifted from the gramophone, a tiny drop, just within the edge of perception is made in the general light level, and this starts the remainder of the fade. As the stereophonic funeral passes, pick up and follow the mood of the sound, trying to get the main bulk of it done by the time the sound is panned half-way across the stage, thus leaving a few moments in which nothing at all is happening, except the fire going out and the votive candle gently glowing, trying to reflect the mood of stillness and introspection of the crippled boy. There is now only just enough light by the door for us to see that a man has entered, silently. We cannot see who it is, and in fact we never do see his face as we are now very, very slowly creeping the light on the door area to virtually out. As he leaves, all we can see is the panic-stricken face of the boy in the faint guttering light of the votive lamp. The fade to black takes almost painfully long to wring every ounce out of it.

Now, the important thing is this. All that could have been set by the lighting designer. But in fact it was not. All that had been issued to the operator was the plot consisting of two states. The rest was the unique contribution of the operator, as the result of the trust of the lighting designer. Of course, this was largely done in rehearsal, and eventually evaluated, split up into separate cues and tidied up before the first night. Before we go on, please take a moment to mentally put that cue onto a ratefader. It would probably have looked fine. Done by hand it was made to look magic. I do not object to ratefaders *per se*: but no automatic crossfader with the possible exception of TEMPUS or A.M.C. has sufficiently accessible overrides.

My own definition of a lighting board is this: its an absolutely vital bloody nuisance, that gets between me and my needs.

Fortunately, many of us have now been given the opportunity to thrust into the middle distance the problems normally associated with accurately repeating the plot, and therefore the operability (loveableness?) of any control must be con-

# CUE

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cerned with the degree of ease with which it can be incorporated as an equal partner with the operator into what I call 'Feedback Loops'. The function of these is to establish an unbroken circuit between the eye, the brain, the aesthetic response, the motor response, the hands, the fader, the lantern, the lit object and thence back to the eye, with auxiliary inputs from the ears (see fig. 1). As these are self correcting analogue/linear processes which take place not only on pairs of masters and cross-faders, but also on each and every channel, and on groups of channels as required, and bearing in mind that like every servo process it takes place largely a few microseconds in the past (think about it) and as once the need for correction is seen it has already happened, there is no time for the half second or so it takes to access channels or groups if they are not instantly to hand. On a fully manual board of medium sophistication, their contribution to these feedback loops are of course inherent; faders never need accessing or matching. Keypads, on the other hand are essentially nonlinear objects: they need staccato hand movements to operate and lead to staccato thoughts which are incompatible with the evolutionary flux of a fade.

However, the advantages of dimmer level memory by far outweigh these problems, and are not to be given up lightly: indeed it is only the existence of this that has made us able, even to consider taking the state of the operators' art one stage further. There are virtually no systems currently available that have all the facilities for good operator interface built-in; but a good operator is a good operator even if he has only a row of dimmerswitches to work with. In fact, he has probably rigged himself up with an arrangement of meccanno and string to act as group and submasters by now.

The trouble with all non-manual boards is that they force the operator into a rigidly channelled methodology of operating. The precise behaviour of a lantern or group of lanterns must be predicted during plotting or discovered the hard way during rehearsal before it can be allocated to a particular submaster or allotted a fade profile on those systems where that facility is available. On other systems anything other than a simple split fade requires the cue to be dissected into two or more separate memories, depending on how many playbacks you have available. If you wish to make up a lead group, a main group and have some lanterns lagging behind the rest, some up, some down, then you also need to use the digital wheel, or equivalent. Cumbersome. And the drill is so inflexible that two dangers are immediately apparent: the first is that you cannot instantly adjust for alterations, emergencies or mere whims: the second is that it is a bit too much like hard work for a conventional-type operator to consider doing it in the first place, and it *does* tax the brain so on the three hundred and forty-third performance.

So what is the ideal? Well (temporarily discounting such beyond-our-art schemes as direct connections into the human brain, or attaching sensors to various parts of our bodies to control our lighting rigs merely by

waving the appropriate parts of our anatomy at the stage) memories, of course, *plus* one full set of channel levers that *never need matching*, *plus* a system whereby clues are worked fully manually until the fade is perfect and all parties are satisfied with what is happening on the stage, and then the machine memorises the actual dynamic of each channel and can reproduce the fade exactly as the operator last worked it, *plus* the ability for the operator to override each channel and submaster merely by reaching for it, *plus* the ability to override the overall playback dynamic merely by reaching for the master, *plus* the ability to re-record a new dynamic without erasing the old, *plus* automods, etc., *plus* a full pin patch with level pins for that inevitable moment of failure and to allow easy access to the control lines for the connection of chasers, flashing keys, etc., *plus* V.D.U., somewhere to put your ashtray, beer, etc.

Here, then, we may be groping toward a possibility of a control that is all things to all men. It can be worked by a beginner or an accomplished expert, an artist or a cretin, and can handle any situation, including those unpredictable Sunday concerts, colour music or the non-arrival of the board operator. It is capable (but God forbid that it should ever be so!) of being worked by a simple push from the prompt corner and still be capable of looking good under emergency conditions, or worked by the designer from the stalls until the fade was perfect, and could then be reproduced by any member of the LX team secure in the knowledge that it at least stood a fighting chance of looking the same night after night. It would, more importantly, be capable of performing that elusive phrasing and harmonising, would have, in fact, 'playability'. There is even the possibility of there emerging a new breed of artist-operators whose sole function is to record his personal touch onto the board at the beginning of the run and to touch it up from time to time. Perhaps we may even be seeing a new production credit in our programmes 'Lighting Control dynamics by Walter Plinge'. In many ways, though, I hope not. The best person to work the board on the first night should really work it for the rest of the run. Hopefully, he just wouldn't be able to keep his hands off all those overrides, and in his hands, the performance would evolve as all good performances must.

I believe that it is of great importance that he who is to work the control should focus the lanterns, or be present on stage during the focussing session, preferably after some discussion with the designer. Only this way will he have enough knowledge of the tools at his disposal. It will also enable him to offer constructive suggestions to the lighting designer at the plotting session, something rarely resented unless the suggester patently does not know what he is talking about. Of equal importance is his presence at rehearsal, perhaps even more often than the designer (often busy on other shows) as this can be a very useful extra channel of information between him and the company. For a musical, the head limesman may also

benefit from a visit to the final runthrough. Incidentally, I happen to believe that a long spell as a lime operator is the very best training that a board operator can get. Nothing else can give such sense of the dynamic and kinetic possibilities of the use of light.

I should like here to enter a plea to reappraise the hierarchy and role of the electrical department of any medium-to-large theatre, to accommodate the new grade and job description of *Technical Operator*. This would cover board operators, sound operators, head limesman, power flying system operators, audio-visual system operators and so on, and allow them to be freed of the otherwise unconnected duties relating to heating and ventilation, power installation, plumbing, changing the bulbs in the ladies loo, etc., and allow them to spend their forty-odd hours more productively, working shows, maintaining the rig properly, doing turnarounds, and generally learning their trade at courses covering optics, fibre optics, lasers, electronic first aid repairs, use of microphones, spectrum analysers, graphic equalisers and all the tools of the future, for it is from this grade that the sound and lighting designers and all the innovators will spring. It will also enable theatre managements to hire properly qualified persons capable of taking responsibility for the electrical installation, health and safety, etc., without regard for the fact that they may not know one end of a colour frame from the other. Perhaps never again will a House Manager poke his head into the control room just as finger muscles are being tensed for a cue to demand replacement bulbs for the foyer, or as in one theatre where I was (dear God!) a fresh supply of toilet paper.

One of the nicest sights to see in the professional theatre is the sight of a real pro technician working the board. You really can tell the difference in the house. He obviously enjoys his work. He is always ready to react to anything new, even notices new lines, gags, etc., and who has a keen eye for potential dangers, trucks about to run into obstructions, important props missing, obstructions to the Iron, or an emergency in the auditorium, and informs the prompt corner in time to avert disaster. I cannot help contrasting this to the sight I had recently of a West End board operator with his feet up on the MMS reading a book pressing a GO button on sequence, complete with all the electronic goodies designed to deny the operator even the simple pleasures of needing to look out of the window to notice the fact that he was on the wrong cue. When informed of this state of affairs he was seen to 'wallop' the right cue in and then expect to enlist my support in the fiction that the '@\*&\*@ board had gone wrong again' for the purposes of the show report. He is still working there. A pity.

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*DORIAN KELLY is a Lighting and Sound Designer, and freelance production Electrician/technical operator.*



# Ticket to Ride

A report by ANTHONY McCALL on new ways of selling theatre-going in New York and London.

The air is thick with new ideas to improve efficiency of ticket sales and pull in dwindling audiences to the starved West End theatres. This autumn alone promises such major changes as a half-price ticket booth, probably in Leicester Square, and the introduction of computerised systems into one or two major box offices. Both, in their own ways, are landmarks, if not revolutions.

They are not the first and will not be the last innovations we shall see in the gradual transition from old-fashioned methods to new. And their effects are likely to be more far-reaching than is perhaps realised. But before looking closely at the innovators and why and where we need changes, let's look at the picture to date. The regions, as usual, are also developing novel solutions to their individual problems, but more of them later.

Things began to get organised when Vincent Burke, one of the Society of West End Theatre's deputy secretaries, returned from a working holiday in New York last year. His report pricked their imagination and the Society asked for more detailed information, giving him six months and a separate office along from the Albery Theatre stage door. His story is largely that of Broadway's rejuvenation: how they fought the odds with self-help and a co-operative effort.

The Broadway story's merit is in its simple clarity: the problems were identified, discussed and solved. Many aspects of the story remain unique to Broadway, because life in New York is different from London. But there are strong parallels.

