

CONTROL BOARD ALPHABET

Continuing Francis Reid's ABC for 1987



M is for **Memory** which has released operators from beat-the-clock feats of dexterity and drudgery. Dimmer levels are nowadays just one of the many types of information to be handled by a lighting board's **microprocessor** — but level memory is still the most fundamental breakthrough of the newer control technologies.

Electronic shrinkage brought a rash of product names based on 'mini' and 'micro'. The **Mini 2**, combining compact twin preset desks with multiple 6-way dimmer packs, opened new horizons in both low cost and portability. The **Micro 8** on the other hand was born of a somewhat misguided decision to miniaturise the Junior 8. At the other end of the scale, **Multi-Q** was a good American name to convey the end of technological limitation to the number of cues possible in a production.

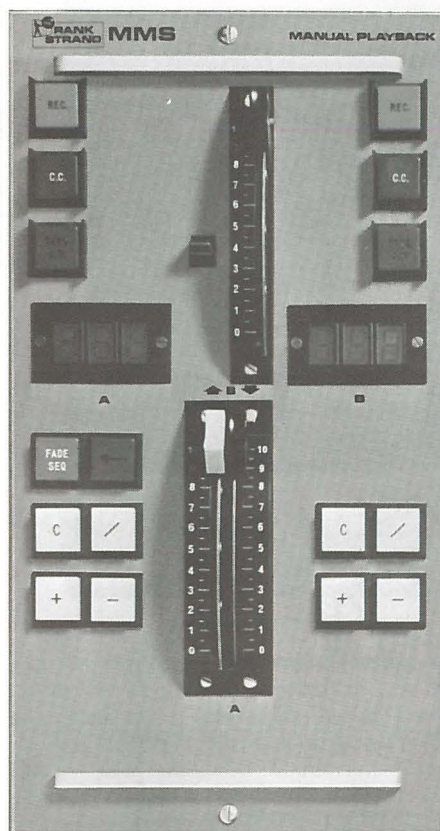


This version of Mini 2 predates the invention of "yuppie"

Multigroup Preset boards combined the channel memory pistons(qv) of electromagnetic light organs with the electronic level presetting of thyristor dimmers. The absence of inertia(qv) reduced their flexibility and the prototypes were overtaken by the arrival of level memory.

Multicore cables provide the standard inter-connection between desk and dimmers, with each channel requiring its own control line. However, digital processing now allows a system's entire data to be transmitted down a single core to the dimmer room.

MMS was the Modular Memory System that enabled most professional theatres to be able to equate their aspirations with their



An MMS Manual playback panel as reproduced in the Strand card game MneMonicS.

budgets. Each desk was assembled from a selection of modules to provide a system customised in terms of size and facilities. Strand's marketing included printing the panel options as playing cards so that desks could be planned by shuffling. The wide range of possible permutations, combined with operators' individuality and consultants' zeal, ensured that there were few cries of 'snap!'.

Early **Mimics** were simple panels whose numerals lit to show live or selected channels, but no system today is without a dynamic display on a video monitor showing the detailed progression of every channel. In the repertoire houses of central Europe with their fixed lighting rigs on bridges, towers and galleries, there is a logic in laying out a mimic geographically. But for theatres with flexible plugging, a simple numerical progression is more appropriate.

The **Mouse** is a means of access that is gaining ground. This familiar tool of

computer graphics, pioneered in theatre by ADB, allows the operator to make the kind of painterly strokes that have more appeal to many lighting artists than button pushing.

Just before the dawn of the micro-processed thyristor, the options (much argued and alcoholed over) were **Magnetic Clutches** or **Magnetic Amplifiers**. The magnetic clutch allowed a mechanical dimmer to be moved remotely, while the magnetic amplifier allowed a choke dimmer to be load independent. Both could be remotely preset but only mag-amp moves were proportional. Siemens(qv) confused the option by using a magnetic clutch in the desk and a magnetic amplifier in the dimmer room.

And lastly but most importantly **M** is for the **Master** — the simple control surface that the operator activates to make the cue happen. At its best the simplest of devices, allowing full concentration on the cue's timing.



N is not for very much. Only **Non-Dims**, the channels which for one reason or another (usually because they are controlling a type of light source or motor that looks unkindly at a dimmer) are only switchable. They are usually independent of the board's mastering system, although located within the main control desk.



O is for the **Operator** without whom no lighting board has anything to offer a live performance. If I may get personal for the only time in this ABC: I would like to confirm that, as a lighting designer, I am not really interested in boards — only in their operators. Given a sensitive and committed operator, the most unpromising boards will perform anything I ask. Even boards with a penchant for amnesia seem to enjoy better health under sympathetic operation.

And **O** is also for the **organ** whose console became the first board to be a playable instrument rather than a technology-based electricity distribution system.