

TABS

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by
The Strand Electric and Engineering Co., Ltd.

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EDITORIAL

Time, Gentlemen, Please

Our Hire Department report a disappointing increase in the late return of equipment.

When orders are placed with us with little time to deliver we send the goods by the quickest means to ensure its arrival on time. Similarly, we expect the goods returned immediately after use.

Should there appear to be a delay in return we write reminding the customer of this in case the equipment is still in use.

Latterly we have had several cases of very late returns, despite our weekly reminders, not because the equipment was in use but because of "a misunderstanding" about who was responsible for the packing up and despatch of the goods back to us.

This disturbs our planning of other orders and is a cause of avoidable unpleasantness. Remember: it may be you who suffers next time through "the other fellow's" shortcomings. Punctuality is the politeness of Princes!

* * *

Chromatic Chaos

Our good friends, the Editors of *New Zealand Theatre*, the journal of the New Zealand Drama Council, have, we are pleased to see, recently reprinted a condensed version of an article which appeared in TABS last December. Our title was "Primary Colours—the Watt Wasters," whereas New Zealand called it "Chromatic Chaos."

We are inclined to wonder whether a false impression may be given as the result of condensation and transcription. In our original article we referred to the fact that as an electric lamp was dimmed the colour of light emitted by it altered, the bias towards the red and away from the blue end of the spectrum increasing with the state of dim. In case there should be any doubt about it, we would like to make it clear that this statement was intended to refer to filament type lamps and not to fluorescent tubes.

* * *

Cinemoid Colour Sets

The suggestion has been sent to us from New Zealand that we should make available complete sets of "Cinemoid" filters in every colour through the range for the benefit of those who would like to make comparative tests or conduct other colour experiments. Colour filters cut to fit any of our standard lanterns have, of course, always been available, but it is true they have been listed in our

catalogue on a per dozen basis. (See our leaflet L.11.) Sets of 48 filters, including clear and frosts (but excluding Nos. 55, 56 and 60 which are not available in "Cinemoid") can be had as follows:—

Cut to fit	Patt. 23.	Baby Mirror Spot ..	18/-	the set of 48
"	"	Patt. 237. Baby Flood ..	48/8	" " "
"	"	Patt. 45. Spot Light ..	22/-	" " "

Postage and packing (U.K. only) 1/1 in each case.

* * *

Forthcoming Lectures and Demonstrations in Head Office Theatre

For parties of not less than twenty-four it is usually possible to arrange a special lecture or demonstration. However, for the benefit of individuals or small groups, a series of "omnibus" lectures have been arranged as follows:—

"Colour and Directional Light as applied to the Stage." <i>Lecture by L. G. Applebee.</i>	{	Wednesday, October 5th, 1955
		Wednesday, December 7th, 1955
		Tuesday, February 14th, 1956
		Tuesday, April 10th, 1956

"Basic Stage Lighting," Demonstration and Talk. <i>By F. P. Bentham.</i>	{	Thursday, September 8th, 1955
		Wednesday, November 9th, 1955
		Thursday, January 5th, 1956
		Wednesday, March 7th, 1956

Special Advanced Technical Lecture <i>By F. P. Bentham</i>	}	Thursday, January 19th, 1956
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The above will be at 6.30 p.m. on each day. Entrance to the theatre is at 29 King Street, W.C.2 from 6.15 p.m.

Those wishing to attend should apply in writing as early as possible to Head Office, 29 King Street, W.C.2, marking the letter "Demonstration." Personal applications can also be made at the Hire Showroom, at the same address, and sales counter in 25 Floral Street, W.C.2, but should be confirmed in writing.

THE NEW STRAND P.R. CONTROL SYSTEM

Strand Electric backroom boys have recently developed a new form of remote Stage Lighting Control. This is known as the P.R. system and it is the form of *control* and not the type of *dimmer* which is new, for either Strand Sunset 100 contact resistance dimmers or Strand Phoenix transformer dimmers may be used, neither of these being new. The improvements have, therefore, taken place in the dimmer control rather than in the dimmer itself.

Fig. 1 shows the Control Desk for a 134-way P.R. type equipment which has recently been installed in a West-End London Theatre. At first sight the desk appears to be almost identical in layout with that of our Electronic Control developed several years ago. The similarity is, however, almost entirely visual for although many of the moulded scales and switch and dimmer knobs were used before, now practically each one performs a different function. The switch and dimmer knobs are duplicated on left- and right-hand panels for the purposes of giving a single scene preset. This much was, of course, achieved with the Electronic Board, but with the P.R. system owing to an ingenious arrangement of switching a panel, although in use, may be "frozen" so that the switch and

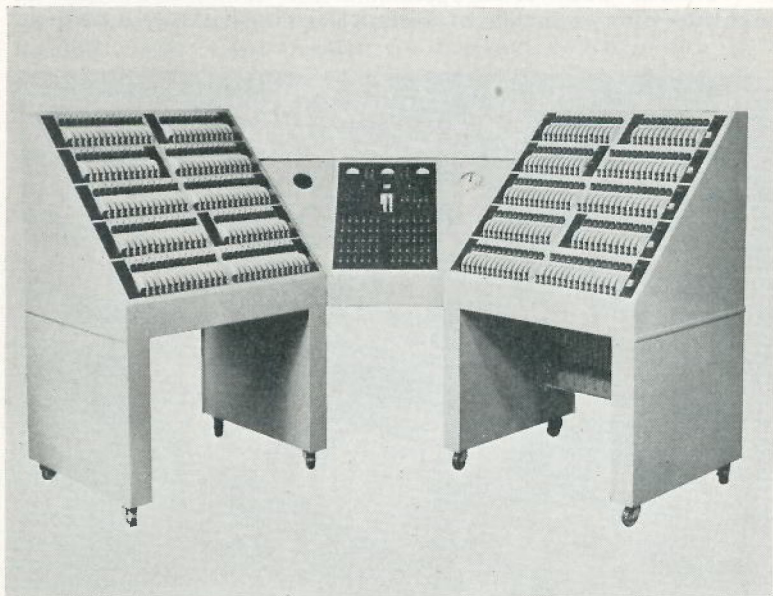


FIG. 1. A 134-way P.R. type control desk with right and left wings whereon all switches and dimmer knobs are duplicated. The P.R. system gives two presets of switch and dimmer positions ahead of last requirements.

dimmer handles may be re-set without interfering with the lighting in use. Thus with only two sets of switch and dimmer knobs the P.R. system gives a total of three separate set-ups; one in use, and two in reserve for the future. This was one of the principal objectives which we set out to achieve, and which is not possible with other systems whether they employ electronic dimmers, saturable reactors, magnetic amplifiers or the like. Another facility which we successfully set out to provide was to make it possible for one or more dimmers to be travelling upwards or downwards as required, without the necessity of the operator having to move the appropriate dimmer knobs on the desk throughout the lighting change, which might of course only be a matter of a second or two, but which equally well take fifteen or thirty minutes. In effect all dimmers are motorised and can be automatic in operation when required.