Vincent Burke returned to New York to delve deeper into detail. He found that even on its new firm footing, the League of New York Theatres and Producers still considers it has a vital marketing role to play.

'Five to seven years ago, Broadway was considered dead' begins Burke, with the confidence of a doctor who knows he will cure his patient. 'Under 10 theatres were open in the summer then; last year that went up to 28. The producers knew they had to attack the problem all together.

'There were a lot of accidental factors in Broadway's revival,' he adds. 'The Musicians Union strike which closed down the Great White Way made New Yorkers realise the theatres' contribution to the city. Restaurants, hotels, taxis, general transport all suffered badly. Even the authorities woke up to their importance.

The director of New York tourism wanted to increase his budget from the New York State Legislature, at around the same time. So he put the lion's share of his annual sum, \$400,000, into research, which turned up the fact that most visitors came for the theatres. His budget rose to an

astronomical \$8m overnight, adopting the slogan 'I Love NY'.

'Another discovery was the demographic changes in the average theatregoer: most audiences were younger, better educated and very aware of theatre.'

It did not take long before the image-makers were transforming New York and its theatres into a fresher, more vital entity. Television commercials focused on Broadway, pushing attendance up by 20%, according to Burke.

After its new image, it was the turn of the 'physical' face-lift, especially the scruffy neighbourhood around 42nd Street (the porno heartland). 'The area was filthy. So the Schuberts paid for the salaries of four extra street cleaners supplied by the authorities. There was also a general campaign to improve the condition of the theatre interiors.

'The Theater Development Fund, a non-profit organisation, set up by the Ford Foundation and various other charitable organisations, started a number of schemes to interest the public in theatregoing. An early scheme was to subsidise worthwhile productions during the first two to three weeks of their run. By buying up 4,000 - 8,000 tickets for \$6.50 and selling them to

an eager public for \$4.50, a subsidy of about one third, producers could rely on a hard-core audience for the first sensitive weeks. It also boosted word of mouth - a vital factor.

'The TDF never stopped a bad show going down, but it provided a breathing space. These voucher sales definitely increased audience attendance. From its inception in 1967, the TDF's role grew until in the mid-seventies, it introduced the TKTS booth: the half-price ticket centre sited in Times Square. It was very controversial at first, as it was in London. But it helped and gradually grew. It sold 400,000 tickets in its first year. By last year it had shifted \$1.3m worth of tickets, bringing the grand total to \$12m.

'Advertising has become important. Until 1974-75 it was used occasionally. Methods were unadventurous. Then Pippin's producer decided to pep them up. Bob Fosse choreographed a one-minute piece with Ben Vereen and two gorgeous girls dancing a number from the show. Producers now don't dare *not* to use TV ads. This places another burden on producing costs, but it works. It also targets the audience. You can pick ethnic minorities, young people or whatever



NEW YORK. 'Annie' - the kids' show that good merchandising turned into a little cult.





LONDON. A personalised public relations programme for *Private Lives* Maria Aitken and Michael Jayston.

according to the TV station in New York.'

Alongside these changes went a general improvement in methods of ticket sales. The mid-seventies brought in telephone bookings and credit cards, which boosted business significantly. Ticketron however, remains the only real ticket agency (it gets an allocation of seats) and is not computerised except for audit control and sales figures. Like the 'libraries' over here, little has changed in recent years chez Ticketron.

'New York is not London,' stresses Burke, returning to the present. 'Nor is theatregoing that similar; because of prices and mugging people tend to book well ahead and organise their evenings further in advance than we do.'

'The Leicester Square booth is analogous to the Laker stand-by. You may or may not get a ticket to the show you want: you take the risk. We are now working on an Apex fare, which will offer a degree of concession. There are different schemes in the air; it is still early days.'

It would be testing Vincent Burke's loyalty to SWET unfairly to quiz him on why things take so long to get moving in London. But a knowledge of producers and theatre managers paints a clear enough picture: many are over-cautious, some are even lazy and prefer to slow the pace of progress. But the New York lessons have impressed them all and made them professionally jealous.

Nor is crisis new to them. This is an industry which has seen crises before and has got through on tried and tested formulas. So new schemes will never go through the committees willy-nilly; they are resisted, or tried with great caution.

Let it be noted that some advances have been made. And one or two giant strides.

Credit cards and student stand-bys are now commonplace — and successful. No fewer than 70,000 student stand-by tickets were generated in the first month of being tried. The NUS says there is now an upsurge of interest and support.

Both commercial radio stations, Capital and LBC, have become involved. At 5.30

p.m. Capital now gives a daily plug to whichever five shows have a good supply of tickets left — at a discount of between a third to a half off. They are usually the better seats which have not been sold. It helps to break down the 'mink barrier' in the front of the house, as Denis Quilley put it.

Marketing and merchandising have improved greatly in the past few years, not only in the theatre but throughout the field of entertainment: rock, classical music, the fine arts, dance and opera. Examples of imaginative radio ads, smart mugs and T-shirts and promotional campaigns are to be found from the Royal Opera House to 'Shaftesbury Avenue' shows like Annie, which employed a special marketing team

to dream up ideas.

Occasionally PR grasps its opportunities and catches the public imagination. In addition to Peter Thompson Associates being hired to launch the West End transfer of *Private Lives* from Greenwich, Peter Wright of Cue Consultants was taken on by Michael Jayston and Maria Aitken for their personal PR. Using such angles as fashion spreads and phone-in programmes, the two stars notched up another 40-odd media exposures in the national and trade press, from *Variety* to Lynda Lee-Potter in the *Daily Mail*; and from BBC's *Pebble Mill* programme to Thames TV interviews — not forgetting plugs in *TV Times*, *The Stage*, *Evening Standard* and so forth. Owing to the pressure of work on PRs and low, low fees, such opportunities are too often missed for want of a few hundred pounds.

Which leads on to a central question. What are a show's top priorities? Few, surely, can be more important than to coax an audience in for each performance, whether to make money or to justify a grant. Then there is little excuse for failing in that effort. Yet all forms of promotion from box office staff to PRs cannot and do not cope as well as they could. As the lifeblood of the organisation, promotion deserves to be taken more seriously.

Many new schemes have been tried. Reduced rail fares; subscription booking discounts; special offers like cheap dinners or bargain records with small group bookings, reductions for readers of designated papers. But often what's lacking is flair, showmanship. And with all new ideas, co-operation and determination is vital. Yet this is still lacking.

Rupert Rhymes, president of SWET, rightly berated arts writer Michael Owen of the *Evening Standard* for denouncing the

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West End as slow to solve its problems. It remains a sad truth, however, that things could be progressing at a far brisker pace if there were more freshness or enthusiasm.

Eric Kilner, former managing director of Keith Prowse, has for years been advocating major practical changes such as scaled seat pricing (from an early-week and matinee 'low' to a weekend 'high'). Sweeney Todd already adds £1.50 to its top price on Saturday. Better staff and better facilities for booking at theatres and agencies: in a word, why not make it easier for tickets to be bought? More sales outlets should be available too, all over the country. Not just for theatre but all forms of entertainment, to draw in new and untried audiences wherever possible. Wide, not narrow appeal should be the aim. Kilner is a mine of good ideas with over 20 years experience in selling tickets behind him. He is closer to the ticket-buying public than most ivory-tower producers and theatre managers, whose talents must, one imagines, lie elsewhere.

Common sense and applied marketing is to be found ironically in the subsidised sector, within the big companies and the Arts Council domain. An interview with Jodi Myers and Peter Verwey of the Council's marketing department built up a complex picture of marketing strategies and collected experiences (failures as well as success) from fringe theatre to large-scale touring opera. Others like the Old Vic's Jack Emery, ENO's Howard Lichterman and the RSC's Peter Harlock are all in their different ways making giant strides with every new opportunity. Here are some of the recent findings, especially in the regions.

Touring companies build up local reputations (like the RSC in Newcastle), but in addition, certain shows benefit from marketing ancillary benefits as added

inducements. Granted that dance and opera are specialised events and often require less selling, the more accurately you can define your audience the more effective good print material will be, even in those fields.

Good mailing lists are, not surprisingly, considered the most valuable form of promotion. With careful working out, you can even use parts of the list for different events.

For repertory performances, audiences are being asked to go to the theatre several times a week, therefore discount subscription seasons and other bargains are essential.

'Sunday booking facilities are a priority,' stressed Jodi Myers, 'since so much advertising goes into the Sunday papers. Yet with all day free to arrange bookings, people have to wait till Monday, another busy workday.'

A variety of selling techniques are in use, from social chats or lectures at colleges by company members to sub schemes at places of work. Workshops usually arouse interest; Ann Meyer held one at a pithead in Yorkshire for English National Opera North - with the help of Arthur Scargill!

Co-operation with local businesses like record shops to sell opera tickets, or in the case of Oklahoma! recently, the Egg or Milk Marketing Boards can produce results. Printed vouchers offering 50p off tickets for every two pints or half dozen eggs per week extra worked reasonably well. The redemption rate was about 1% from a total of 200,000 vouchers, which is about typical for this kind of operation. 'Not that we're satisfied with this,' adds Jodi Myers, 'but word of mouth was excellent from this exercise, so the promotion got noticed and then talked about. Not bad for cold selling - and to people who normally don't go to musicals.'

There are eight Arts Council marketing

officers covering the country; each has comprehensive contacts in local education, other local authority departments, local media and so forth and keep in constant touch all year round, not just when a company visits. They are based in Newcastle, Leeds, Liverpool, Nottingham, Birmingham, Oxford, Bristol and Winchester. Tried and tested ideas are fine, they find, but there's nothing like surprise to prick people's interest. Freshness is all.

Small companies find it difficult to get their own promotions off the ground, especially since different times of year and different theatres call for different techniques. This summer, the Actors Touring Company, London, took a three-week season to an unusual venue, the Oxford Union. Although Oxford is a good theatre town, the public was foxed by the new venue: advertising made no difference for the first week. Special print material however, worked better.

