

NoTT 86

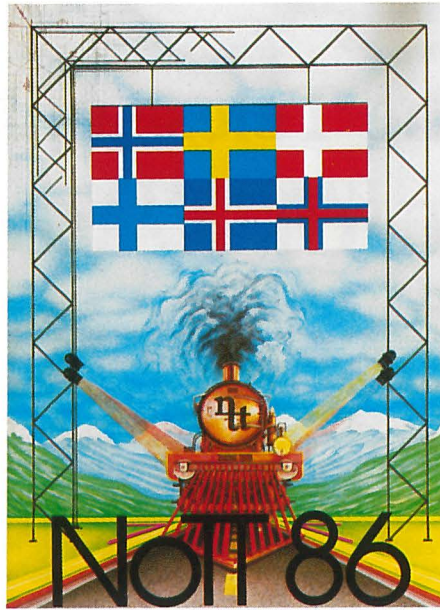
On the evening of Saturday 24th May a special train left Oslo for a four-hour spectacularly dramatic climb up, over and through the mountains that rise out of Norway's fiords. On board the train were five hundred theatre technicians from the Scandinavian countries, together with forty guest speakers and twenty interpreters. This was NoTT 86 and we were heading for four days of discussing theatre technology amidst the heady mountain air of Geilo.

Ignoring the seven British, two Italians and solitary Austrian and American as statistically insignificant, the breakdown was:

Norwegians	33%
Swedes	28%
Finns	26%
Danes	10%
Icelanders	3%
and:	
Lighting	24%
Machinery	19%
Costume	16%
Make-up	10%
Props	9%
Stage Management	8%
Scene Painting	8%
Sound	8%

On the train, and on a couple of station platforms at passing loops on the mainly single line, we renewed old friendships and made new ones. By the time that we took over Geilo, occupying most of its beds and bars, we had gelled into something rather more than the sum of our parts. Alas, and this was the only weak part of an otherwise excellent get together, we then tended to split into our specialist areas. Light talked with light, sound argued over which knobs to computerise and the prime movers debated hydraulics versus pneumatics. Costumes, props and painters had some shared experiences in common areas such as masks. But there could have perhaps been a little more cross discussion on mutual problems on the lines of the proposed colour seminar for which a time slot could not be found. However this is a matter of fine balance for any conference and we have all known events where an overstress of interdisciplinary sessions has led to an excess of surface discussion. The key sessions will always be those where each speciality takes a deep look into the recesses of the state of its own particular technology. And here NoTT 86 did its participants, and their industry, proud.

There being no theatre in Geilo, a resort where apres ski in the hotel is the preferred form of culture, NoTT 86 erected a tent. But spring arrived a little late this year and, after a chilling opening which was warmed by a satirical but realistic contribution from a non-present minister of culture, followed by a freezing evening of 'Waiting for Godot',



the tent was abandoned when the ice-capped mountains disappeared in a flurry that became a blizzard. (I, having waited for Godot on many occasions, particularly recently in Malayalam, decided that if he/she/it really wanted to wait upon me in Finnish Swedish, the bar of the Highland Hotel would be as appropriate as a tent.)

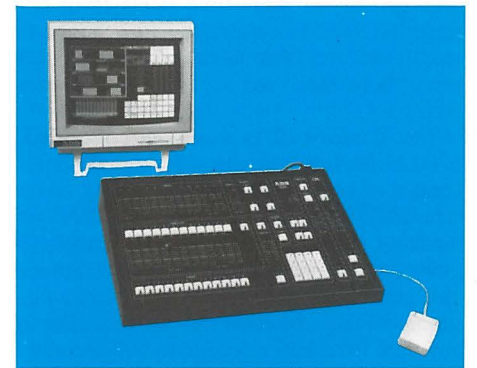
However there was a multipurpose hall that could become a cinema and there, at midnight, I became a fan of the Swedish film *Brodrene Mozart*. I may have missed some of the niceties of dialogue (the Norwegian subtitles seemed very close to the Swedish words, although I understand neither) but there was no missing the realities of the modern opera producer who sets out to reveal the inner core of Don Giovanni, seducing singers, orchestra and the stage door keeper into accepting his interpretation. He becomes the Don but Mozart is his Commendatore. Simultaneously funny and philosophic, this is a great film for those of us whose world is theatre, or who view the theatre as a metaphor for the world.

There was a trade show where the Scandinavian firms and the local agents of the overseas big boys had laid out their latest goodies to tempt us. There was a lot of sound gear: the only trend perceptible to my unsophisticated eye was more knobs. My ear is not unsophisticated but trade shows do not provide a proper opportunity to hear sound or see light. The lighting manufacturers are now entering a period of desperation as they struggle to make their controls seem new and different. All the traditional modes of access were represented plus some newer ones. If you want to use a mouse activated cursor, ADB can accommodate you. I don't think its for me but I do acknowledge that this mode works well in computer graphics and so I suspect that any future in theatre lighting is dependent upon designers using the machine themselves rather than by talking to its operator. However I personally feel quite strongly that to use a typewriter keyboard to talk to

lights is a misuse of language. Nevertheless Grossmann seems to be selling well, both with this kind of board and also with one where the wheels seem to me to be ergonomically misplaced.

But surely survival will be the reward for manufacturers who can resist the pundits whose only objective seems to be to discover what a system cannot do, irrespective of whether that function is a truly positive requirement. As a lighting designer I very rarely need anything more sophisticated than an M24, and when it gets its remainder dim push it will work faster than I can think. However I want my operator to have whatever brings happiness.

Finely tuned lighting marketing men are in any case no longer dabbling in control refinements but are seeking the prizes in cost-effective positioning and colouring. They are debating mechanically dimmed discharge lamps and electronically transformed low voltage tungsten. Any alive lighting manufacturer is envious of Varilite, sees the demise of TBA as only a short respite, and is relieved that Rosco have channelled their imagination towards peripherals.



The "MAUS" a computer graphics device seen here successfully applied to stage lighting control in the latest ADB system.

Other trade stands included make-up, fabrics and all kinds of assorted hardware. And one could watch, transfixed, as an AVAB flying system demonstrated continuously that computer control can now set limits to within the thickness of an egg shell.

Touring was advertised as the main theme of the conference — yet, rather than becoming a linking theme throughout, its discussion was mostly reserved for the final day. By then many delegates had started their homeward journey — including this tourist who had the scent of the Oslo Theatre Museum in his theatric nostrils.

So it only remains to report that of all the many theatre conferences I have attended, this one was by far the tops for gastronomy. Never were the fruits of the sea and the river consumed with such pleasure as by the participants in NoTT 86. The NoTT tradition started in Stockholm in 83, rumour has it that Finland will host NoTT 89. Until then, Skol!

FRANCIS REID