With the P.R. system, dimmers are housed in a bank or banks at some remote point (Fig. 2) and operated by means of an electric motor through electro-magnetic clutches. Each dimmer has its own clutch so that it may be moved upwards or downwards or left in *status quo* regardless of what its neighbour may be doing at any particular moment. Just behind each clutch, and mounted on the end of each dimmer, is a small "magic box" which is the brain of the P.R. system. It is this unit which advises the dimmer, as it were, whether to travel upwards or downwards, how far to move, and when to stop. If an operator at the Control Desk puts the miniature dimmer handle of a particular circuit at say a half, the

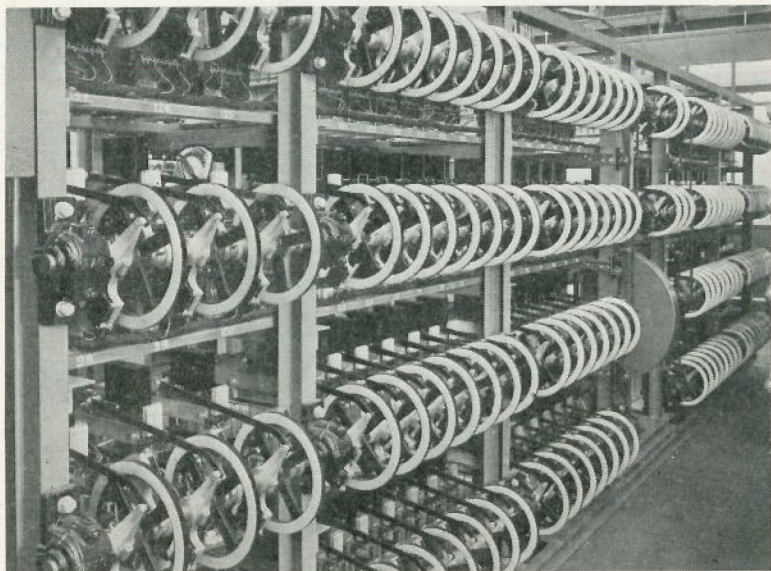


FIG. 2. *The remotely controlled dimmer bank of a P.R. system.*

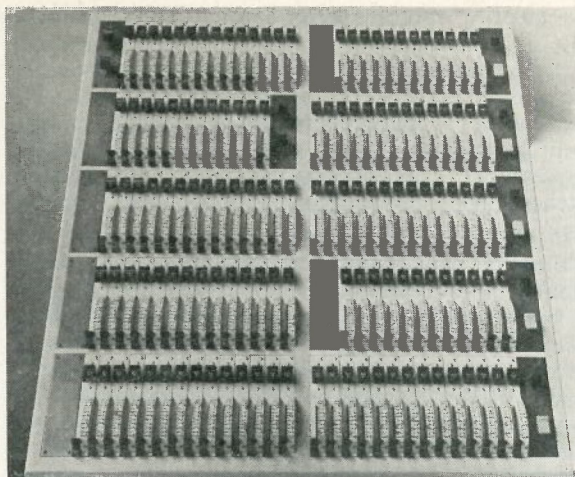


FIG. 3. Close up view of one wing of the control desk shown in Fig. 1. Each circuit is complete with its switch and dimmer handles and "masters" are shown at the right.

remote dimmer will take up the mid-way position without the operator having to be concerned with direction or extent of travel.

Fig. 3 shows a closer view of a Control Panel. Each circuit has its own miniature dimmer handle and switch. The former call for no further description while the latter are of two-way and off type. With the switch in the down position, operation is normal and the lighting circuit is fed through the blackout switch in the usual manner. With the switch in the up position, the circuit is again alight but this time fed independent of the blackout switch. With the circuit switch in the mid-way position the lighting circuit is out *and* the dimmer control circuit disconnected so that the dimmer handle may be reset to another position in advance of requirements and without any movement taking place.

At the end of each row are two further switches, one black and one amber. The former is concerned with blackout, i.e. switching and the latter with dimming. The black switch again has three positions. Normal working is given with the switch down. The centre position blacks out the row while the upward position connects all circuits in that row to a master switch irrespective of whether their circuit switches are in the "independent" position or not. The amber switch gives normal dimmer working in the up position, disconnects all dimmer controls in that row in the centre position (so that they may be re-set without a change actually taking place at the moment), and gives a general dim on that row in the downward position.

At the top part of the centre section of the control (the dark panel at the centre of Fig. 1) are two meters which indicate the general state of dim on left and right panels respectively; and a third which indicates the progress in the changeover from left to right-hand panel or *vice versa*. In the centre of the panel are two

small knobs for regulating motor speeds for left and right-hand panels respectively. These speeds are variable between three and forty-five seconds with this control from full on to black-out and *vice versa*, to give a dimmer travel of between two and forty-five seconds. For speeds slower than forty-five seconds a special impulse arrangement is available so that a dim can be set to take as long as half an hour if necessary. The lower part of the centre panel is taken up with switches and masters for the operation of remote colour change on lanterns.

The remote dimmer bank can, as usual, be placed in any convenient position in the theatre—preferably near the stage so that the wiring between the dimmers and the stage lighting lanterns may be kept as short as possible. The desk is, of course, preferably housed where the operator has an uninterrupted view of the stage. As room in the front-of-house is so precious it was essential that the size of the control desk should not be increased while providing the new facilities, and it is a matter for congratulation to those concerned that this has been found possible.

INTRODUCING OUR NORTHERN COUNTIES REPRESENTATIVE

To provide a closer contact between the Manchester Branch and the growing number of Strand Electric customers in the North Riding of Yorkshire, Durham, Northumberland, Westmorland and Cumberland, Mr. Philip Rose is now living in the area and is, therefore, readily available to those who may need service.

Mr. Rose joined the company on leaving school early in 1941. He acquired a thoroughly comprehensive knowledge of the electrical and theatrical technicalities by practical experience in various departments, supplemented by theoretical studies at the Polytechnic in London. He assisted in the permanent and temporary wiring of stages of all shapes and sizes and worked on such West End productions as *The Dancing Years*, *Arc de Triomphe*, *Sweet and Low*, *Alice in Wonderland*, *Peter Pan*, *War and Peace* and many others, equally varied.



When he reached mili-

tary age he joined the signals branch of the R.A.F. and after a short period of training in England found himself on the banks of the Nile. In due course, because of his theatrical knowledge, he was "lent" by the R.A.F. to E.N.S.A., to take charge of the stage switchboard at the Royal Opera House, Cairo, for a drama festival presented by the British Council. The plays were produced by Basil Dean and included *The School for Scandal*, *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*, *It Depends What You Mean*, and *Hamlet*. The star performers were John Geilgud, Roger Livesey and Ursula Jeans, and playing minor roles was a future star—Brian Reece. The switchboard, being limited in size and flexibility had to be augmented by portable boards. Any Basil Dean production could be a lighting expert's delight . . . or nightmare, and as Rose had a veritable United Nations staff consisting of a Greek, an Italian, a Sudanese, three Egyptians and three Englishmen, "nightmare" was the operative word. Each performance on stage was accompanied by a thrilling performance in the wings in silent but expressive mime. Rose then took charge of the electrical department of the Cairo Garrison Theatre and later was transferred to Combined Services Entertainment to supervise the electrical and sound equipment workshops for the Middle East Area.

His Middle East adventures included the acquisition of a wife who, being a Yorkshire lass, should be a guarantee that he is *persona grata* to the northerner, notwithstanding his handicap of being a southerner by absorption!

After demobilization he returned to the London office and became one of Mr. Applebee's assistants in the Theatre Lighting Department, in which he has been concerned with the planning and equipment of stages, large and small, in theatres, schools, village halls and all the other types of buildings in which drama demands more than four boards and a passion.