Habits are important to build up: Norwich Theatre Royal sells the theatre more than the show, to avoid selling from scratch with every new touring show.

With computerisation as this year's big word in box offices and telephone sales the new thing for renewing lists of former patrons and cold canvassing, there is plenty afoot. The Post Office actually runs a section called Phonopower under John York Williams, which lectures on telephone selling techniques!

Whether it is to be civic theatres who try out box office computerisation first or the subsidised companies who have been working with Kenneth Fraser, managing director of Box Office Computer Systems, to develop the right software, either way it will mark the first change since 1884, when counterfoil tickets and numbered seats were introduced.

Jodi Myers feels strongly on the subject: 'A welcome atmosphere and efficiency are the vital ingredients for a box office' (the very term originated as a joke-word in *Variety*). 'They should have longer hours and be better manned all over the country. Can the staff *sell* tickets? If not, why employ them?'

'This is possibly the number one sales point of a theatre, and thus of vital importance, not just an ancillary function for underpaid clerks.

'Especially in the subsidised sector, there is no consultation whatever with the publicity people at the planning stages of a production. How many industries do you know where the salesmen are given something to sell without any reference prior to it? A subtle shift of balance here would be valuable.'

Overnight changes are too much to hope for, but as Britain's recession bites deeper, affecting theatregoing still further and cutting back remaining margins, it is time for singleminded and concerted progress in sales methods. Let's remember, it is just four years ago that Tony Field, the Arts Council's finance director, launched *exactly* the same half-price ticket booth scheme in London, only for it to be boycotted. It is an unfortunate, but an illustrative, moral tale.

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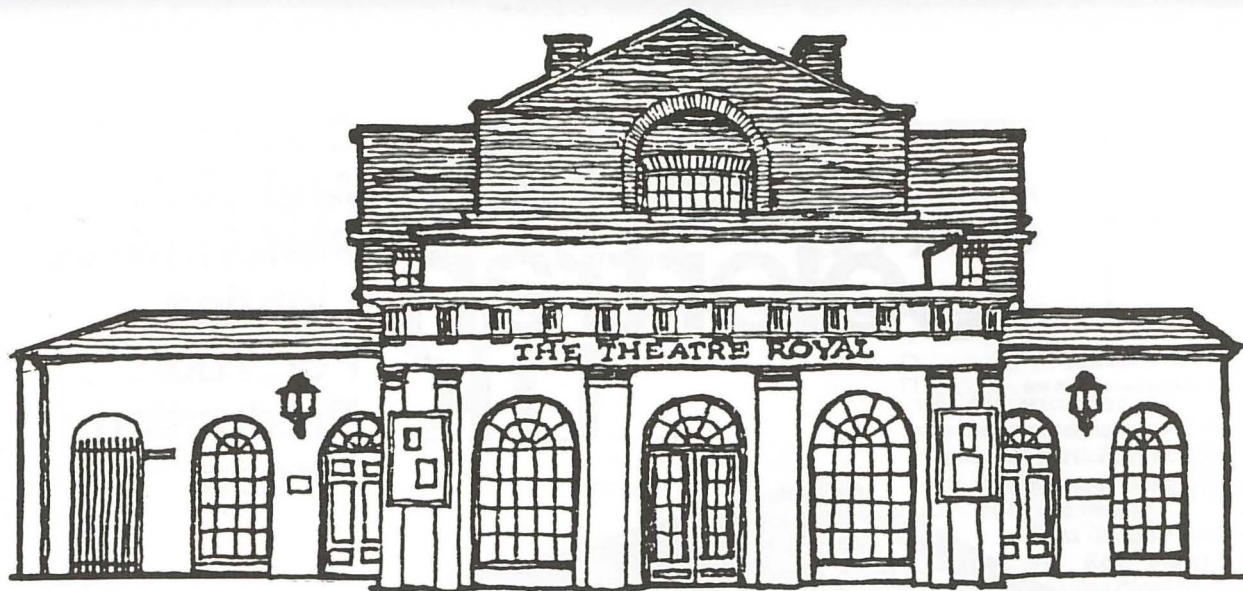
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# Microprocessing a Georgian Theatre

FRANCES REID

'Let there be light,' said the Mayor and, with audience joining in, continued 'and there was LIGHT!'. On the word *light* he pushed the raise button on his Rigger's Control and was immediately bathed in a tight white downlight from six PAR Cans. Simultaneously, as the remainder of the stage and auditorium blacked out, Monteverdi trumpets thundered out from speakers at the back of the gallery. Pause of five seconds then auditorium and cyclorama went into a 45 second sequence of crossfades that embraced a fairly comprehensive palette of colours and textures.

A theatre which has known the switch-on of candles, oil, gas and common electricity (presumably first the direct and then the alternating) had become equipped with the all-singing, all-dancing, micro-processed digital stuff. A significant moment in the life of a Theatre which has no legal right to call itself Royal, but has surely earned regal status by continuing to remain on parade for 161 years. Yes, Wilkin's 1819 Georgian Theatre Royal in Bury St Edmunds, the only working theatre in the care of the National Trust, has entered the age of the silicon chip. A moment surely for Mayors

and Trumpets.

The final moments of the old switch-board – a Strand LC – had passed with perhaps a more muted but nevertheless emotionally tinged ceremony. After LC's last cue, the theatre staff processed to the 'gods' with a salver bearing a bottle of champagne. The cork behaved impeccably and landed where the OP stage box would have been when the theatre first arose in the Georgian mode. Glasses were raised and LC solemnly thanked for services rendered.

The audience entering for the new switch-on found LC standing proudly in the foyer, bearing the simple words

1965 – 1980

R.I.P.

She has been put out to graze in the Arcadia Skegness and we wish her a happy-retirement: one of the amplifier cards, framed and inscribed, will hang in the theatre to remind future lighting generations of the dawning of the age of the transistor.

The new Control System was funded from the Theatre's Repairs and Renewals Fund (swollen by last year's operating surplus) temporarily augmented by an

interest free loan of £10,000 from St. Edmundsbury Borough Council.

The chosen system is a Rank Strand DUET 2 with 60 STM dimmers. Why DUET?

Well, most controls now have certain essentials:

- . Digital Channel Access
- . Two playbacks
- . Cue linkage
- . Video display

But DUET also offers two essentials which are not universal:

- . Wheel for channel adjustment
- . Digital window in addition to VDU

and, very important, it is not *over-miniaturised*.

Bury surveyed the market, went to tender with four likely manufacturers and discovered DUET to be the most cost-effective response to outline specification. Two hundred Duets sold seemed impressive – and a few discreet enquiries established that the machine had acceptable reliability in lands more remote than Suffolk.

So it's a DUET.

The package is fairly straightforward. The back-up is a pin-patch and there are a couple of stock extras to make life easier in a theatre where the resident technical staff is also but a duet (Stage Manager and Assistant). The control room is in the gallery so a rigger's control makes sense – it will save time (and therefore to some extent save money, although time in a theatre is frequently something that money cannot buy). But the Rigger's Control is also a very humane device – even in a small theatre, the journey from stage to control room can be quite a route march.

The other optional labour/time/money saving device is the duplication of the pin-patch masters in the prompt corner so that the control room need not be manned during simple concerts requiring simple standing light or basic colour washes. Indeed there are many unrehearsed concert situations in a small regional theatre when it can be more convenient – and often produce better lighting – when the operator has the *contact* of being on the side of the stage rather than in front.



Councillor John Knight, O.B.E., Mayor of St. Edmundsbury, switches on under the supervision of stage manager Nick Beadle. (Photograph Nick Adkin)



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### CHANNEL TRACK

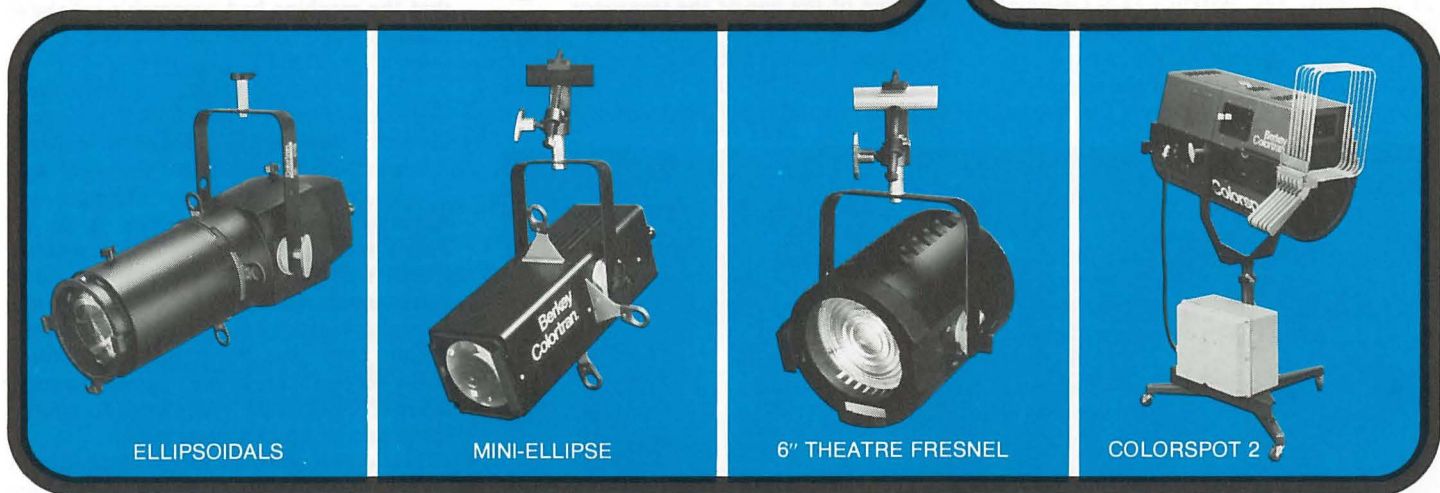
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# PRODUCT NEWS

## New Box Office System

Computerization of box offices is likely to be a major topic in 1981. The latest suitor for the favours of theatre managements is Space-Time Systems Limited with their newly announced BOCS system (Box Office Computer System).

