

panels are too cumbersome and inconvenient, particularly for large scale repertoire houses, and arguably more expensive than providing more dimmers if all the costs of installation are taken into account, a large installation of 480 dimmer outlets has been provided which will fulfil the majority of the RSC's repertoire requirements.

Although there is now no technical limitation to the control of this number of dimmers, there has to be a limit to the capacity of the electrical supply and the switchgear. So, although there is around a megawatt available in the dimmer room for short durations, the example of one commercial theatre organisation has been followed, — and Rank Strand have been asked to include a load limiter with the installation. This will automatically trim down the level of dimmers when the electrical demand reaches a preset figure.



One of the most interesting of the technical innovations in the theatre is to be found in the sound mixing desk. This is currently being installed and has been manufactured by Rank Strand based on circuit design by Theatre Projects Special Project Group. This desk utilises the Floppy Disc and microprocessor units from the Rank Duet Lighting Control range in order to memorise and recall the routing selections of input channels to groups and from groups to outputs for loudspeakers. 36 channels may be selected to 10 groups which may be driven to 26 outputs in this installation.

Similar solid state switching has been used to ease the problem of switching paging microphones to appropriate areas of the building. We have sixteen paging points associated with the Theatre and these have to be routed to eight areas. Using the new system which has been devised, this has been made possible by utilising only two switching lines to each microphone position.

So there it is, many years of hard work by everybody concerned and the Barbican Centre for Arts and Conferences nearly finished. Despite the long wait I am sure the Royal Shakespeare Theatre will still fascinate all of us with its intimacy and theatricality when the doors are opened.

Alan Russell (is a Director of Theatre Projects Consultants)

Autolycus

You win some, you lose some

You lose some . . . Arts Council grants, Frank Matcham interiors, the revolves that never worked at the Lyttleton, proenium arches, the Old Vic . . . The Old Vic? Well, we certainly hope not, specially in this 50th anniversary of Lilian Baylis' Great Plan, and following Peter O'Toole's great season as a seller of seasons. But, then again, you win some . . . computerised box offices, pre-packed gins and tonics, a revival of 'The Sound of Music' (or 'Von Trapp's Last Tape' as it is known to intellectuals). In our last issue we were celebrating the re-emergence of Lord Miles' Mermaid from the waters of Puddle Dock. And now (see page 4), conveniently close to Grub Street, the City Fathers are on the point of opening most of the doors to the Barbican Centre for Arts and Conferences. Architecturally it is an astonishing achievement, with facilities that will be the envy of all other administrations, and will cost, incidentally, about £5,000,000 a year to keep functioning. Aesthetically, the sweeps and swoops of its foyers and walkways, the warmth of its colourations—special rounds of applause for its acres of polished pine-block flooring, the honey-coloured wood panelling to the concert-hall, and the Kew Garden sized conservatory that hides the 109 ft fly-tower—could fail to please only the man from the RSC we met who hates being uprooted from the cosy, if ramshackle, Aldwych. But (and as our RSC man may yet be proved right for the wrong reason) the problem for the Barbican will still be one of attracting a clientele for *all* its wonders that will remain loyal and regular in its attendances. Who exactly will come from how far and how wide. Valerie Miles, the peripatetic and immensely helpful press officer who was our guide, instances first the population of 5000 of the Barbican complex itself, who at least will have pass-keys (alright, alright, we understand the security problem) that enables them to reach the centre by the shortest routes over roof-tops, along corridors, and across the waterways and fountains (we got stuck somewhere in St. Giles, Cripplegate). Yes, of course, a substantial percentage of them will become regulars, and equally of course there will be the packaged jumbo-loads from Fujiyama and Little Rock, Arkansas. But one thinks, too, of those two great maxims for management (1) 'First nighters will go *anywhere*' and (2) 'Never give a complimentary ticket to a friend', Maybe the Barbican could do better—and indeed all the theatres now including the Mermaid, the Lyric Hammersmith, and even the National that seem to have got wrapped around by the Mammon embrace of offices—if it had a tangible facade on an actual street. Maybe all theatres should, by law, have a pediment that asserts a more understandable and sociable scale of

operations, and proclaims to passers-by, on foot, in buses, in taxis or, indeed helicopters, in notices of nasty neon: 'I am a theatre. I have a show going on. Come on in'.

A different breed of cat

We've done quite a lot of complaining in these columns about the failure of Production to grasp the opportunities for invention provided by all the new technology so hopefully and expensively installed in our theatres. Even in musical shows, where the costs of production would seem to force a full cooperation between the whats and the hows of a mise en scene, there has been a tendency, we believe, to accept as inevitable what can only be described as 'bad timing' in the plots for lighting and sound. It may just be directorial nerves or it may be arrogance, but, whatever it is, it has left a lot of audiences baulked of a viable and meaningful relationship with a show and asking the question in the Thurber cartoon: 'What *made* the magic go out of our marriage.?'

But now, at the New London Theatre in Drury Lane (where, as if to prove our point, more time has been taken up with catering to conventions and conferences than with running a live theatre) Andrew Lloyd Webber's 'Cats' is on, and, with a swirl of lighting and a sennet of sound, the old bezaz is triumphantly back. If you hate cats, we suppose, or love them too much, you could hate 'Cats'. But nod once in acceptance of T. S. Eliot's anthropomorphic fantasy and you'll be totally hooked, we think, by the sheer scope and energy of the inventiveness with which it is staged. The effects, in the full F/X sense of the word, are stunning, and, by the end of the performance, one feels that every trick or treat or transformation the 'machinery' of a modern theatre is capable of pulling off had been used—and used *relevantly*. Trevor Nunn directs; Gillian Lynne did the choreography; and an endearing cast of hot or cool cats includes Paul Nicholas (as the preening, prancing Rum Tum Tigger), Brian Blessed (particularly as the portly, white-spatted Clubland cat, Bustopher Jones) and Elaine Paige (as the sad, drab alley-cat Grizabella). But, from CUE's specialised point of view, an extra saucer of Whiskas goes to John Napier for his overall design of the splendidly sleazy setting where all the catwalking and caterwauling take place. He has created out of a clutter of old junk—part of an abandoned automobile, old tyres, even a giant boot thrown into mid-stage to stop the dancing cats in their nocturnal tracks—a world perfectly in scale with the fantasy. David Hersey's lighting sweeps us in and out of it; from the outset, with the auditorium black, when we are suddenly watched by a hundred pairs of yellow eyes; intermittently as the swoop of