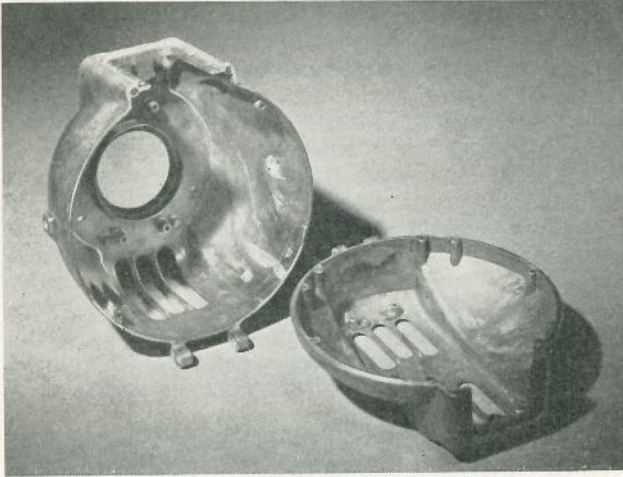
He has lectured on Stage Lighting in the London demonstration theatre and to amateur groups in various parts of the country. He has also written a series of articles on the lighting of ballrooms for one of the national periodicals devoted to dancing. For a few months he managed a Repertory Theatre in St. Annes, for his father, and thus rounded off a varied experience of the problems to be solved on both sides of the footlights (if any!).

Rose has already made many friends in his new area. He is available to all in the counties named who may need his services. In addition to representing all departments of The Strand Electric Company and its subsidiaries, he will also act for Watts and Corry Ltd., in the area. He may be contacted either through the Manchester Branch or directly to his home address:—

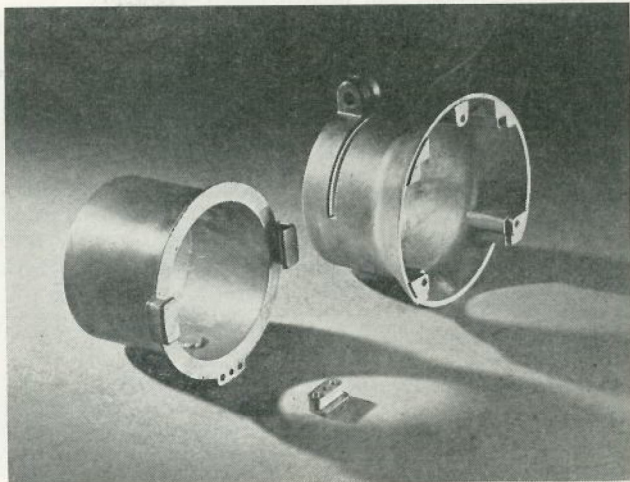
19 Beechwood Avenue, DARLINGTON.

MASS PRODUCING MIRROR SPOTS

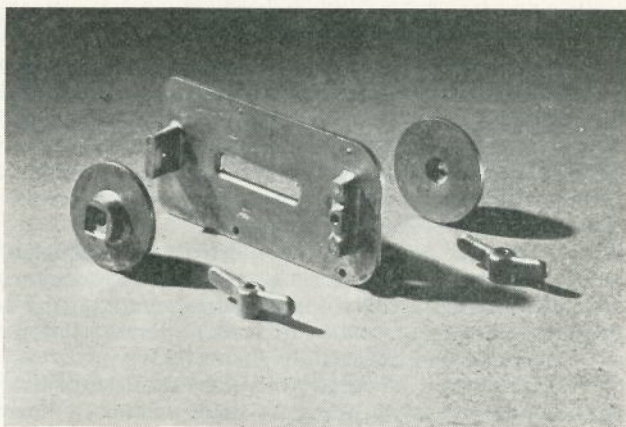
Some of the more technically minded of our readers may be interested to see the set of castings which go to make up that little giant the Pattern 23 Baby Mirror Spot. The apparent simplicity of the parts conceals many months of preparatory work on the drawing board and many hundreds of pounds spent on the special die casting moulding tools which were required for us to go into mass pro-



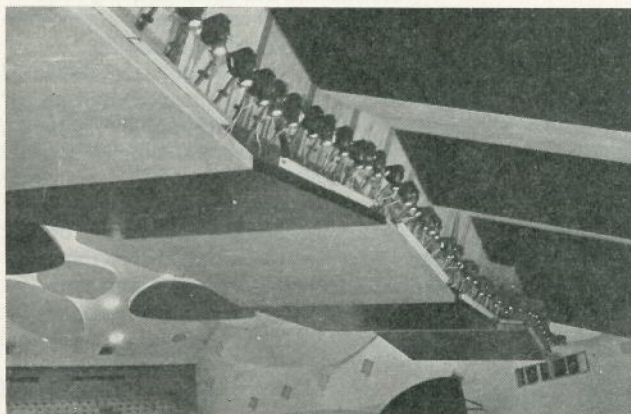
(Above) Housing castings, which together make up the body of Patt. 23 Baby Mirror Spot, and (below) front draw tube assembly for Patt. 23 Baby Mirror Spot.



duction. It is as well for all concerned that this time and money were so invested for it would otherwise never have been possible for us to keep pace with the demand for this spotlight—at the same time the neatest and one of the most efficient lanterns we have ever produced. The illustration opposite shows some of these spotlights installed in the roof of the Aula Magna at the University of Caracas, Venezuela. There are a total of 150 of these spotlights installed in three rows of 60, 50 and 40 each, over the concert platform.



(Above) Sundry parts of the Pattern 23 Spot and (below) part of an installation of 150 Baby Mirror Spots in Aula Magna, Caracas University, Venezuela.



A NEW USE FOR CINEMOID

By E. O. Hudson

Contemplating some odd scraps of Cinemoid left over from a play, it struck me that here was the very medium for translating designs for stained glass windows into something like reality.

The construction of actual stained-glass windows is, of course, out of the question on a class scale in schools; but Cinemoid is well within the range of the practical. Furthermore, it is light, easily stored and cut, robust, and may be handled, washed and rubbed clean almost with impunity.

The first step is to rough out a design, bearing in mind that, if a realistic imitation of stained glass is desired, the limitations imposed by glass-cutting and lead-burning should be preserved even though they do not apply to the technique actually in use. If, on the other hand, Cinemoid is treated as the new medium it is, and free use made of its possibilities, then patterns difficult or impossible of execution in glass may be produced.

The design is then drawn full-scale on a sheet of fairly stout paper, preferably black or dark grey. The spaces for the "glass" are cut out with a sharp knife, the intervening ribs being kept of uniform width to represent the lead of a real window. The pieces cut out should be preserved for the next step.

These cut-out pieces are then laid on Cinemoid of the selected colour, and the latter is cut to shape with a sufficient margin to allow of sticking to the paper frame.

The Cinemoid pieces are now attached to the frame with a suitable cement of the amyl acetate type. Any unwanted cement may be removed with methylated spirit; acetone is too drastic.

Finally any black lining needed to complete the picture is added in Indian ink with a fairly broad-nibbed pen, remembering that too fine lines will not show up.

The "window" is now ready for framing in a cardboard or thin wooden mount for rigidity, and may then be placed against a suitable window of the room for display.

The effect is most impressive; the technique is well within the capacity of school pupils; and the cost is reasonably low—especially if the pieces of Cinemoid may be begged from the Dramatic Society!