BOCS is an on line system that can be accessed by more than one sales outlet at any time. This considerably enhances the marketing power of each outlet, be it window, mail room or agency and is greatly superior to traditional box office sales methods which rely on documentation that can only be used by one person at a time.

BOCS can also record information on patrons which as we have observed before in these columns is probably the most valuable and yet wasted marketing information available to theatres.

The box office, and in particular ticket printing, is apparently one of the most cost-intensive aspects of theatre operations. BOCS prints tickets at the time of sale and only as they are required. Initial calculations indicate that BOCS tickets cost about one-fifth of tickets produced by traditional methods.

BOCS is pre-programmed for each theatre and every performance so that it always offers the best available seat in the house, as designated by the theatre manager. However, by using the keyboard the computer's offer can always be overridden by

GRAND THEATRE										
HIGH STREET, WESTON-SUPER-MARE										
STALLS					CIRCLE					
STALLS	CIRCLE	TOTALS	STALLS	CIRCLE	TOTALS	STALLS	CIRCLE	TOTALS	STALLS	
MONDAY EVENING	11.50	13.50	10.00	11.00	11.00	13.00	13.00	11.00	11.00	
TUESDAY EVENING	11.50	13.50	10.00	11.00	11.00	13.00	13.00	11.00	11.00	
WEDNESDAY EVENING	20.00	21.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	
THURSDAY EVENING	40.00	41.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	
FRIDAY EVENING	40.00	41.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	
SATURDAY EVENING	40.00	41.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	11.00	
TOTALS	170.00	171.00	110.00	111.00	110.00	111.00	110.00	111.00	110.00	
HOUSE NO. 14551	GROSS TOTAL				AGENCY FEE				20.11	
NET 14 JUNE 1980	GROSS TOTAL				NET TOTAL				190.89	
DATE 14 JUNE 1980	GROSS TOTAL				NET TOTAL				190.89	
DATE 14 JUNE 1980	GROSS TOTAL				NET TOTAL				190.89	
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MAJESTIC THEATRE			
A PHOENIX TOO FREQUENT			
SPACE-TIME SYSTEMS LTD LONDON WC2 01-240-0411	WEDNESDAY NOV. 1979	13	13
£8.00	EVENING	8.30 PM	A19
INC VAT	STALLS	A19	£8.00

the box office staff or the definition of the best seat changed to suit the nature of the show.

Developed on a Digital Equipment Co PDP 11/34, BOCS software will also run on the 11/23 and 11/44 models, offering modular growth to meet the growing demands of users. BOCS has been written in Fortran and uses the RSX operating system.

Box office routines include analysis by seat price of gross receipts, total sold, not

sold and percentage sold. BOCS can provide full marketing reports on sales trends, response to particular promotions, advance sales progress and automatic invoicing of agencies by the theatre.

'The business of show business is selling tickets', says Ken Fraser, Space-Time Systems' managing director, 'and an unsold ticket is worthless the moment the curtain goes up. BOCS can keep all the available seats on sale at all outlets right up to that moment.'

Space Time Systems Limited is supported by two city groups, The Foreign and Colonial Group, who are also the major shareholders, and Venture Link Limited. Theatre Projects Limited also have a substantial interest and Richard Pilbrow is on the board.

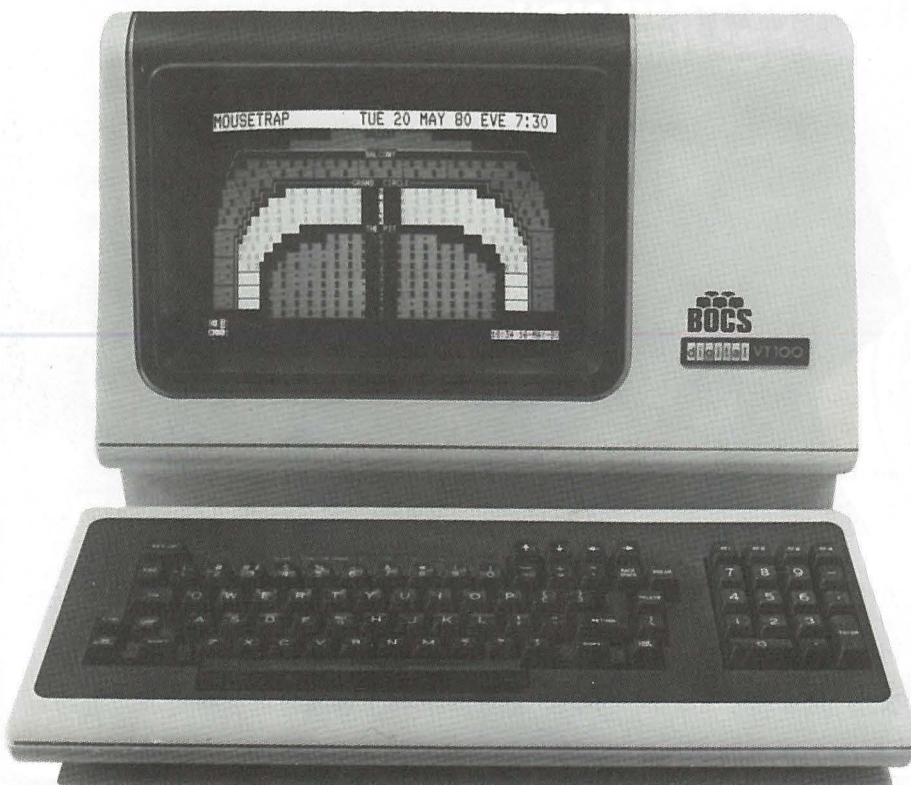
## New House Journals

House journals by their very nature are biased, having as their object the promotion of the manufacturers who publish them. Having said this they can still make interesting reading and provide an insight into the products and markets in which a manufacturer is engaged. Good house journals generally manage to include some interesting non-promotional articles as well. *Electrosonic World* is one of the better journals of this genre, well produced and interestingly put together. Anyone wishing to receive future issues should write to Electrosonic Ltd., 815 Woolwich Road, London SE7 8LT. *Electrosonic World* is to be published occasionally which according to Robert Simpson means 'about twice a year when we have something to say'.

Another new house journal due to appear in December comes from Rank Strand. It will be published under the familiar title of *Tabs* but inevitably in these days when every promotional penny must not only pay but be seen to pay the new *Tabs* will be a commercial tool. Richard Harris, who is in charge of the production, nevertheless promises to include some interesting general topics. The new *Tabs* is also to be an 'occasional' publication.

## Patrick Hayes joins Clear-Com

Patrick Hayes, formerly President of Precision Metal Forms in Sunnyvale, California and Chief Financial Officer for Digital Telephone Systems has joined Clear-Com Intercom Systems as Operations Manager. He will be responsible for manufacturing and company expansion as well as Clear-Com's customer service and product availability.







### Sonifex Micro HS series

A new broadcast cartridge machine from SONIFEX embodies an entirely new principle of pinch lift giving absolutely silent and rapid starts and stops. The new machine type Micro HS series is a compact full specification machine intended for radio broadcasting and features a rugged alloy machined deckplate carrying the tape drive servo components and pinch lift mechanism. The heavy flywheel capstan assembly is carried in microfine sealed ball races and the machine has spring cartridge



guides for positive location. Accurate tape guidance is ensured by four edge tape guides.

All the sub-assemblies are carried on the main deckplate with P.C.B. connectors for easy access and maintenance.

The general features of the machine are absolute silence in operation and extremely cool running with an input power of only 10 VA pulling tape.

The machine is designed to meet the I.B.A. specification.

The units are available as play only, play/record and interlocked triple stack

with full 3 cue tone responses and triple forward speed cueing.

The new machines are available priced from £825.00.

### Showlight '81

Very sensibly Showlight '81 has been organised to follow (with a week-end's break) after the BKSTS Exhibition so these two complementary events should make a very interesting week. The BKSTS Exhibition is from 29th June until 3rd July 1981 at the Royal Lancaster Hotel, London and Showlight '81 is at the Barbican Theatre and Conference Centre, London, on 6th and 7th July. Showlight '81 is described as a colloquium (L. speaking together, conference, Obs.) There will also be a manufacturers display area for manufacturers' literature and representatives. More information from Miss Anne Gibbins, CIBS, Delta House, 222 Balham High Road, London SW12 9BS.

