

# 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

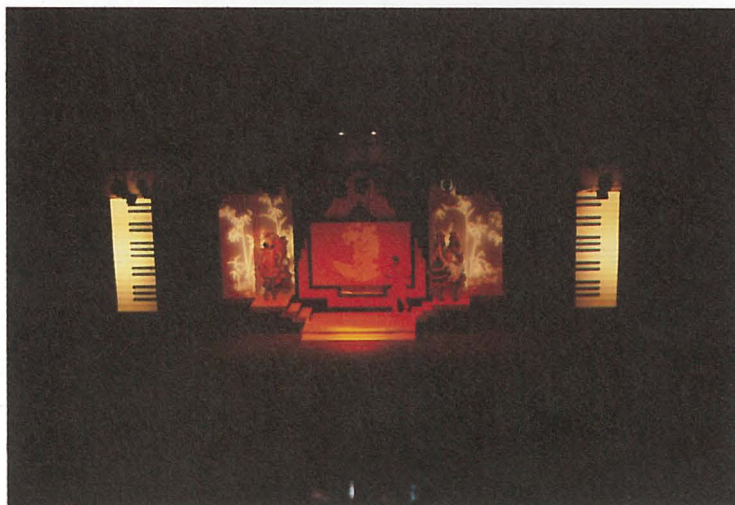
Each date followed this pattern:

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