It need hardly be mentioned that the Dramatic Society may borrow the final product for use on their next set!



The example of a stained glass window effect made by the author from "Cinemoid."

CYCLORAMA COLOUR FILTERS

In the December issue of TABS we condemned the use of primary colours on the acting area of the legitimate theatre. Our arguments were, it may be remembered, that even if the mixing of primaries did provide the widest possible range of available hues and tints, the drawbacks of the system were wastage of current, wastage of available light, and if full advantage of the colour change facilities were to be taken, a double wattage of blue was in any case necessary. As against all these points all we were able to show was that it was possible to obtain a range of colours so wide that at least half of them would never be wanted, and there might be a possible small saving in colour filter expenses. The following figures from a recent experiment in which circuit watts were measured indicate the order of current wastage referred to. To produce a visual match for No. 11 dark pink from three lanterns fitted with primary colours, 2.75 amps. was necessary; for a match for No. 18 light blue, 2.75 amps.; and for No. 35 deep golden amber 2.5 amps. The single lantern against which these were matched consumed only 0.9 amps., so the use of the primary system involved from $2\frac{1}{2}$ to $2\frac{3}{4}$ as much current for the same result. (In order to meet speculation as to what standard lamp was used, it was a 250w. projector, dimmed to give the equivalent colour and brightness of the other three.)

Another consideration is one of space. The room required by 3- or 4-colour equipment may, in some cases, mean that an inadequate wattage of any one colour is available.

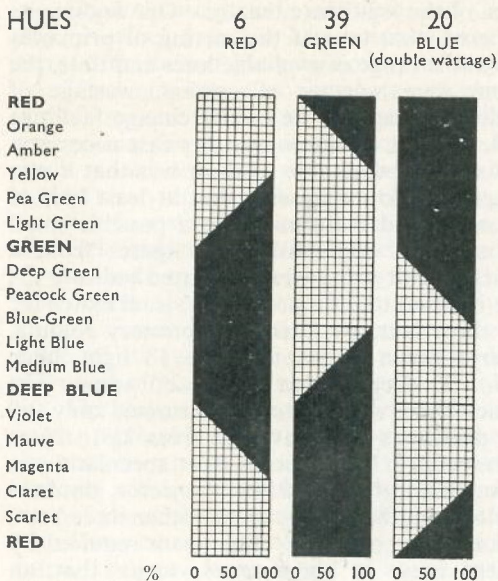
How do these arguments apply to the cyclorama and skylcloth? Firstly, it should be understood that the question is not capable of a single answer. If deep saturated colours are never wanted on the acting area, the same cannot be assumed for the cyclorama. As production expenses mount annually if not monthly, it is becoming increasingly common for the entire action of the play to be housed in a single stage setting in the interests of economy; and this often has the effect of the action being extended over widely varying times of day (or is it that managements hope that the audience will think they have been treated to different settings because one part of the action takes place in broad daylight and the other after nightfall?) Whatever the reason, whether it is the author's or management's plot that dictates, major changes are by no means infrequently called for. Even a change from noon to dusk or from dusk to night will call for considerable colour change, but if no really marked changes are needed it is clearly not economic to obtain one's requirements—say a light blue summer sky—by having the red circuit out, the greens at a half and the double blues (only) at full-up. A single circuit of blue, or two perhaps if a slight change was called for, will give much better value for money. But what is to happen if major changes are wanted? Are primaries then to be the order of the day?

These primaries will certainly give us the widest choice, and

FIG. 1. PRIMARY COLOUR MIXING

From which the largest selection of colours may be derived

HUES



The percentage figures on the charts are approximate guides only since the characteristics of dimmers and circuits vary; slight movement of the dimmer handles either side of the positions given will bring in the required colour. If double wattage is not available for the blue, then No. 19 may be substituted for No. 20. The schedules show diagrammatically the positions in which to place the dimmer handles to obtain the colours in the first column. The percentages are of handle travel, 0% being the "off" position, 100% the "full on."

TINTS

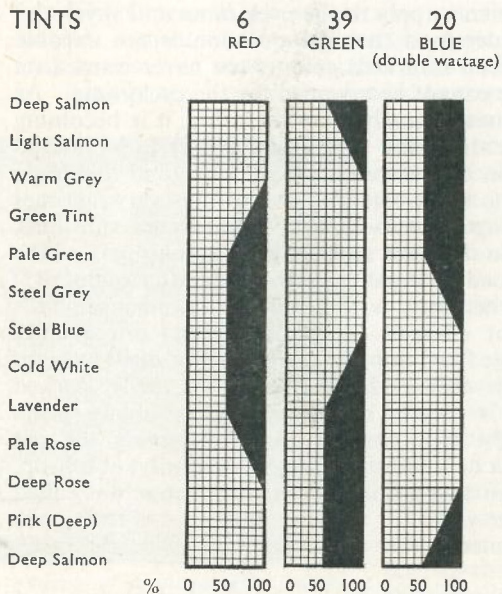


FIG. 2. ALTERNATIVE THREE-COLOUR MIXING

For realistic colours at maximum intensity

tints no dimmer is taken below 50%.

Compare the light blue as obtained by either mixture. Using the primary colours in Fig. 1, this is obtained by setting the red dimmer at 0 (out), Green at 66 $\frac{2}{3}$, and Blue at 100 (full up). With the alternative mixture the Orange is put at 0 (out), the Blue Green at 100 (full up) and the Blue at 100 (full up). When it is appreciated that the setting of the green dimmer handle in the former mixture reduces the light output of that circuit to about one-third, the superiority of the latter system will be apparent.

HUES
 35 DEEP GOLDEN AMBER
 16 BLUE-GREEN
 39 BLUE (double wattage)

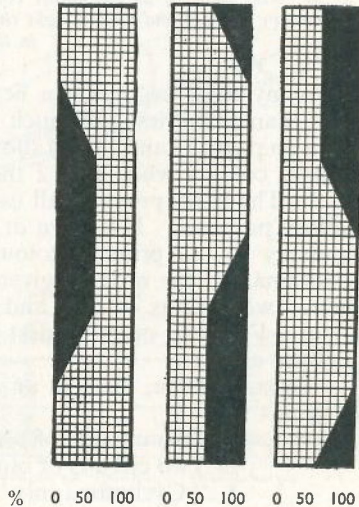
ORANGE
 Amber
 Straw
 Warm White
 Grey
 Pale Green
BLUE-GREEN
 Peacock Green
 Peacock Blue
 Light Blue
 Medium Blue
 Dark Blue
DEEP BLUE
 Violet
 Mauve
 Rose
 Pink
 Salmon
ORANGE



TINTS

35 DEEP GOLDEN AMBER
 16 BLUE-GREEN
 20 BLUE (double wattage)

Deep Salmon
 Light Salmon
 Gold Tint
 Warm Grey
 Green-Grey
 Blue-Grey
 Steel Blue
 Lavender
 Rose Tint
 Pale Rose
 Pink
 Deep Pink
 Deep Salmon



an only slightly restricted range is given if a single circuit of No. 19 dark blue is substituted for the double wattage No. 20 blue. For many purposes the three-circuit set-up will be quite adequate. For many more it will still be found unnecessarily wide for actual requirements. What then is the next concession that can then be made in the interests of economy?

