

although on slowish plays, a good operating team could deliver such finesse as a quarter plus or minus.

**SR** was an early solid-state Strand board named from the initials of its **Saturable Reactor** dimmers (see *choke*). It had a single preset and each channel had tablet (qv) switching for grouping to alternative A & B masters. The larger models had a second switch per channel to allow the grouping for instant **snap** cues to be different from that for dimming. But the heavy control currents precluded the addition of a second preset.

**S.P. (Senior Preset)** was the upmarket cousin of J.P. (qv) when Strand brought thyristor presetting to the mass market in the second half of the nineteen sixties. It was available in two or three preset versions, and a set of grouping switches allowed each channel to be routed to alternative masters. Although there were a pair of masters for each preset, the grouping was common to all presets and this considerably reduced the operational flexibility of the system. S.P. was probably the first board to have vertical sliders rather than rotary knobs for masters.



S.P. Desk. (Earlier models had quadrant faders and groupong switches that became known as *flying buttons*)

**Shift** allows a set of control surfaces on a desk to perform more than one function. This is common practice in the design of today's boards. The term and the technique was used in Strand's experimental punch card board of 1969. Was this the first shift?

A **Stalls Control** allows board operation at rehearsal from the production desk position in the auditorium. Although some Light Consoles had a sufficiently long control cable to make this feasible, the first board to be used specifically planned for use in this way (and regularly so used) was probably the Glynbourne(qv) installation of 1964. The design required a lot of multi-core and relays for a facility that now needs but a single wire for data transmission.

The final S is for **Strand** and for **Siemens** who have probably been the twentieth century's most consistently active european names in board design and manufacture.

## REIDing SHELF

Craig Zadan's **SONDHEIM & CO** starts from a baseline assumption that Stephen Sondheim is *the* great genius of the musical. Personally I get more pleasure from Ebb & Kander, but this did nothing to spoil my enjoyment of the book. I love the American Musical and I am fascinated by its creative processes, even if my own work experiences have involved all the complexities of a love-hate relationship. Zadan's book is full of truths about the structure of musicals, mostly in the form of anecdotes and quotes. The basic structure is a show-by-show sequential study of Sondheim's theatrical development, broken up with chapters on such aspects of musical production as orchestration, posters, casting, recordings, staging. . . indeed most aspects except design. An appendix lists major productions and there is a discography.

The Sondheim enigma lies in the box office. Reading this book reveals no logical reason why many of these shows should have failed to become hits. With such concepts and structures, allied to Sondheim's undoubted masterly use of words and his ability to integrate his libretto with a musical text that is never merely decorative, these shows should surely have swept audiences along into a great theatrical experience. Perhaps everything is just a little bit too calculated, a little bit too logical. When I go to a Sondheim musical, I keep dropping into analysis. I find myself admiring the technique when I should have surrendered to it.

I wonder if my reading of this book will change my perception of Sondheim on my next visit to a Sondheim show. The theatre experience is a strange one indeed. And it will doubtless continue to defy logical analysis. It is part of the enigma that *Sondheim & Co* is at its most potent when it reveals detail of the old backstage hokum of trying to get a show on despite all the conflicting advice from those who are convinced they have the answer. Theatre's interplay of power, money, philosophy and old cobblers never fails to make a fascinating read.

Rodney Milnes has revised and updated Leslie Orrey's concise history of **OPERA**. This book has to be one of the best buys for any theatre bookshelf. 252 pages with 253 illustrations, 32 of them in colour, and a text which is accurate, informative, entertaining and balanced. Rarely has a history been so precise and concise. And all for £4.95. Will my enthusiasm never end? No, not while this handy volume offers so many of the key reference illustrations of opera houses, composers, productions and singers.

Stephen Gallup has written **A HISTORY OF THE SALZBURG FESTIVAL** which is rather different from the usual festival biography. This is no mere string together of performers and productions, illustrated with photographs chosen for their implication of success. The book is an analysis of the complexities of finance and politics that always seem to be associated with any attempt to make the arts available. Perhaps this is inevitable when the final product cannot be valued by the same criteria as the costs of its manufacture. The personalities and money may be bigger but Salzburg mirrors anywhere's struggle for the arts. I have made it to the Salzburg Festival a couple of times and I am saving up to go again. Quite simply, my life was renewed there twice by the quality of the Mozart opera. I was intrigued to read how it all happens because of, yet in spite of, people who care.

**DESIGNING DREAMS** is about art at its summit. Contemporary art interacting with contemporary life. Donald Albrecht's book describes how the architectural modernism of the 1920s and 1930s was both promoted through, and stimulated by, film design.

Upward mobility has always been good box office, whether the victorian play, the television soap or the Hollywood musical. The sleekness and spaciousness of the new architecture provided an environment sympathetic to the scale of the screen. In the movies it was sufficiently heightened from reality to enhance the heroic stature of the stars, yet sufficiently credible to hold out a promise of attainability. And the plausibility of the architectural dream was increased by the similarity of the cinema's own architecture.

But if glamour was the most obvious use of modernist design, it was not the only one. The new architecture featured in all styles of film making everywhere, and Albrecht's book looks to Europe as well as to Hollywood in its analysis of the dream and the reality in an era of environmental design. Splendidly illustrated, it fuelled my increasing desire to rush out and save the remains of an architectural style which I reacted against for most of my life and thus helped to destroy. Thank goodness we still have, and can continue to have, those movies.

When the curtain falls, a stage performance can only live on in the memories of the audience, perhaps prompted a little by the frozen images of ephemera. But the very nature of film virtually ensures perpetual repeatability provided the print is properly

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