### TBA Lighting – touring memory system

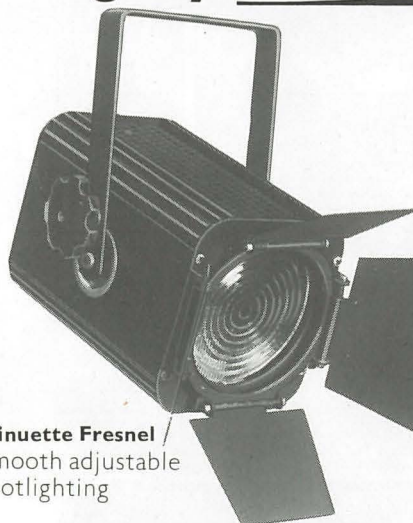
TBA Lighting have just announced a new, purpose built control system, designed for all touring applications. It is based on the Berkey 'Colortrack' 96 Way control and a

## Emphasis lighting with BEAM quality under your control

The 'MINUETTE' Range by CCT 300w/500w



**Minuette Pebble Convex**  
Soft adjustable spotlighting



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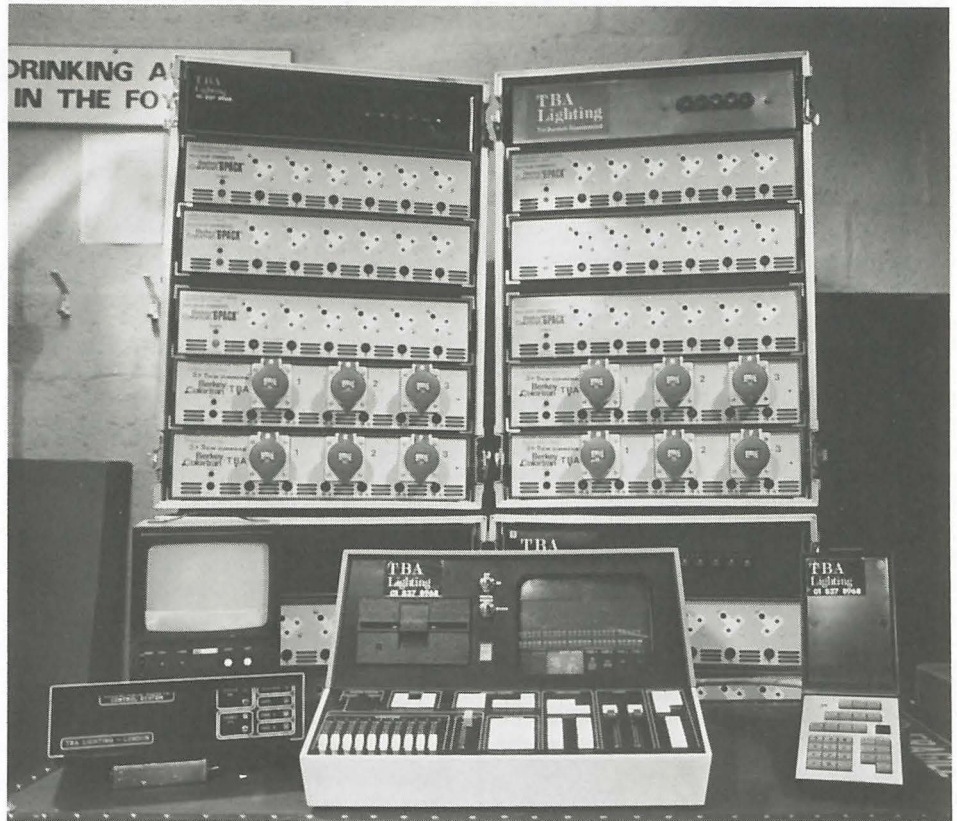


standard system comprises 72 2.5kW dimmers, plus 24 5 ks'. TBA have also developed themselves a remote control system which combines riggers control, 'stalls console' and Audio Visual remote operation. One of the features of the system is that no tools are required to assemble a 96 way rig, which one man can apparently do in about 15 minutes. It is available as a standard rental item.

The 'front end' of the system is the Berkey Colortran 'Colortrack' control, which incorporates - timed, auto and manual playback, ten submasters, five display modes, including 'channeltrack' and 'memory mapping' floppy disc storage, chase and matrix back-up.

The remote control is a hand-held keypad with all the functions of the Colortrack, so that, as well as being useful as a riggers control, it is also quite adequate for use as a designer's 'stalls console'. In this context, a remote (colour-coded) VDU is also part of the standard kit for use in the stalls, on stage, or out front for designer monitoring. For those involved in multi-media productions, TBA also provide an interface unit to operate the Colortrack remotely from most types of A.V. programmers, or, indeed, off any combination of switches and relays.

TBA's standard touring dimmer racks are totally compatible with the control system, and are based on Berkey's new 500 series dimmer. The standard rack is a small flight case, containing 18 x 2.5kW and 6 x 5kW dimmers, in slide-in modules. The outputs are 15Amp BESA for 2.5kW,



and 32Amp CEEform for 5kW. Control connectors are 32 pin cannon milspec (one per 24 ways), and up to 150 metre control runs can be supplied.

TBA have put two complete systems into their hire stock. It will be interesting to hear how hirers get on with this system 'on the road'.

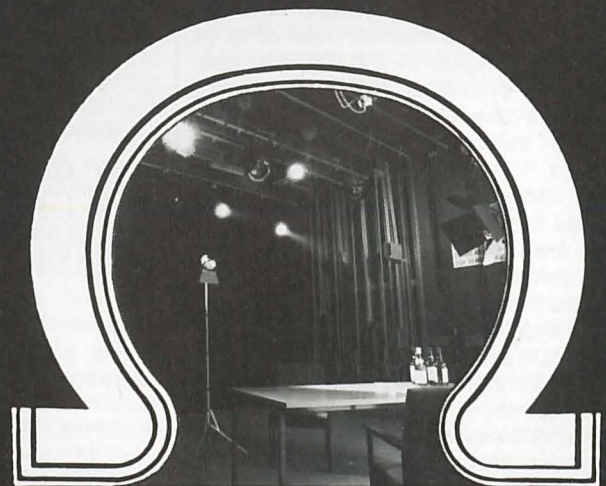
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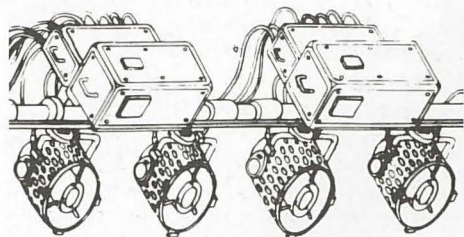
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### New remote control for lanterns

Light Works Ltd have unveiled their remotely controlled LIGHT SCAN and it looks a very interesting well devised system with obvious applications not only in the theatre but for discos, conventions and pop shows as well, to say nothing of military tattoos.



The Light Scan system can control up to twenty lanterns either at will or to pre-set positions. Although almost any lantern can be used Light Works have designed their own Par Can to go with the system.

Light Works Ltd was formed by Charlie Paton who managed to impress the NRDC enough to get their financial backing and also had the Light Scan exhibited at the Design Centre last month.

### Another New Intercom

Theatre Projects are developing a new intercom system. The products so far announced are Power Supply PS 1 which serves up to 16 Outstations, Splitter Box SB 1 which distributes one communications circuit to four outlets, Master Station MS 1 with two circuits each with a call light and Outstation OS 1 which can be used free standing or on the belt. Other products planned are loudspeaking outstations, communication routing systems and multi-ring systems.

### Harrogate Conference Complex Contract

CTL Control Technology Limited, started only 2½ years ago by Messrs. Bell and Owen, have won a contract believed to be worth in the region of £90,000. The contract is for the supply and installation of sound and communications equipment at the £20 million Harrogate Conference Complex. The specification was very precise and most of the major companies in the field were asked to tender.

The main sound consists of a 24 channel, 8 sub group 2 master group mixer routing via a multi-way patch to 6 × 500 w main power amplifiers. Three Revox B77 tape recorders, a cassette desk, digital delay line and graphic equalization are provided for effects and the system drives a total of 26 column loudspeakers and 9 ceiling mounted dual concentrics.

There are also concert sound and communications system included in the contract.

Peter Angier of Carr and Angier is the theatre consultant for the Harrogate Complex, and acoustic advice has been provided by Sound Research Laboratories.

## REIDING SHELF

'Who would have dreamed that the closely-knit small town of Puritan Plymouth of over 150 years ago would conceive the building of a social project complete with hotel, assembly rooms and a majestic theatre, describing it as 'for the greater convenience, accommodation and amusements of persons resorting to this town' (not for the citizens, mind you) and, what is more, finance it from the proceeds of a lottery and the sale of religious benefices.'

Who indeed! But Foulston's 1811 Georgian Leisure Complex was surely the first English Civic Arts Centre – and when the 1937 demolition gang went into action, the whole idea of National and Civic responsibility for theatre was still awaiting general acceptance. Indeed Plymouth's replacement Civic Theatre Royal is currently building after a less than unanimous Council decision (36 to 25).

The fortunes of the Plymouth theatres, along with all the other playhouses in Devon and Cornwall are chronicled in *Playbill. A History of the Theatre in the West Country* by Harvey Crane, a local critic who writes with a stylish enthusiasm which conveys the joys of a lifetime's theatre going.

The book, of course, starts well before Mr. Crane's personal experiences. Did you know – for I certainly did not – that the Cornish *Ordinalia* pre-date the mystery cycles of York, Chester, Wakefield and Coventry? And my heart warms to a 19th century touring manager's account of theatre going in Redruth:

A spacious loft erected over an eight stalled stable, two of which were apportioned as dressing rooms for the company, and we had access to the stage by a step ladder through a trap door. The aroma made our ghost sneeze and one evening when Hamlet conjures Horatio and Marcellus to 'Swear by my sword' the ostler underneath roared to his horse 'Come up you booger, or I'll scat the brains out of tha!' This unexpected salutation acted like an electric shock on the nerves of Hamlet who rushed off the stage exclaiming 'Oh Day and Night, this is wondrous strange!'

To the Manager of Plymouth Royal in 1856, I extend my admiration for his honesty and guts in posting across the face of one week's playbills after the first night

### NOTICE TO THE PUBLIC

Mr. J. R. Newcombe presents his respectful compliments to the patrons of the theatre, and earnestly entreats them *not* to come during the remainder of the above named artists; as, if they do, they will not only witness the crude efforts of two ladies who have everything to learn and have not yet attained even the most rudimentary knowledge of their profession.

Many of us will hear a familiar chord in another of Mr. Newcombe's poster announcements . . .

The apparatus for the lime light has not yet arrived, but will astonish everyone when positively installed.

