

Lighting the Show

Francis Reid reports on *SHOWLIGHT 81*, the International Colloquium on Television, Theatre and Film Lighting organised by the National Illumination Committee of Great Britain at the Barbican Conference Centre on July 6th & 7th.

This was rather a good event. It remained rooted in reality. There was just about the right amount of questioning of current practices and fantasising about the future.

The preliminaries were got out of the way quickly. Being the first ever conference in the Barbican, it was rightly and properly declared open by a Lord Mayor of London who had been suitably briefed on the cost-effectiveness of halogen lamps. A word or three in *techspeak* from the CIE Chairman and then lift-off with the appearance of Richard Pilbrow talking jolly good sense accompanied by a backcloth of badly projected lighting photographs.

(Let us get one little matter out of the way: mention it and then forget it. This conference succeeded despite the most inept display of stage management and technological bungling since Frank Spencer assisted the vicar with his nativity play. A screen at war with slide formats, blank videos, silent sound films and a textbook demonstration of the 100% wrong way to light a speaker's face. OK, so the room had only been handed over 48 hours previously. So what! In showbiz that is an excuse not a reason. Are not newly opened theatres continuously disguising from the audience the raw state of their technology?)

STAGE

Richard Pilbrow offered a whole series of truisms. Lighting as 90% art and 10% technology (although no doubt the hordes of manufacturers in his audience would have wished – even believed – that it was the other way round!) Despite the phenomenal advances in lighting control, he noted little improvement in the final result. The problem was a human problem – many practitioners were untrained or (dare it be said) untalented. He applauded the advances in TV and in Pop/Rock with its 'need to put

on one hell of a show'. He called for improvements in rigging techniques – improve cost effectiveness or die. (Always one to accompany his words with actions, Richard's own T.P. have just acquired a specialist rigging subsidiary.)

And he made the most fundamental observation of the conference in respect of theatre lighting. *The profile is becoming the soft light with the PAR as the form revealing source.* This prediction is so absolutely true that any lamp or luminaire manufacturer interested in maintaining his box-office receipts should muse well upon it.

It was easy for this theatre lighting designer's ear to recognise the truth in Richard's remarks, but he put his message over so clearly and entertainingly that it must surely also have been recognised as the real thing by the film and TV lighting men as well as the manufacturers. (There were, incidentally, very few theatre lighting designers present).

FILM

Freddie Francis, defining the role of the Film Director of Photography as *creating an atmosphere for the director to tell a story* in endorsed Pilbrow's comments about speed and economy. He talked about light and shade and showed us some superb examples of cinematography (both mono and poly chromatic) where the shade was even more delicate than the light. Freddie Francis expressed a fondness for old equipment and obviously was more interested in the light's direction than whether it was emitted by a fashionable source. Amen. To questions about how one particularly splendid piece of lighting had been achieved, he explained (with all the self-effacing simplicity that is characteristic of so many great artists) that he had stuck a lamp on a stick in the actor's belt. He predicted that technology would take over responsibility

for exposure, allowing the scene to be lit from small lamps.



TELEVISION

From single camera photography to multi camera television with John Treays demonstrating great video lighting of the present but expressing some concern over the future. TV was falling apart. Efficiency had dropped from 30 to 20 completed minutes per day. Techniques were taking over. They were becoming amateur film makers rather than producing good television. They must not become engineering dominated. An increase in the amount of post-production work could remove some artistic control (and therefore artistic concern) from the originating production team. Communication between Director and Lighting Director was tricky – and, not