

Between Cues

The thoughts of
Walter Plinge

Lighting Ideal . . .

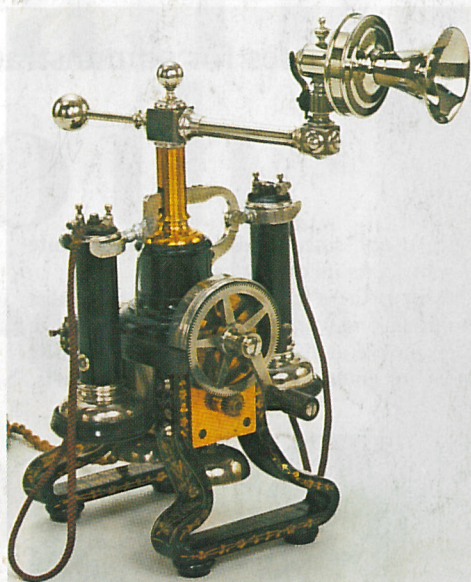
Somewhere in Soho, I was assisting with the education of tomorrow's technicians. "At what point" I enquired, "should the lighting designer become involved in the planning of a new production?". Quick as flash came the reply from a likely lad "as soon as he has signed his contract". The same fellow paid little further attention to my discourse except to dispute my observation that director and scenographer did not always find it easy to agree on a mutually ideal lighting balance. He advised me that there is a scholastic establishment to the north of London where harmony prevails and the path of the lighting designer is forever smooth. Why should (indeed how could) it ever be otherwise? Why indeed! How indeed!

. . . And Lighting Real

Somewhere in Europe, I was enjoying a dress rehearsal as guest of the production desk. The director and scenographer were English and work frequently together. They were known to me but I am unknown to them. So I played fly on the wall to their foot stamping disagreements about whether the actors or the set should be favoured with the available light. Both of them displayed a rather alarming ignorance of the more basic facts of stage lighting. Perhaps if their talents had been tempered by just a touch more rationality, their vision might possibly have been communicated more positively to the audience. Fortunately the resident lighting designer deployed the necessary cool logic and tact. His compromise saved the day.

Elegant Eavesdropping

One of the negative influences on my development as a lighting designer was a certain departed London impresario who had the less than endearing habit of summoning me to his office for a little advice on modifications that might, with advantage, be incorporated into the lighting plot. Perhaps advice is too gentle a word for the instructions to ignore the concept of Author, Composer, Director, Choreographer, Scenographer and my humble little self. These sessions taught me little about lighting but they did wonders for my diplomacy. And they opened a little window on the world of wheeling and dealing. Our discussions were continually interrupted by the telephone and throughout the calls a secretary made shorthand notes. She



eavesdropped by means of an earpiece cannibalised from early technology headphones. (One suspected the hand of a theatre electrician rather than a post-office approved engineer) Strange that an impresario of his undoubted elegance had never acquired a more stylish model. Perhaps he never visited Stockholm's Telemuseum where he would surely have been inspired by Ericsson's 1884 model.

Original Staatsopernbühnenboden

Regular readers of this column (if any there be) may have gained an impression that my approach to theatre is emotive. I do not deny it. And so you will understand that my most cherished card of this or any Christmas came from the Munich State Opera. Helmut Grosser's signature was on a fragment of timber from the original stage floor.

FPB at the IEE

Lighting has very little to do with electricity. It just so happens that, for the time being, electricity provides the most appropriate way of processing the required energy. The electrical chappies, however, like to keep abreast of the direction their current is flowing in such esoteric fringe fields as stage and studio. So it has become their habit to invite Fred The Console along to their palatial Institute from time to time for an hour or so of light entertainment. I doubt whether many of the Institute's

distinguished Electrical Engineers can appreciate the finer points of a Bentham discourse on the playability of digital keypads. To do so they would need to understand the differences between lighting design and lighting operation, the differences between a lighting plot written on paper and one kept in the head and, perhaps most fundamental, the difference between the solo act of composing colour music and the corporate act of lighting a production with actors. But it is Fred Bentham's special gift to be able to throw out thought provoking crumbs to the handful of specialists (albeit, in Christmas week, mostly manufacturers and consultants rather than designers or operators) while entertaining a non-specialist audience with pithy comments on his fifty years of slides. And I hope that someone somewhere is recording samples of the comments without which no Bentham lecture is complete: that is, his views on the architecture and equipment of the room which has had the misfortune to be selected for the lecture.

Park Theatre

Strolling in Amsterdam's Vondelpark last summer I chanced upon a lovely bandstand all rustic and romantic, but overgrown and unused



Then I found the stage used for today's concerts



Oh, dear.