Mr. Crane chronicles the twentieth century fall and rise of theatre in his region. Playbills record the last days of 1950s variety (with Morecambe and Wise at the bottom of the bill) and the opening of Exeter's *Northcott* in the 1960s. Amateur theatre is not forgotten: The *Minack* is unique and famously so. And there are performance pictures of David Owen and Angela Rippon in the days before they made and read news.

This book is a jolly good read even if, like me, your sole personal contact with the theatres of Devon and Cornwall has been appearing at the *Regal Barnstaple* and *Palace Bude* under conditions not unlike those of an earlier era when

. . . everything was conducted with the strictest regard to economy, and the duties of prompter, scene shifter, property man and candlesnuffer were performed by Mr. Dawson Sr. I have seen him speak the tag of a piece in the corner of the stage, whilst with one hand off stage he rang the bell and lowered the curtain when the play had ended.

From a book about an entire region's theatre history to a book about one single theatre – but about that plum theatre on the *prior-to-London* road, Brighton Royal.

The perhaps less readable part of Antony Dale's *The Theatre Royal Brighton* is that concerned with the chronology of the productions. Paragraphs summarising the most notable productions of the years inevitably include lots of repetitive phrases like 'The year ---- brought several other important plays, the first of these was. . .' or 'other notable productions during the year were. . .' or '---- saw as distinguished a programme as the year before' and so on.

This is a long unsolved problem of writing theatre history: it is not unique to this book. Would straight listing have been more effective? I honestly don't know. Certainly the productions that opened or played Brighton form a record of the successes of London's west end tradition (A record so starry that no space could be found in the 1970 entry to list such a blockbuster as the world premiere of *Sleuth*).

But as a former regular visitor, both in front and behind, I am delighted to have the book on my shelf for many reasons, not the least being the illustrations including three 19th century photographs showing the exterior before and after the 1866 rebuild plus an 1876 painting of the interior. Moreover the author is a solicitor and so we are given a clearer than usual insight into the arrangements under which the theatre has been owned, leased and managed across the years.

The adjoining theatre built in the 1870s as the New Oxford Theatre of Varieties and



variously known as the Brighton Empire, Brighton Coliseum, Court, Paris and finally Dolphin has not survived. I well remember crawling all over its fibrous plaster delights with joy and tears at the prior-to-demolition auction in 1963. If it had survived but another decade or so, changing attitudes might well have produced a preservation order that would have encouraged combination with the Theatre Royal to form an elegant arts centre befitting the Prince Regent's chosen seaside spa.

This sort of history book is vital. Every theatre should be the subject of such literary recognition.

*Teach yourself* is the traditional way of learning about theatre. Even in these days of concern about formal stage training, with committees beavering away at the structure and accreditation of the courses, learning the job is likely to remain largely a matter of do-it-yourself. At best, formal courses may develop awareness of possibilities and provide a framework into which later self-discovery can be slotted. At worst, they may instill a minimum awareness of safety requirements and a knowledge of traditional techniques that can be usefully reacted against to take the art and craft of theatre forward. Reading seems to play a surprisingly small part in formal stage education but it is the stuff that self-teaching is made of.

Everyone in theatre starts, or should surely start, as an amateur (and anyone with any sense probably stays with their amateur status!) Jennifer Curry's *Amateur Theatre* in the *Teach Yourself Books* series is a 225 page introduction to every, yes I think every, aspect of the craft. Each chapter covers one aspect of theatre (Playscripts, Acting, Directing, Stage Management, Lighting, Scenery, Costume, Make-up, Sound, Publicity and Management). These chapters are each prefaced by wise words from an appropriate expert — and these experts are straight out of the top-most drawer: people like Patrick Garland, Keith Mitchell and Richard Pilbrow.

There is a surprising amount of information in the book and the author is obviously not only well experienced but well read: she appears to have absorbed the essence of the standard texts that her book recommends for further reading. For the energetic, each chapter includes one or more exercises. This paperback is the cheapest way I know of finding out what goes into making a production happen.

*Playbill. A History of the theatre in the West Country.* Harvey Crane. Published by Macdonald and Evans. £7.95

*The Theatre Royal Brighton.* Antony Dale. Published by Oriol Press (Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd.). £8.75.

*Amateur Theatre.* Jennifer Curry. Published by Teach Yourself Books (Hodder and Stoughton). £1.95.

# The Computer Fixes Bubbles' Waggon

SIMON KELLY

He who laughs last laughs longest was never more true than in the case of Leonard Stencil, the Senior Impedimenta Officer (Roman and Greek) at the National Theatre. He was a short man with a serious disposition and a scraggy Hitler moustache. He was balding, but not in the usual way, it took the form of a small thick thatch right on top of his head, the rest having fallen out some years ago. This effect, coupled with his steel-rimmed glasses, gave him the appearance of a startled carrot. He also had a slight limp, not that there was anything physically wrong, it dated back to when his mother told him to stop sliding on the ice in the back yard. 'Don't you come running to me when you break your leg,' she told him. Later that day she herself slipped on the slide little Len had made and was laid up for months.

Mr. Stencil, as he thought of himself, and his assistant Barry (an out-of-work actor who had mistakenly thought to sneak himself into the company via the back door so to speak, and had got himself stuck with Greek and Roman dept on a five year contract. He still paid his Equity sub every half year in the forlorn hope, and could often be seen posturing in the corridor near Lord Hall's office. He was once rewarded with a 'Good Morning') inhabited a small but modern office in the sub-basement below the main auditorium. It was tastefully furnished in Civil-Servant Filing Cabinet Green, slightly foxed, a desk, a couch upon which Barry was wont to fling himself negligently but elegantly, and a Computer terminal. This last was nothing unusual at the National at that time. Everyone, even the doormen at the stage door had one. The system had been the gift of an eccentric wealthy Cybernetic manufacturer who had had his life changed by a definitive production of 'Cuckoo in the Nest' and had donated one of his experimental models in an excess of generosity, and then shrewdly charged against his tax. Mr. Stencil sent himself on a course. He knew how to interrogate the machine on the current Spear and Breastplate situation, and how to update the Toga stocks when a new consignment had been delivered. Although he was quite in the dark as to the workings of this wondrous machine (so was the manufacturer, it was *very* experimental) he had a certain knack, a certain je ne sais quoi, a *rapport* if he wanted to be French about it which Mr. Stencil most certainly did not. Barry would have been French about this or any other thing had he been allowed, but Mr. Stencil no longer permitted unauthorised use of the terminal since a disastrous episode when Barry (who definitely did not have the touch) attempted to program a simulated Lunar Module Landing into it, thereby causing a Ken Campbell production to overrun by 10

hours and to crash into the moon at a speed of 3000km/hr. As luck would have it none noticed any difference.

St. John McGovern Jones-Letherby, known to his intimates, of whom he had few, as Bubbles, had only lately signed with the company to play medium-sized parts at quite a good salary. This made his agent very pleased prestige-wise even though he wasn't going to get as much as when he was in the world's longest and dreariest surgical soap opera 'Maternity Ward 10'. As Dr. Killdead he had made his face a household object, but lately his fan mail had become a little predictable, and his act, as it were, needed a little class. Hence the National. He was a chronic complainer, given to moaning about anything and everything as a matter of principle. Barry hated him, but then he hated anyone who was working when he wasn't. He could often be seen standing in the wings during performances sneering out at some of the finest actors in the world, until chased away by irate stage managers.

Bubbles had lately been kitted out by the Wardrobe as a Centurion of the IXVIIIth Legion (the ones that tied their Greaves in half-hitch knots for quick-release) and was dissatisfied with his helmet plumes. He had gone up to the Wardrobe to complain, but he found it full of pre-pubescent girls being fitted for yet another revival of 'The Devils at Loudon'. They all screamed when he went in, but they needn't have bothered. The only person he was interested in was himself, a lifetime's love affair, with never a moment's disappointment. He moodily went down to see Mr. Stencil as the next best thing. As he rudely walked into his office, Barry was reclining at his ease on the couch reading an old copy of *Plays & Players*, while Mr. Stencil was conscientiously entering the day's returns of Grecian Urns into the computer.

'Now look here,' was the not very promising opening gambit, 'look at these feathers.'

Mr. Stencil and Barry looked.

'It's a bloody disgrace!' said Bubbles indignantly. 'Not even the B.B.C. would have given me *this* to wear. And they've tried to fob me off with a few old bits of tat in their time, I can tell you. Surely you can do better than *them*? How can I be expected to get into character when I'm given this rubbish?' He waved a perfectly good and highly expensive bronze hand made authentic in every detail ostrich-feathered roman helmet disdainfully in the air.

'Have you tried the Wardrobe?' asked Mr. Stencil politely. 'It's not our province now it's been issued to them, you know.'

'Yes, dear boy,' said Barry in tones of languid fellowship, 'Such a ghastly crew. No time for the Artists, you'd think that the prod acted itself.'



Bubbles treated him to the fish-eye treatment, then turned back to Mr. Stencil. 'As I was saying,' he stressed, 'I trust you will do better than this.'

Mr. Stencil shook his head.

'I'm sorry,' he said, 'It's out of my hands.'

'Now you look here,' hectored Bubbles, an unbecoming flush spreading over his famous but unprepossessing features, 'Are you or are you not an employee of this company? I am a member, an important member of the cast of the play,' (they had been rehearsing 'The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire' for the last few months, Bubbles was to make a telling entrance in the second act as a Conspirator). 'Are you or are you not going to replace this thing, or do I have to go to Front Office? I advise you,' here Bubbles was turning sinister, Act III 'An Inspector Calls', 'to think very carefully before you answer.'

Barry returned to his *Plays & Players*, an unwilling gleam of admiration in his eye. That's the way to treat 'em, he thought, forgetting that he was the 'em' referred to. Mr. Stencil turned to his terminal for comfort.