Let us for the first time regard the cyclorama top and bottom separately. While there may be an occasional need for hues and tints of red and green at the bottom of the cyclorama, the commonest colours required at the top are various blues from dark to light, blue-greens, greys, ambers, mauves and pinks. Now all these

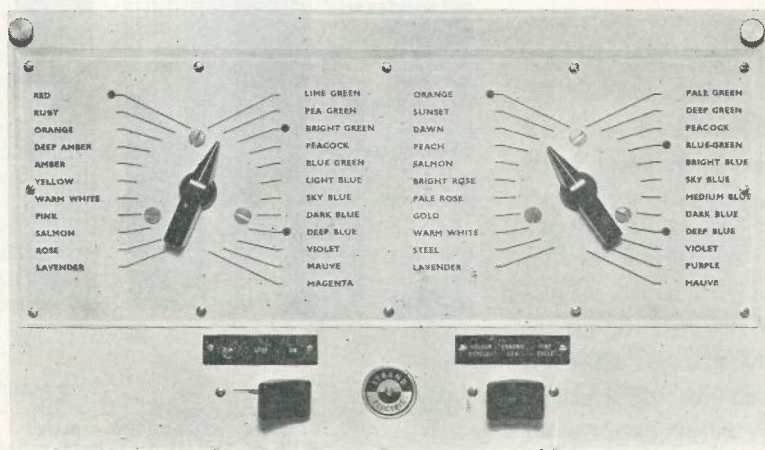


FIG. 3. The panel of an automatic colour selector switchboard, using on the left the primary colours and on the right the secondary "cyclorama mix" referred to in the text.

and many other colours can be produced by using a combination other than primaries, and much more efficiently as reference to the tables on pages 14 and 15 will show. Fig. 1 shows the result of mixing primary colours while Fig. 2 the result of a modified "cyclorama mix." The latter provides all usual cyclorama-top requirements for realistic purposes. If a dawn or a sunset is involved then it may be necessary to use primary colours, but *only* at the bottom of the cyclorama. If the mixture given by table 2 is in excess of requirements, two circuits of blue and a No. 35 deep golden amber may suffice. For even more modest requirements it may be possible to omit the amber.

To summarize, then, in an ascending order of range of effects we get:—

1. Two circuits of blue.
2. Two circuits of blue and No. 35 deep golden amber.
3. "Cyclorama mix" (top and bottom as Fig. 2).

4. "Cyclorama mix" as Fig. 2 at top; and primaries at cyclorama bottom.
5. Primaries red and green, with a single circuit of 19 blue.
6. Primary red, two circuits of primary blue and primary green.*

So far as control is concerned, automatic dimmers exist which will do the colour mixing for one. An example is shown in Fig. 3. Whilst such things have a place in the dance hall and cinema auditorium, their expense is not warranted on the cyclorama or indeed any other part of the Theatre Stage.

* Recommended for spectacle, not realism.

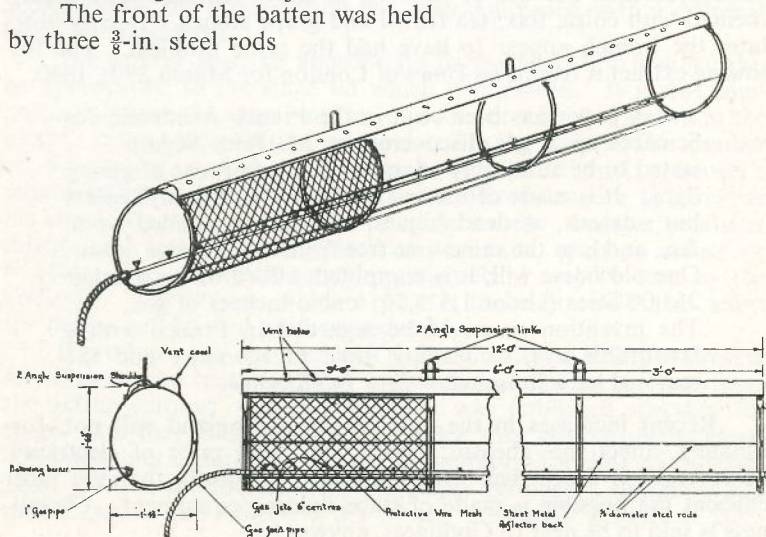
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DETAILS OF AN OLD GAS BATTEN

From the Surrey Music Hall, Barnsley, Yorks

The body of the 12 ft. long batten consisted of five oval-shaped hoops of strap iron 1 in. by $\frac{1}{8}$ in., placed approximately 3 ft. apart, the back half being covered in by sheet metal to form a reflector riveted to the hoops. Ventilation holes were spaced along the top of the cowlings above the jets.

The front of the batten was held by three $\frac{3}{8}$ -in. steel rods



running through the hoops fixed by nuts either end. These in turn acted as supports for a protective wire mesh guard curved to the contour of the batten to prevent scenery or curtains from being blown into the gas jets.

At the base of the reflector was a 1-in. gas pipe fixed by clamps to the twisted flat of each hoop, with batwing gas jets spaced at 6-in. intervals. The gas pipe was fed at one end by a rubber hose pipe with steel wire protection, this connecting it to feed pipes on the grid or side wall of the stage and thence to the control panel.

An interesting feature is the crude but effective two-angled tilt into which the suspension hooks were attached.

* * *

GETTING GAS

At a time when the continent of Europe is turning increasingly to England for its stage lighting requirements, it is interesting to recall that 135 years ago an Italian visited London to explore the possibility of using gas in the Scala, Milan. (See TABS, Vol. 7, No. 3 for further details.) He reported that although a gas made from whale oil "had been found useful" in London, transport costs precluded the use of fish oils in Italy. Instead they experimented with colza, flax, sea fennel and grape stones. Twenty years later the French appear to have had the same problem. The following extract is from *The Times* of London for March 25th, 1840.

A paper has been read in the French Academie des Sciences on a gas discovered by M. Jules Seguin . . . stated to be admirably adapted for the purpose of giving light. It is made of materials which are not only useless but noxious, as dead horses, old leather, spoiled wool, &c., and is at the same time free from an offensive odour. One old horse will, it is computed, afford on an average 25,000 litres (about 1,525,701 cubic inches) of gas. . . . The invention seems to be regarded in France with a favourable eye, as leading alike to economy and the removal of a nuisance.—*City Intelligence*.

Recent increases in the cost of gas in England will not, fortunately, affect the Theatre. With the rising price of electricity, however, it is more than ever important to ensure that the most efficient use possible is made of stage lighting equipment. Cleanliness is said to be next to Godliness, anyway!

SCENE PLANNING AND DESIGN

The April issue of TABS borrowed from the journal of the Southampton Theatre Guild, an article by L. C. E. who discussed, rather tentatively, the desirability of attempting to reproduce imitations of settings originally designed for professional productions. It is a problem that often arises in the amateur theatre and one that might well be more fully examined.

The production of a play, any play, is an attempt at the creation of a work of art. It should be a translation of the author's words into significant speech, emotion and action in appropriate environment. But, as with any other translation, it must be an adaptation assumed to suit best the idiom of these for whom it is translated. It cannot be literally transposed. There is no single way in which a play can be translated to a stage performance and the *décor* (of which lighting is an essential part) is an individual interpretation of ideas which are capable of a variety of interpretations. An interpretation appropriate to Shaftesbury Avenue would almost certainly be absurd for *Much Gurgling-on-the-Green*; and a setting designed to suit a production by Tyrone Guthrie would probably be quite incongruous if attempted for the vicar's production in the parish hall.

