The Telescan II

A Review by Steve Kemp

In the lighting business, 1985 was the year of the ''moving beam'' and I think 1986 will be even more so. Sky Channel and Musicbox are crammed full of videos showing moving theme lighting effects. These are extremely spectacular and thanks to some wonderfully creative lighting design, add enormous visual excitement to a rock band's performance. But up until now, the equipment providing these effects, although computer controlled, revolutionary and sophisticated in design, has not been able to produce the subtletly required for theatre and opera performances. Here at last is a lumière that can not only cope with the ''Razzle Dazzle'' needed for large rock shows, but can also provide extreme subtletly. For instance, a slow colour change from the very palest amber to steel blue and at the same time move from upstage left to downstage right and a change of size in say twenty minutes!! The Telescan II meets both these requirements and moves with ease.

The Telescan II is a remote controlled, 1200 H.M.I. followspot offering computer control of beam position (x & y axis), beam size (iris), focus (sharp or soft), dimmer and blackout shutter, optional gobo changer (5 gobos) and of course, a trichromatic colour changer offering a choice of any colour. The timing of any function can be recorded in any time from half a second to 999 seconds. Preset can be replayed manually or automatically. In short, this is a precision made lighting instrument which is a new and exciting tool for the professional lighting designer.

The most interesting design feature of the Telescan II is the fact that the lantern itself does not move. The beam is reflected to the stage via a mirror and it is the mirror that does the moving. This, of course, allows the mechanics controlling the movement to be small and compact and therefore extremely accurate. Other moving beam systems move the complete lantern in both pan and tilt mode and therefore require much heavier and less accurate mechanical control. The fact that the mirror moves, and not the lamp, allows a standard, extremely bright H.M.I. light source to be used. It is not impossible in later versions of the Telescan to envisage a 2K or even a 4K option.

Telescan II units can be placed on conventional stage bars or trusses. They can be mounted horizontally or vertically. They can also stand on the floor. They can be placed on stage bridges or side galleries or in the house to be used as conventional but remote controlled follow spots.

As can be seen from the technical specification, the Telescan II is an extremely sophisticated lighting instrument. Its possibilities are being explored in all aspects of the performing arts. It has been used by numerous rock bands on tour including Prince, Stevie Wonder, The Police and Spandau Ballet. It has been used in large revues in Paris at the Crazy Horse Saloon and the Rock 'n Roll Circus. It has also been used on theatre productions of ''La Penchole'' and ''Cyrano de Bergerac''. In Holland, great interest has been shown by television lighting designers at the NOS and a nine way system was used on the ''Platengala 85'' for AVRO television. Also in Holland, a sixteen way system has been used as a complete lighting concept on a major musical, ''IK JAN CREMER''.

Although Telescan II is a strange, delicate looking creation, it has proved to be able to withstand the rigours of one night stand touring and proves to be reliable ''on the road''.

Telescan II is a revolutionary piece of equipment and it is hoped that ongoing development will maintain its high standard.

Like most of us mere mortals, the Telescan II computer can suffer from limited memory capacity and large systems used in complicated performances may require ''memory reloads'' from the floppy disk. This, in itself, is not a great problem but it demands that the operator plans carefully when to complete this fifteen second reload in mid-performance, without interrupting existing sequences.

A designer's dream you may think! Yes, it certainly is. This is a wonderful new tool. One now has the possibility of sculpting the stage, not just painting it.

However, this added dimension of space and movement needs a little more consideration than conventional lighting, especially if music is involved. It is now possible to expand one's design parameters to such an enormous degree, but this can create a new series of challenges because of the sheer range of the possibilities provided by the system. It's like the Englishman who goes to a Dutch sweetshop wanting liquorice and is faced with the enormous selection of ''drops''. So many temptations. What to choose . . .??

(An un-named lighting designer with liquorice stained teeth and a coat pocket full of ''drops'' has recently been seen in the stalls of an Amsterdam theatre, sitting on the floor, staring at the wall, sucking his thumb and rocking gently, mumbling something about the wonders of modern technology!!)

It should be noted that the use of a Telescan II system is not cheap, but in terms of replacement of, or addition to, conventional lighting units, speed of fitup, spectacle ease of use, they are certainly cost effective.

In my opinion, the Telescan II is one of the most exciting innovations available to lighting designers at the moment. Who of us has not dreamed of having any number of follow spots in any position, focus, colour and size available at the touch of a button?

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