'Really,' he said, 'nothing can be done. Nothing in stock at all.' He entered the code on the terminal:

HELMETS, ROMAN, STOCK STATUS  
RPT. PLS.

Instantly it responded:  
ROMAN HELMETS, READY.

It ruminated for 20 or 30 milliseconds, then:

AVAIL STOCK: NIL  
200 UNITS IN USE FOR PROD 2976 RS  
FL RMN EMP

Mr. Stencil turned back to an impatiently foot-tapping Bubbles.

'It's as I thought,' he began, but was interrupted by the renewed clicking of the printer. He studied the onrolling piece of paper as it came off the machine, then carefully tore it off, for he was always a careful man.

'There is just one possibility,' he said hesitantly, 'One of the helmets has just returned from the prop mender's workshop. It may not be quite suitable. . .'

'I think I shall be the judge of that,' said Bubbles, 'Hurry it up, please. I haven't got all day. I am expected at the Beeb,' he condescended, 'for some Telly interview or other. One must keep up one's obligations I suppose.'

Mr. Stencil once more consulted the printout. 'Yes,' he said, 'I won't keep you a moment.'

He left the room, leaving Bubbles and Barry to out-nonchalant each other. He was back in a very few moments bearing a brand new gleaming helmet with beautiful feathers.

'If I were you, I wouldn't put it on. . . .'  
began Mr. Stencil.

'Well, you're not me, I'm glad to say,' snapped Bubbles putting it on his head. 'How am I supposed to know if it fits if I don't try it on, you silly little man. Really!'

He buckled it firmly under his chin and cast about for a mirror, something not found in Mr. Stencil's office.

'It feels about right,' he grudged. 'I shall take it to my dressing room to see properly.'

He swept out grandly, his plumes waving in the wind, and stalked down the corridor, Charlemagne the Great, Act IV.

In the ensuing silence, Mr. Stencil looked once again at the printout in his hand. It read:

LOOK MR S IF THATS THAT BURKE  
JONES-LEATHERBY AGAIN GIVE HIM  
THE ONE THATS JUST BACK FROM  
THE WORKSHOP. THEY USE SUPER-  
GLUE ON REPAIRS WITH ANY LUCK  
ITLL STICK TO HIS STUPID HEAD. LET  
ME KNOW IF YOU WANT ME TO FIX  
HIS TAX CODE HIS N.I. CONTRI-  
BUTION AND HIS WAGES. ITLL BE A  
PLEASURE.

As Mr. Stencil turned to his terminal there came an unfamiliar noise in the room, so unfamiliar and alien it made Barry look up in fright. It was a sort of creaking, cackling noise. It was Mr. Stencil laughing.

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## Within whose magic tents

PETER BENNETT-JONES

Since its inception in 1972, Bubble Theatre Company has played to over a quarter of a million people, presenting 40 shows in most of the 32 London Boroughs, covering an area of 610 square miles. This outstanding success has been due largely to the portable structure itself: its original appearance and its informal atmosphere, together with its ability to be erected almost anywhere, have helped to break down the psychological barriers which inhibit the vast majority of people from going to the theatre. In every borough, the Bubble audiences represent a genuine cross-section of the community, which is rare in or outside Greater London.

However, this theatrical version of taking the mountain to Mohammed poses special technical problems and 'touring' takes on a new meaning when it involves touring a theatre as well as a repertoire of plays. From the outset of the venture, which was initiated by the Greater London Arts Association, Glen Walford, the first Artistic Director, was adamant that to avoid the technical problems which arise when playing in cold and draughty council halls, the company needed its own portable structure which could be erected in parks and on any small open space. At least this guarantees that one has a standard performing area and the same back-stage facilities wherever the company travelled to.

The original structure used by the Bubble was designed by Polyhedral Developments. It was made from nylon reinforced P.V.C.

and was erected over a tubular steel framework with steel sides. Covering an area of 845 square feet, it held up to 110 people. The structure was made up of individual domes joined together which formed a clover leaf with the stage in the centre. A second identical structure was linked to the main 'Bubble' by a covered walkway and was used to provide refreshments and other Front of House facilities. The experiment of touring a theatre to London communities proved to be an immediate success and by 1974 it was decided that to increase the seating capacity, a totally new structural concept was needed. A firm of architects, Castle Park Dean Hook, were employed and in due course the tent which is in use today was developed. The Polyhedral Structure was acquired by the Christchurch-based Balloon Theatre Company.

The present structure is called a 'Tensi Dome' and it was originally designed in Sweden by Barracadaverken. The Tensi Dome is a frame supported structure in which cloth and arches interact to form a self-supporting weatherproof enclosure. The dome consists of two tubular steel arches and a P.V.C. coated polyester fabric cover, tensioned over these arches, and anchored to the ground by over 80 3-foot earth pins. The external arches are inclined at an angle of 45 degrees to the ground level, and the centre section is mounted between them. Owing to the weight of the arches and the anchorage to the ground, the central section acquires an advantageously curved shape which completely takes up

loads and transmit these to the arches. The inclined arches are anchored to the ground by means of a cloth stretched outwards with a maximum inclination of 60 degrees to ground level, and also by means of steel wires extending from one-third divisions of the arch to the corners of the ground anchorage.

The Bubble also use a smaller Tensi-Dome as a bar tent and display area, which is 1:4 smaller than the main tent. In both tents, the cloth and wires are dimensioned so that each Tensi remains steady when there is a full load even if one of the short sides is dismantled or if the cloth is damaged. The central section of the dome is also supplemented by safety wires.

In many ways the Barracuda structure serves the Bubble's purposes extremely well. It provides an internal space of 250 square metres which is completely clear. There are no supporting poles which would interfere with sightlines, as the arches and the baseplates to which they attach support the fabric. The cover itself meets the appropriate Council and British fire-resistant standards, and it is a striking bright yellow on the outside, and its dark green inside blanks out daylight. However, it does present practical problems when one considers that it has to be moved almost every week during the summer months. The Tensi-Dome is most commonly used as a cover for tennis courts and it was not custom-designed for use as a mobile theatre. It takes a crew of ten men the best part of 24 hours to move it from one site to another.

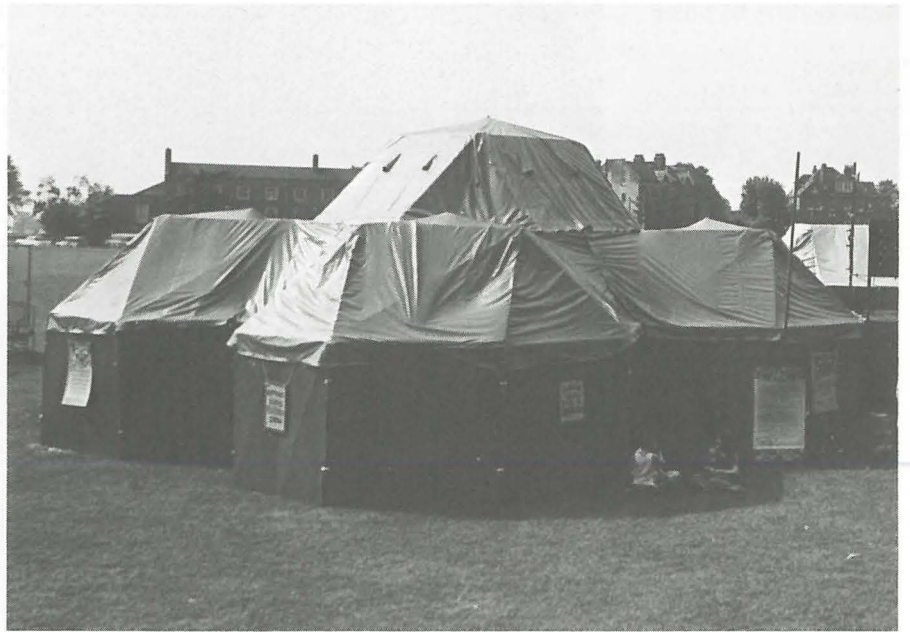


The main tent skin itself weighs 1½ tons, and is not easy to manoeuvre. Four sixteen-week seasons render the tent useless and it is an expensive item to replace.

The company again needs the opportunity to expand its work, improve its facilities and to meet a demand for an increase in audience capacity. Accordingly, Bubble commissioned Pentagram Design to carry out a feasibility study for a new theatre that would allow for the much needed expansion and would resolve many of the problems encountered in working with the Tensi-Domes. To this end Pentagram produced initial plans and costings for a unique and revolutionary inflatable structure. This new design is for a mobile theatre, tailor made to meet the Bubble's needs and is built around the expertise of the architect research into other experiments with inflatable buildings, and the Bubble's considerable experience of presenting a high standard of professional theatre in the other two portable structures.

The fundamental principle of the new structure is the same as that of the pneumatic tyre. It consists of a series of tubes that when inflated form a rigid, free-standing structure. There would be no necessity for any additional system of internal or external support. The only extra requirement is for a method of anchoring the structure to the ground.

The structure consists of three distinct elements. There are three primary high-pressure ribs that are the main structural ribs, and together create the central internal space. These are supplemented by smaller ribs that form half domes to enclose the



*First Structure – (Polyhedral)*

open ends of the space created by the main ribs. The open areas between the ribs are filled by low pressure air cushions. Similar elements will be joined up to make the theatre's foyer and dressing rooms. The structure is given its overall shape by the main ribs which are vertical to a height of two metres and then curve in a semi-circle across a 16m span, and by the smaller ribs, again vertical for two metres and then forming the half domes at either end. This will give an internal height of 9 metres and a

floor area of 416 square metres. The structure would seat a maximum of 350 in a chair and table arrangement. It offers a vastly improved lighting ability. The additional height allows for better angling and focusing. To take full advantage of this facility the present power input will have to be upgraded, as well as the distribution, the operating board and many of the lights which would be too weak to deal adequately with the increased distance and area to be lit. Much of the Bubble's success can be attributed to the unique visual effect it makes. The new structure is certainly more striking and will have the effect of being an immediate attraction in any community. The traditional colours of blue and yellow can be retained to produce a startling striped effect and will help to continue introducing more and more people to the unique style of lively and exciting theatre which is the hallmark of Bubble Theatre productions.