A competent producer does not rely on the "acting edition," complete with photographs and plan of the original setting. If he must work from such a book he can either tear out the photograph and blue-pencil the "business," or he can use both merely as yardsticks with which to measure his own ideas. It is always interesting to see what has been done by somebody else, particularly when it is obvious that the other person has greater ability; but it must be accepted that the other person has been concerned with a different set of circumstances.

The setting must be appropriate to the play, but it must also be appropriate to the stage on which it is placed. It is not compulsory to have the exact number of doors or windows shown in the picture in the acting edition or stipulated in the script. The number of doors was probably determined by the original producer's manipulation of his cast, or by the author's endeavour to visualise his characters moving about an imaginary area. Another producer might need less or more entrances and exits, perhaps arches or windows through which something significant may be seen by the audience. The way in which a play is to be lit could also affect the design and lay-out quite considerably.

If producer and designer lack the originality or ability to present anything but an imitation, they may welcome the aid received from the acting edition; they should, as it was published specially for them. But they must accept the fact that they are borrowing ideas. They must not claim the virtue of interpretation for skill in imitativeness. It is a sad fact that far too many producers, designers and actors regard the collective art of the drama as a kind of suet-

pudding—something to be made according to an expert's recipe; and suet-puddings can be stodgy, in spite of experts' recipes. It might be more honest if the producer's credit on many programmes read: "Original production imitated by . . ."; and instead of the claim that somebody has designed the setting, there should be the acknowledgment: "Original setting copied by . . .".

Both producer and scene designer should approach the problems of presenting a play not as copyists, but as artists or craftsmen using the facilities and personnel at their disposal to create the production best suited to their particular opportunities and limitations. The stage of the West End theatre on which a play was originally produced probably had a setting 30 ft. wide, 20 ft. deep and 18 ft. high and had 10 ft. or more extra depth to spare for backings. The amateur designer is more likely to be restricted to a setting which cannot exceed 20 ft. width, 14 ft. depth and 11 ft. height, with a mere 3 ft. depth for backings. (If he is as unlucky as many would-be designers he probably has considerably less space.) The original setting could, no doubt, be scaled down to suit the restricted measurements, but it is obvious that the architectural and decorative treatment of a room 30 ft. × 20 ft. × 18 ft. could be quite incongruous for the 20 ft. × 14 ft. × 11 ft. rooms: also, there are definite limits to the possible scaling down of furniture which forms an important part of the setting. The scaling down frequently emphasises the space restrictions. Of course, if the setting happens to be that of a proletarian kitchen, the smaller stage might have advantages: the designer for the large stage would probably have striven to minimise the excessive area.

It is important to remember that the setting must *suggest* a credible and appropriate environment for the characters and a designer will achieve the best results if he not only plans but also designs his set to suit the space available. "Suggest" is the key word: he must create a theatrical illusion and he is often least successful when he is most painstaking in his efforts to imitate reality.

It is a curious fact that the height of the scenery flats used will materially affect the apparent size of the acting area. To avoid having borders or ceilings too low it is usual for the flats on a professional stage to be not less than 18 ft. high. If the amateur stage has a proscenium opening height of about 10 ft., the flats will almost certainly be 11 ft. or 12 ft. high. The tops of the flats, therefore, merge into the proscenium frame, which creates an actual scale for the eyes of the audience and the restriction of width and depth of the acting area will be emphasised. It is not necessary to follow the technique adopted on most professional stages, but it is the habit to do so. If the height of the flats is reduced to about 8 ft. and they stand in front of black draperies extending as high as possible into the grid space, the actual scale is lost and an illusion of much greater spaciousness is created. Black borders would also be raised as high as possible and be used merely to

mask the ceiling and any lighting equipment suspended up-stage.

Fig. 1 shows a section of a stage with such an arrangement of borders and Fig. 2 indicates the arrangement of the surrounding draperies in relation to the scenery.

This method of setting greatly simplifies the lighting problems:

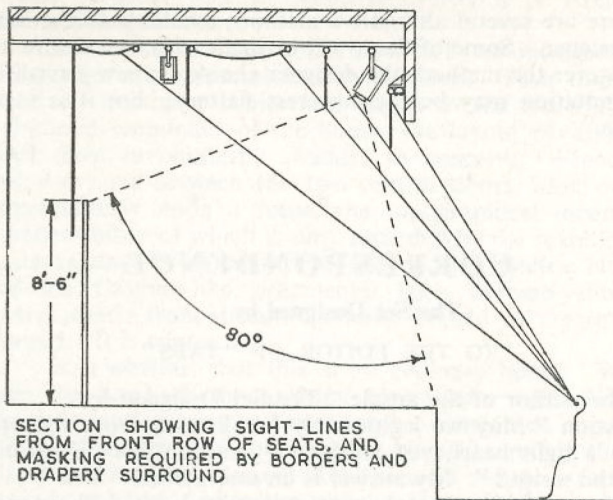


FIG. 1

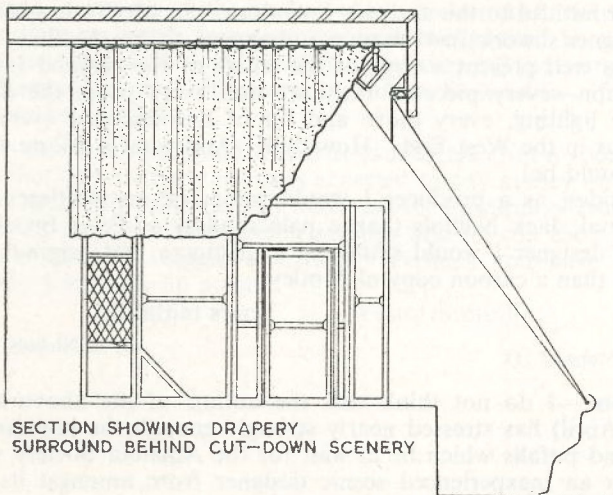


FIG. 2

any part of the acting area can be lit from the No. 1 batten position without causing distracting shadows from intrusive borders. The cut-down scenery is cheaper to make, easier to handle and stack, is more convincing and is more suited to the smaller stages, than the usual scaled-down imitation of the professional theatre's full-size box set.

There are several alternative methods available to the amateur scene designer. Some of them will be dealt with in a future article. But whatever the method, the designer should eschew slavish imitation. Imitation may be the sincerest flattery; but it is insincere "theatre."

P.C.

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CORRESPONDENCE

The Set Designed by . . .

TO THE EDITOR OF "TABS"

SIR,—The author of the article "The Set Designed by . . ." poses the question "May we legitimately break away from the original set with a light heart, yet consider it irresponsible deliberately to change the script?" My answer is an unqualified "Yes."

The art of the theatre is an interpreted art. The producer, the set, lighting and dress designer and the actors (an actor does not *create* a part) are interpreters of the work of the playwright.

There can be many interpretations of every aspect of any play, all faithful to the author's intentions. So why follow the first set designer's work just because it happens to be the first. You might as well present a copy of the whole of the original London production—every piece of furniture and every prop, the dresses and the lighting, every move and bit of business and every part played as in the West End. How dull! And what a failure such a show would be!

Besides, as a producer I would rather be an indifferent, but substantial, Jack Nichols than a pale shadow of Peter Brook; as a scene designer I would rather be a mediocre, but original, Jack Nichols than a carbon copy of Motley.

