

# ie in Amsterdam

Most stage equipment in Holland is imported so the salesmen are more likely to describe the bad as well as the good features of the product that they are selling. After all, they have decided to sell it—and so you are more likely to buy it—because the good points outnumber the bad. I have always found such realistic sales pitch to be much more credible than corporate sycophancy.

But those proverbial wild horses will not drag distributors' indiscretions from me: this report must remain in traditional subjective format—but I trust that the foregoing comments will justify any light hearted cynicism that may creep into serious assessment.

The equipment exhibition was part of the THEATERTECHNISCH CONGRESS 1981 organised by the *Vereniging voor Podiumtechnologie* who are the Dutch theatre technicians association. This body are OISTT affiliates and hosted a meeting of the OISTT Technical Commission which was held as part of the congress.

The event was held in the foyers of the RAI CONGRESS CENTRE which are not only roomy but have the considerable merit of natural daylight. It was probably the least claustrophobic trade fair that I have attended. It was surprisingly large. Can the Netherlands technical theatre market really support this size of operation at two year intervals? There is a lot of theatre in Holland, with a well organised touring system; and every other canal warehouse in Amsterdam seems to house an alternative theatre. But is there enough turnover for the industry to justify this selling expense—or, more importantly, can the customers stand the mark-up in final selling prices that must surely result from this costly sales effort?

The biggest impact was made by **Flashlight** who seem to have almost everyone else under their umbrella. But before going any further, I must declare interest. They, *Flashlight*, were able to supply me with the product I most needed—a plastic carrier bag for the armfuls of leaflets, catalogues and other literary masterpieces which will always be the prime motive for attending trade exhibitions. And furthermore I must confess that this is being written with their pen (on which I read that they are based in Utrecht and that you can call them on 030-444842).

The distinctive *Flashlight* carrier bags gave them something of a supermarket image and indeed that is just what they are—consider the range: Kliegl memory controls, Electrosonic manual controls, Tipspot rigger's controls, DHA gobos, Clear-Com intercoms, Lee colours, and spots from Strand, Ianiro, Lowel, Neithammer and CCT. To display all their goodies, *Flashlight* had taken the whole upper floor so that individual firms could have ample space to demonstrate their own products under the *Flashlight* banner. For example, it was good to find that Woody



trained veteran of the international scene, Michael Wooderson in action with his CCT luminaires. Having led the way in developing profile spot versatility, CCT are now having a successful rethink of smaller stage lighting. Nice to see linear floods coming in at the *Minuette* end of the market. Indeed I can see myself using the *Minuette* flood before long in conjunction with *Silhouettes* on the larger shows.

The **Electrosonic Multiway 2** manual control system is attractively styled and represents the facilities that we were all clamouring for once upon a time. Its shallow modules are ideal for fitting into own-made desks and so it would be logical to add a simple memory facility module to the range. Most of us expect memory from 30 channels up and those of us that do not expect are certainly liable to hanker, if not immediately, then eventually. I personally would be a little defeated by the system's ergonomics—not the nicely set-out master module, but the lunacy of working in dozens in a decimal world. I can certainly pick out, say, channel 23 on a preset when the breaks come at every ten; but when the breaks come in multiples of twelve, I become finger tied. The leaflet quotes "the ease of operation and cost effectiveness of a manual control system". Is a 48-way 3-preset 3-group *really* more cost effective than a simple memory board? (Remembering that theatrical cost effectiveness is more truly measured in running than in capital costs).

The answer could probably be found within the *Flashlight* organisation, because alongside the *Electrosonic* manual was a *Kliegl Performer*. To confuse the issue, *Kliegl* were also downstairs as part of *Theatre Projects* who were appearing under their local banner of **Courage Light** who, despite their name, are Haarlem importers not London brewers. Indeed the product mixes of various importers threw up some surprising, even incestuous, combinations of familiar brands who in other parts of the world would be competitors.

The TP stand had a prototype **Colourmix** from *Plumblin* Designs of London. This offers (and I quote) "a new concept in gel changers offering rapid deployment of up to 10 colours and white". Well mechanically it has some way to go. *But* it

is compact and I am going to watch it. TP (in the person of Brian Benn . . . now there's a salesman with an objective, even cynical, approach) also managed to convince me that I can afford fibre optics. So if I get the chance, I'll have a bash. Just the background to disguise lack of talent in any artiste.

There was a lot of sound equipment around, most of it silent. The desks continue to look like ergonomic nightmares with a potential beyond the control of the operators' fingers or musical memory. Sound quality surely cannot progress much further until the operator can capture good mixes in a storage system during rehearsal, rather than rely on his own personal memory. As lighting rigs became more complicated, they needed ever increasingly sophisticated written plots then instant electronic plots. Have not sound rigs overtaken plotting resources?

**Tri-wall Firemarshal Board** has never taken off as fast as one might have expected. Flame resistant light fibreboard that bends without splitting and cuts with a knife should answer many a sceneographer's dream. Perhaps it just needs aggressive marketing and it looks as if that is just what is about to happen. Its new distributors, *Benbow Creative Limited* were handing out samples and giving away lighters. Being a non-smoker I have never ever owned a lighter and so sure am having fun (and some alarms) playing at being a fire prevention officer on my own stage.

But lighting, as always, tended to predominate. *Thorn*, of course, were sadly missed and *Siemens*, once so much at the centre of things, had not sent along a single control system. There was a Dutch lever per channel memory system of some operational complexity, rather rock orientated. **ADB** had a big system on show, but *Strand* have produced in **Galaxy** what seems to be the ultimate in intensity control—no need to go beyond this in the present century. However I was surprised to find that the *DUET* on show was not only badly displayed in a corner but was a Mk I without a VDU. Now that is no way to treat what I consider to be the best small cheap board on the market. I thought so a year ago when I bought one and I still think so after a years trouble free usage. *Jack Watling* gave me a terrific sales pitch for a display fresnel called **Minim**—with all the missionary fervour of a salesman with total faith in his product. But cynical old me found it difficult to believe that it has a market slot.

It only remains to add that all the manufacturers were having a ball-visiting each others stands. Not looking for ideas so much as looking for reassurance that there was nothing new around. As the world recession continues, these trade fairs may well become like my local antiques fayres where the dealers buy from each other and the rest of us go along to watch. However, it is always nice to meet one's fellow technicians and we must be grateful to the equipment manufacturers for laying out their *conversation pieces* for us to comment on as we stroll through the boulevards of exhibition stands.