Sadly, the wonderful, custom-designed new inflatable Bubble has still not proceeded beyond the drawing board stage. Inevitably, the company has found it extremely difficult to raise the large amount of money required to realise the project. In 1979, the Bubble purchased a new Tensi-Dome and it is this tent which is in use during the current season. For the 1980 season it was decided to concentrate on improving the facilities within the Tensi-Dome instead of gearing everything towards the new structure. These facilities are limited due to financial and practical restrictions. The entire Bubble operation is packed away every move into two trailers and three small vans. The main tent, the bar tent, the barriers and the protective fence fit into a 34' trailer, with the 1½ tons of tent skin being raised on a tail lift. All the staging, seating units, sets, lighting and sound equipment travel in a 40' trailer, which is converted into a dressing room during the week and is linked to one of the side entrances to the tent. A caravan serves as a primitive green room and base for the



*Putting up the Bar Tent*



## A Midsummer Nights Dream

Cliff Burnett – *Demetrius*  
Eva Lohman – *Helena*  
Steve Warbeck – *Thisbe*  
Lewis Cowen – *Bottom*  
Stuart Organ – *Peter Quince*



round-the-clock site and security assistants.

Every available inch of space is used inside the performance tent. New staging was constructed for the 1980 season. The main stage, 6m x 3.5m, is positioned centrally and is linked by a catwalk to a band-stage. Immediately behind the band-stage is the control tower upon which a lime operator, stage manager, board and sound operators are precariously perched amidst a mass of equipment. Flats for the various productions attach to the front of the zip-up scaffolding towers and it has a central entrance onto the stage. One stage designer, Claire Lyth, was commissioned to design all the season's shows and has made life considerably easier for the Bubble's stage management and technical team than in previous years. With up to ten shows being mounted in the tent each week the sets are changed over frequently, a factor which was borne in mind by the designer. The sets

tend not to be over-elaborate as the GLC's most stringent technical regulations apply to the Bubble, which is subject to a rigorous inspection every time it is re-erected and fitted up. All settings are required to be inherently flame-proof which automatically restricts one's choice of materials, and the Bubble has responded sensibly to the GLC's officer's request that sets should be minimal as space is restricted and the stage is open.

Under the guidance of the company's Lighting Designer/Chief Electrician, Hugh Laver, lighting and sound potential is being realised to the full. The tent, with its fluctuating temperatures and unpredictable outside interferences, presents a sound operator with special problems. We felt that it was necessary to use a Graphic Equaliser to obtain maximum gain, setting the levels with the assistance of a spectrum analyser and the advice of the excellent

Hardware House (Sound) Ltd. Four ATC speakers are hung from the centre of the lighting rig. We use 5 directional Sennheiser microphones suspended over the main stage, two floating radio microphones and five Beyer Dynamic hand-held microphones when and where they are needed. The sound operator is far from ideally positioned on the control tower, surrounded by the Graphic, two Revox A77 tape decks, two Quad 303 power amps, and a 12 into 2 MM mixer.

The Lighting Designer is severely restricted by the lack of height in the tent. Lanterns are hung off a truss which is supported by four Vermette lifts. The aluminium load-span truss consists of seven sections, the two longest of which are 36'. Up to fifty lanterns are attached to the truss each week, a large proportion of these being 308 microspots as the height from the bottom of the truss to ground level is only 11' 3". 9 x 123s, 7 x 23s, 3 x 23N, 5 x 223s, 4 x ADB 1kW Fresnels, 4 x CCT 1kW Silhouette 30s, 4 colour wheels and a strobe make up the balance. The control is a modest 18 way MINI 2. There are two follow-spots, one attached to the control tower and one positioned on a tower above the main entrance of the tent. Although stage managers tend to have to rely on muted voices to give cues, they are kept in touch with the down-stage lime-operator by a PB Theatre Systems inter-com.

The Company hires a 72 KVA and a 10 KVA generator to provide the power needed on site at the Bubble. The emergency lighting, bar electrics and sound system are run off the smaller generator and everything else off the large one. To set up effectively all the Bubble needs is a patch of grass, with a stand-pipe positioned close by being a pleasant luxury. The company is still extremely keen to procure the new custom-designed theatre, but it is also proud of its artistic and technical achievements in past and current structures.

## Trailer/Dressing Room





# Between Cues

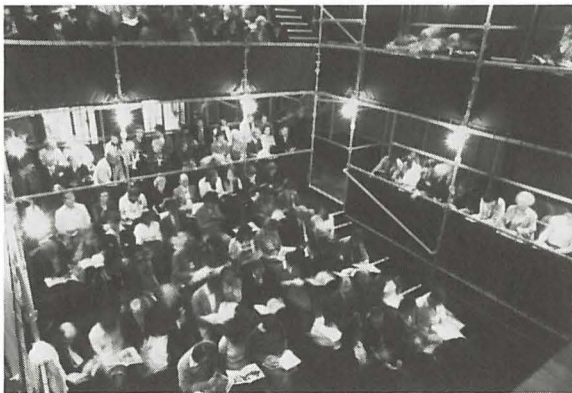
The thoughts of  
Walter Plinge

## Porno Plinge

My note on Plingular aliases in last CUE brings a reminder from Chuck Levy that Walter Plinge's cousin is *George Spelvin* – a name which can be feminised with some ease: actress *Georgina Spelvin* starred in porno films for some years. Chuck wonders how many people got the joke! I wonder . . . can any Ballet company claim a *Georgina Spelvina*?

## Georgian Scaffolding

It was the first time that I had sat in the front row of a Georgian theatre pit. I felt isolated. *Isolated!* An uncomfortable experience for one who has long gone public on his commitment to the audience/-audience relationship benefits of the Georgian theatre form. Then latecomers took a stage-box. *Click!* The corner of my eye had a bridge to the stage. I was no longer alone. In the interval I took the other stage box. It felt good. It had to: The evening was in the British tradition of opening a new theatre with a new play. However Tom Foster's Mackintosh-influenced architecture papered the cracks in the tentative dramaturgy of the opening entertainment.



But the real excitement of London's new TRICYCLE THEATRE is not the shape (although that's lovely) but the escape from the tyranny of concrete. The joy of older theatres was that they could be modified by their users with simple tools like saws, spanners and brushes. This building must be the new number one on any Theatric Tourist's London itinerary (number two is the use of the N.T.'s foyers) and, in offering applause to the Tricycle team, let us not forget the GLC Licensing Authority whose progressive attitude has made it all possible.

## Carol Hall

For a number of reasons the musicals *Best Little Whorehouse in Texas* and *I'm Getting My Act Together and Taking it on the Road* come easily together in the same paragraph. For one thing I caught them on the same day, the first (on Broadway) at the matinee and the second (off-Broadway) in the evening. For another thing, Carol Hall, *Whorehouse's* composer and lyricist, demonstrated versatility by delivering a starring performance as the lady who is



## Teatro Tanger

In Tangier most things are negotiable. And there is rarely a shortage of entrepreneurs with whom the deal can be done. But, surprisingly, the *Gran Teatro Cervantes* had no competing corps of clamouring concierges. So I failed to get inside to inspect what might, just possibly might, be an essay in Franco-Moorish fantasy. It took a big plate of couscous, a wind and string band of tingling timbre, and a belly dancer of musical muscularity to restore my spirits.

trying to get her act together (the act being 'Heather Jones and the Liberated Man's Band'). With one show about a brothel closed to improve a politician's image, and the other about a soap opera heroine preparing to undermine the domestic contentment and aspirations of a nation's women, there is ample scope for a marathon essay on the potential examination question 'compare and contrast contemporary attitudes to the female role in society as portrayed in these musicals'. I will spare you all that, because what really matters is that they are both terrific shows. *Whorehouse* is all cheerful attack and marks the integration of Country & Western Music into a formal dramatic format. *Getting My Act Together* is certainly the most brilliantly constructed and entertaining and stimulating exposition of feminism that has ever come my way. It must be seen in London, but only if it can be given the 'overlooked' style of staging that it gets on the traverse stage at the Circle in the Square. (Remember how *The Club* fell apart when it transferred from that theatre to a 'played-out-front' production style in London).

## Inner Parts

I like my music small: I like to hear the individual threads. So I was much pleased in a rather unusual way by my gramophone the other day. Curiosity had led me to listen to a disc called *First Chair Solos* in a series *Music Minus One*. Got it? Right, this was a recorded accompaniment for practising soloists. The pleasure of listening so clearly to inner parts was magic – something that I miss now that I no longer work in opera houses where one of the joys is to eavesdrop on the orchestra rehearsals held, without singers, in an empty auditorium with the Iron down.

## Mini Turn

I will now perform a U-turn. When timed faders were first added to small two-preset lighting controls, my reception was rather toffee-nosed. But these simple controls may end up in situations where the operational hand on a manual master is untrained and unsympathetic. Under such conditions, the braking effect of the timer can ease the visual pain that the audience might otherwise suffer.

## Printer's Light and Shade

This paragraph is a filler. It has been written to fill up space. I dislike too much white space between items: the thoughts in this diary are throwaways and to-have one's thrown away thoughts printed as a black island in a white sea (or even in a white pond) is to give them an emphasis beyond their importance. Just as spotlighting an actor in surrounding black can, alas, stress his mediocrity. Like one of those ballet evenings when the intervals are longer than the dancing. So I am scared of oasis printing and that is why I have written this extra paragraph.