Yours faithfully,

J. L. Nichols.

DEAR SIR,—I do not think that the author of the above article (TABS, April) has stressed nearly strongly enough the innumerable snags and pitfalls which lie in wait for the Amateur Society which appoints an inexperienced scenic designer from amongst its own members, in preference to scaling down the setting used in the original professional productions. The type of atrocity which is all

too often perpetrated in the name of *décor* has been described, far better than I could ever do, by R. Simmonds under the heading "And so *Ad Nauseam* . . ."* as follows:—

The scene is the small country cottage of the Squatill family. The predominant style of the room is Frustrated Artistic, with the subtlest overtones of Architectural Improbable.

It is a comparatively small room lit by an outrageous chandelier some several feet in diameter. Four doors lead off at highly conjectural angles to the mercifully obscured remainder of the house, the layout of which one must involuntarily shudder to conceive. French windows set between the two central doors, look out miraculously upon a scene, the topographical incomprehensibility of which is only exceeded by the revolting extravagance of its colouring. Beyond the electric blue of the Caspian-like ornamental lake, chrome-yellow gorse snarls from distant Everests, bathed in magenta sunset. It is winter.

It is obvious that this is no ordinary house. We see the hand of the aspiring connoisseur who, held back by an inherent bad taste, and a companion superfluity of money, has fondly made himself a refuge that is, if nothing else, unique. On the solid refectory table stands a Venus—after the style of Henry Moore, who nurses in her fetching abdominal cavity, a lamp with a cerise shot-silk shade. The fireplace must, unfortunately, be seen to be believed, while the delicate pattern of the wall covering, with its half-eaten melon and purple artichoke motif, forms an unusual background to the chartreuse plush of the massive armchairs, and the orange Regency couch. It is a room, not to be lived in—if it can be avoided.

To this I can only add that it is usually also not a room to be seen either—particularly if one is expected to pay money for having to look at it from an incredibly hard seat for upwards of two hours. No, let us start by having better settings and we can then perhaps begin to look for bigger audiences. Perhaps you have already guessed—I am only an actor!

Yours faithfully,

G. Menteith.

* Reprinted by kind permission from "Prompter," issued by the Southampton Theatre Guild.

Production Courses in London

TO THE EDITOR OF "TABS"

DEAR SIR,—I should be glad if you could give me some information about production courses for amateurs in the London area. Our local Amateur Drama Society is in some difficulty over the shortage of producers, and although a comparatively new member, I have been asked to assist in production. I have done a little production work in the north before I came to London, but only in a small way, and I am wondering whether there are any courses on theatrical production which I might join.

I should explain that I have a full-time job, and that for domestic and financial reasons I could only manage one night a week regularly at present. If you could suggest anything on those lines I would be very glad.

Yours faithfully,

L. Browne.

* * *

There are a number of courses on Theatrical Production in London which vary both in cost and duration. As you can only attend in the evenings and fees are a consideration we suggest you get in touch with the Guild of Amateur Drama Producers. This organization runs a course under the L.C.C. at the Stepney Institute commencing on September 29th and extending over 1 year in three terms, each of twelve weekly lectures. These include both theoretical and practical work: the relations between the producer and the Drama Society, choosing and casting of plays, stage management and the organization of backstage staff and rehearsals, lighting, make-up, costume and so on. The fee for the whole course is £1 10s. Od. and this includes Associate Membership of the Guild for one year. For further details you should write to the Secretary: Mr. L. Johnson, 270 Conisborough Crescent, Catford, S.E.6. Tel.: Hither Green 1925. (Editor)

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SOME THOUGHTS ON PROPS

Reprinted by permission from "Theatre Unit Bulletin," Bombay.

By DNYANESHWAR NADKARNI

It is a theory of Tyrone Guthrie's that the actor should be made to feel perfectly at home on the stage. Let the chair that enthrones a Lear suit his shrunk shank. Sceptre and crown must tumble down, but not inadvertently while the show is on. Those who are going to emote on the boards night after night must get the feel of every piece of furniture, every prop.

Technically speaking, any external aid, from the table that serves Macbeth's banquet to the bit of tape that lends a Greek profile, is a prop. We require props to fill up stage space, to define

the "unity" of place itself, and time to some extent. Period furniture has conventionally introduced the atmosphere of drawing-room drama.

Even the best of actors feel that they have a limb too many when they are on stage. Speech and gesture have to be supported by external objects. The casual handling of a flower vase may not only steady the actor but also convey genteel emotions. Sitting astride a chair often engenders a homely feeling on the Indian stage!

From actor's excuse to visual symbol was a natural step forward for the prop. Yet it was not quite taken. Props are still used as if the stage were a crossword puzzle to be filled "across" and "down." The idea that characters can have parts of the stage habitually associated with them, that they can emphasise the trend of their role being subtly magnetized by a particular prop has yet to affect the producer's mind. Ophelia at her orisons and Claudius repenting are instances where similar props have to be clearly *domiciled*, say, by their contrasting positions on the stage at different moments.

A good actor's stage personality is a vortex controlling an eddy of reactions, an atmospheric whirl of great emotional momentum. Lacking this, one requires the props, artificial pin points to help the actor find his gravity in a lighted sea of space. This means that an actor has to be trained to face and *absorb* the emptiness around him. Props are like stray objects floating after a shipwreck. Not all of them are potential lifebuoys. Therefore, they have to be selected and arranged with the various actors' physical autonomy in mind. Their grouping, their placing must encourage not only freedom of movement, but also that semblance of improvisation which is the soul of acting.

Within the limited dimensions of the stage, an expressionistic use of props can be attempted. With a clever manipulation of the footlights a prop downstage can be made to assume gigantic proportions both in substance and shadow. Imagine what menace Shakespeare's props hold: the phial in *Romeo and Juliet*, the kerchief in *Othello* or the parchment will of Julius Cæsar. Modern drama, so chary of props, may have to borrow the expressionist technique of films. The prop that motivates action or reflects character can be stretched to a symbol by obvious emphasis. It is easy to avoid the metaphorical use of props familiar to Bottom and company.

We now reach the stage when props can become part and parcel of the fluid atmosphere and even the action of the play. The hallucinatory tension of *Macbeth* or *Crime and Punishment* may be heightened by an almost surrealist use of props. (Forced perspective in *décor* has already been attempted in these productions.) The prim crockery of a Chekov play can never decorate Ibsen's interiors. Perhaps, furniture that emphasises the discrepancy between human size and external situation can suggest characters

under stress, aspiring or disintegrating, as in Ibsen. A restoration comedy of wit can be boldly staged with two-dimensional cut-outs based on Hogarth or Rex Whistler. (A recent production of *Candida* made do with frames; this was a grave aberration from the main style.) In a production of *The Tempest*, even so passive a producer as Michael Benthall had arranged a glittering display of candles whenever there was a hint of hypnotism in the goings-on. (He had also used human props to create an illusion of tossing waves.)

Candles, incidentally, like mirrors and transparent cloth will evoke a romantic atmosphere. The colour and solidity of a significant prop may set the whole mood of a tragedy. And Hamlet's bare bodkin may achieve the abstract appeal of Macbeth's dagger if it is not quite the type of Romeo's happy one. You think the discerning spectator won't notice? No matter, if it makes a difference to the distinguished member of our repertory company!

