

Symphony in Red

CHRIS BALDWIN

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

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

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

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

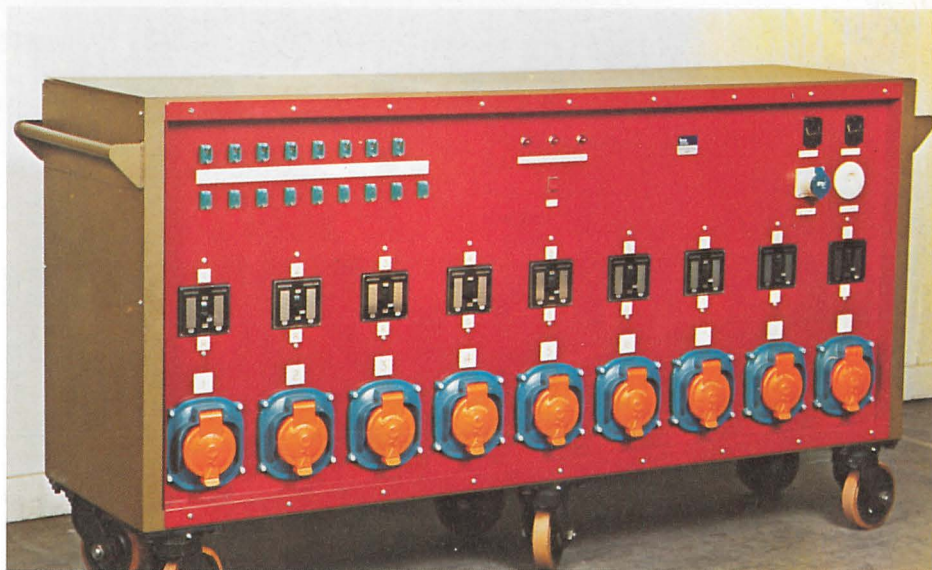
All the sound equipment excluding loudspeakers, was built into flight cases and every single audio connection by plug and socket using factory made up leads. This approach added to the initial cost, but, paid off in the long term. We were easily able to test the whole system in the factory, had a fast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

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

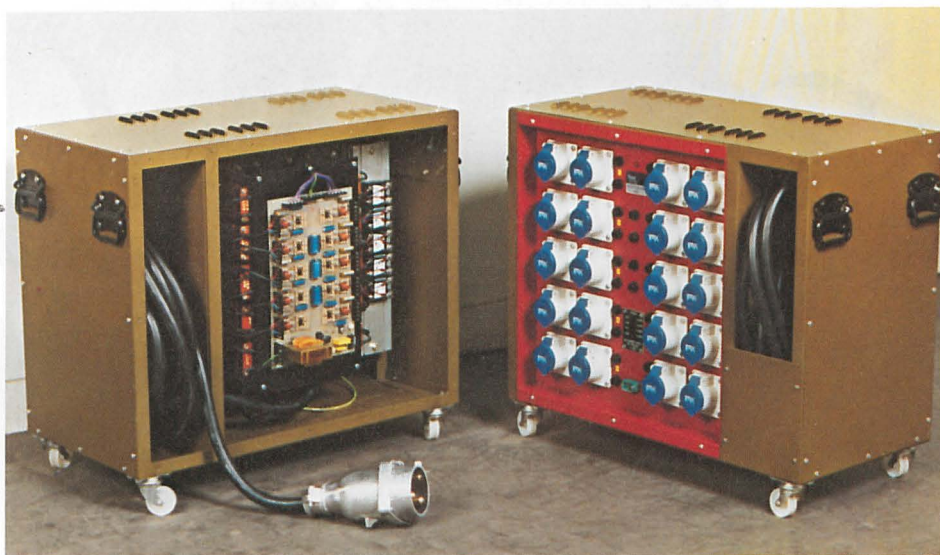
The advantages we thus gained through the portable rigs we have applied to the permanent installations, such as the recently completed "Galas" 1,500 seat theatre restaurant in Salou, where the dimmer racks, distribution rack etc. were supplied even with pre-cut power cables measured out to suit the equipment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

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

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



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



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

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