

ABTT 89

Bursting with innovations

BY DAVID TAYLOR

This year, nestled between the Showlight Colloquium and Exhibition in the Netherlands and the NOTT Expo in Copenhagen, the eleventh ABTT show in London became a time to catch up with all those people you had not seen since yesterday and were about to see again somewhere else tomorrow. The Association of British Theatre Technicians' Show, held at the Riverside Studios in London from 18 - 20 May 1989, is the United Kingdom's chance to see and be seen, and although this year's offering seemed a little more subdued than in previous years, exhibitors displayed an impressive array of new products.

Sixty-three quality exhibitors (plus the 29 firms on a stand devoted exclusively to smaller firms) jostled for premium space at the Hammersmith, proving once again that such an important trade show has really outgrown the confines of that old film studio.

Like years past, the major theme this year was moving lights, with most high volume luminaire manufacturers aiming to get their in-development product into the marketplace to fund further research and development. Strand Lighting was showing its PALS (Precision Automated Lighting System) with its resident dedicated controller pod in a vast Galaxy 3 lighting console. The lone profile luminaire moved sedately, but silently, to its predefined cue positions, putting other manufacturer's equipment to shame.

Great American Market's Joe Tawil sees his LightWiz remote control yoke as aiming for a different market altogether. Along with the ColorWiz rolling colour changer, the GAM equipment fulfills a different niche of the market where affordable and cheerful washes of light are useful for the leisure industry. Strand's low-key stand with only three products was a testimonial to their quiet but diligent approach to the development of

theatre equipment.

Joe Tawil's Access lighting control popped up its cute head on a number of stands — the bank of them on A.C. Lighting's large stand attesting to the fact that here is a truly affordable desk. Crammed with features and with a surprisingly well-organized VDU display, this console is ideal for the small leisure

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venue or school theatre. On Saturday, traditionally schoolboy computer-nerd day, there was a queue behind every one of these friendly consoles as youth after youth realized that Access squeezes grown-up lighting processing power into a book-sized box, and thence into a little credit card for permanent storage. Expect to see these in multiples at a school near you.

True to their policy of supporting an international cast of different luminaires and accessories, A.C. Lighting also showed Strong Supertroopers and Altman Lekos, which are fast becoming the trendy piece of lighting equipment any up-and-coming lighting designer squeezes into his instrument call. Some interesting lighting consoles, including the new Instinct console, were also in evidence from Jands of Australia and a range of Pani scenic projectors completed the truly cosmopolitan range of lighting equipment on offer.

Mike Goldberg of M & M Lighting specializes in creating a British market for the best products from abroad. A new exhibitor this year, Goldberg was showing the Rainbow Colour Scroller from Sweden, currently showing its pedigree in *M. Butterfly* at the Shaftesbury Theatre in

London. I know from experience that getting hold of this product for a show is nigh-on impossible, but Goldberg is bringing more into the UK as fast as he can. Also on the M & M stand was Diffusion — fog in a can — which Goldberg has brought in from California and which offers a cheap, efficient means of getting controllable haze into a theatre or studio atmosphere. This haze hangs around indefinitely due to the "sub-micron sized particles which are actually supported by molecules of air." For most small-scale theatre applications this is a superb product that gives a much easier way to see light beams in the air.

This year saw a number of new smoke and fog machines at the show. A production version of Howard Eaton's famous 'oil-drum' dry ice fog machine was on show on Action Lighting's stand. This massive, but impressive, heavy-duty fog producer utilizes a hot water spray pump to create the vapour, which is then forced into the ducting by a 170 cu.ft./minute fan. Precise fog control is possible via a standard analogue signal from a lighting desk.

Roscolab demonstrated their new fog chiller, a small refrigerator box placed between the conventional fluid-based fog machine and the outlet pipe. Conventional or carbon-dioxide ice is used to cool the smoke vapour on its route to the stage, giving a low-lying fog similar to that produced in more expensive and difficult to operate dry-ice-only machines.

Dry ice in the theatre has always been a nuisance due to acquisition and storage problems, but A & B Theatre Services have directly addressed the problem with their portable dry-ice making machine, winner of this year's ABTT Product of the Year. In 60 seconds this fiendishly simple wooden device will produce a 800 gram block of dry ice from a conventional CO₂ cylinder. The system is safe, easy to