If the producer looks down upon props as things dead, he will never persuade them to *react* to the tempered progress of the play. Lighted from different angles, a single prop can be transformed into a dynamo of changing moods. One has got to mould the inanimate neutral solids into the dynamic style of the production. They must not step on the foot of either author or actor, that is their significance must not be obstrusive. Thus striking a balance between life and silence, they can be a constellation within the mystique of theatre of which Barrault speaks.

* * *

ON SELECTING PLAYS

Reprinted by permission from French's Play Parade.

What shall we do next? The question is one that comes round all too frequently. And for some rebellious reason the plays that memory throws up are always—for one cause or another—quite unsuitable. Invariably we have the desire to produce plays with casts that are far too big (or else they are far too small and won't use up all those who were not given parts last time); or plays that have too many scenes for our small stage which can boast only one set of drab-coloured drapes; or we remember a delightful play we once saw in which we have forgotten there is a repulsive child of seven, and of course the youngest member of our company is twenty years too old—and the wrong sex at that. Always there is some impediment.

The way to solve the problem is of course to start at the other end—to list the resources at our disposal, to get hold of a copy of *The Guide to Selecting Plays*,* and to look up the titles that will fit. For nearly seventy-five years *The Guide* has been doing that job. During that time both the plays and the needs of the amateurs who perform them have undergone many changes, and always *The Guide* has adapted itself to the new requirements. In recent years, how-

* Obtainable from Messrs. Samuel French Ltd., 26 Southampton Street, London, W.C.2.

ever, *The Guide* has become too big for convenient use, and so the next edition, which is due to be published in September, will be brought out in a completely new form.

Instead of all the titles of long and short plays, of sketches, and mimes and Christmas and other entertainments all being allowed to rub shoulders in one long list, *The Guide* will be divided into separate parts, each of which will treat of one class of play only. As before, there will of course be the Classified Lists, grouping the plays according to the numbers of the characters or interests, but these too are being revised and re-arranged to make them easier to use.

In all its long history the price of *The Guide* has only increased from one shilling to half a crown, although the number of pages has grown from a bare 100 to well over 500 in some recent issues. Now there is to be another change—the price will be abolished altogether. The new *Guide to Selecting Plays* will be given away free.

All the features that have made *The Guide* so helpful in the past will be retained in the separate parts, and some new classifications and arrangements will be added.

If you are looking for a play of any kind, Samuel French will be pleased to send you those parts of *The Guide* that will be most helpful.

THE GUIDE TO SELECTING PLAYS

1955-56

- Part I Full Length Plays for Mixed Casts.
- Part II One Act Plays for Mixed Casts.
- Part III Plays for Women
Including Monologues, Duologues and Revue Sketches.
- Part IV Plays for Men
Including Monologues and Revue Sketches.
- Part V Plays for Children
(the Handbook of Plays for Schools and Youth Clubs).
- Part VI Seasonal Plays
Including Christmas, Easter, Biblical and Morality Plays and Pantomimes.
- Part VII Revue Sketches.
- Part VIII Books on Acting and the Theatre.
(A selection of technical books).

To be published in September.

There will be no charge for the new *Guide to Selecting Plays*.

BOOK REVIEWS

Stage Lighting : by F. P. Bentham. (8vo. 350 pages, profusely illustrated). Pitmans. 35/-

The first edition of this textbook was reviewed in TABS in December 1950 by no less an expert than Mr. George Devine. At the time Mr. Devine wrote: "it is not often that a man knows how to put down on paper half a lifetime of experience, and this Mr. Bentham has done, for our benefit and to our advantage." Mr. Bentham's publishers are fortunate that they find it necessary to reprint a book of such a specialist, and therefore of such an expensive, nature so soon. They are doubly fortunate in that their author has found it possible to introduce new material into his book so that the second edition is as up-to-date as was the first one.

Although the bulk of the work remains the same the revisions, which include new illustrations, are nevertheless considerable. Inevitably there has been progress in apparatus in the interval and the chapters on direct-operated switchboards and on remote control, for example, have been largely re-written. When

this book was originally set up remote control was represented by three installations in London. To-day remote control may almost be said to be the rule for first-class installations, and Mr. Bentham instances Drury Lane, Coliseum, Stratford-on-Avon and others.

Such chapters as have not been completely re-written have been brought up to date, for example, the equipment mentioned in the chapter on examples of layout have been amended. Some fresh ideas are given on the application of lighting and the treatment of the open stage has been further extended and now includes a new appendix which gives a critical appraisal of open-stage experiments since 1950. Details are also given of the Royal Festival Hall stage and concert platform lighting with which Mr. Bentham has been particularly associated.

About the time when the earlier edition was printed, fluorescent lighting for stages was making its debut, and the present reviewer would agree with Mr. Bentham in his assessment of it for this purpose, and the lack of progress in the last five years would appear to bear them out. G.M.

*The Business Side of the Amateur Theatre: by Alan Nelson-Smith. (8vo. 186 pages, with illustrated guide charts. Bound cloth boards). Macdonald & Evans, Ltd. 8/6 net.**

Although the business side of an amateur production may seem dull to those whose chief interest is the acting side, unless the business side is handled efficiently a society will, as the author of this admirable book says, soon reach the position where it has no business affairs to handle at all. Alternatively, even if things do not reach this regrettable stage, points must arise from time to time in the conduct of the affairs of the best regulated societies, and this excellent book of reference does deal very suitably with any problems, thus saving time and trouble for the hard-worked officials.

The snags that arise on the business side are manifold and, until the publication of this timely book, amateurs had no comprehensive guide to this all-important side of the presentation of shows. With the aid of this book, however, the secretary or business manager need have no fears; by following its clearly set-out guidance, he will find his troubles halved and his work made smoother at every step.

If the subject may be prosaic, there is nothing prosaic about the way in which Mr. Nelson-Smith tackles it. For what is likely to become a standard textbook, his style, enlivened by personal reminiscences and anecdote, is decidedly readable. After describing in detail how to form a society, he covers the matters of constitution, government and officers, the conduct of meetings, all the intricate questions of licensing (both of the theatre and the play), copyright and other rights, music in the theatre, entertainments duty, insurance, publicity, sale of tickets, and front-of-the-house management. He has special chapters on the duties of the secretary, also the treasurer and auditors (with full details of how to keep accounts). There is also a chapter containing a complete budget for a production and another chapter of special information ranging from shows for children to lotteries. The advantages of joining a national body are fully set out and there is a comprehensive chapter on drama festivals. An appendix details the fire precautions to be taken in small halls.

Mr. Nelson-Smith wrote this book with the full co-operation of the British Drama League, the National Operatic and Dramatic Association and the Standing Conference of Drama Associations, whose help he fully acknowledges. Mr. E. Martin Browne, C.B.E. (director, the British Drama League) contributes a foreword.

It has been estimated that there are in England, Scotland and Wales considerably more than 25,000 amateur dramatic and operatic societies and drama groups. Not one of these societies would fail to benefit by adding this book to its library; having been connected with the amateur stage in all the recognised official capacities for a considerable number of years, I unhesitatingly recommend this excellent book to all who assume the onerous duties undertaken by those who devote so much of their leisure hours to the business side of the amateur movement. R.V.

* At the time of publication (1953) we were not asked to review this book. We now do so at the request of certain readers who feel that their colleagues are missing something good.—Ed.