

A NEW BREED OF SCROLLERS IS DEVELOPED FOR MISS SAIGON

BY DAVID I. TAYLOR

One of the side effects of the high-design, big-budget West End musical, apart from the warm feeling that British theatre is back on its feet, is that inventions and leaps in equipment technology can take place in a research and development environment that is adequately funded, and, above all, market led.

Miss Saigon offered the potential for this year's big push in equipment development, and in the field of lighting, the gauntlet was taken up by Mike Goldberg of M & M Lighting. Goldberg created two superb new products for David Hersey's *Miss Saigon* lighting rig.

Goldberg was approached by Hersey, who was very impressed with M & M's Rainbow Scroller in use on many shows around Britain (including the high-density *M. Butterfly*) and its popularity, despite only being launched in 1988. Goldberg was presented with the task of producing a wide colour change unit for Hersey's design that utilized Rainbow scroller technology but that fitted Hersey's backlight

It means an end to lighting designers using the dimmer curve for colour control on their single gel light curtains.

workhorse, the Thomas Light Curtain.

Goldberg developed the Light Curtain Scroller -- a 1.8m wide colour change unit which allows remote controlled colour selection of one of 11 user-selected gels. The unit will move to any of the colours at random according to its control signal in less than 1.5 seconds, and is completely silent when in use.

Says Goldberg, "The brief was very

concise. Hersey was impressed with the conventional Rainbow scroller (there are 40 standard Rainbows in the production as well) and wanted similar parameters for colour selection on his famous light curtains." The Rainbow system is manufactured by Camelont AB in Sweden. Goldberg maintains strong bi-directional communications with the Swedes allowing for a very smooth and productive development of the new product from conception to installation — essential on a Hersey production where such complex units are only a small part of an even more complex lighting scheme.

There are 20 Light Curtain Scrollers in the rig for *Miss Saigon*. They allow for precisely controlled broad washes of top light and linear backlight in strong and pastel shades. It means an end to lighting designers using the dimmer curve for colour control on their single gel light curtains and offers a cheaper, simpler, and less dense in-road to the European school of epic illumination, where vast colour washes are spread over the stage and keyed into with white accent light.

Control of the conventional scrollers and the new light curtain scrollers is by DMX512 digital protocol signals interfaced via an Arri Connexion unit to the Vari*Lite console that controls all the effect elements of the show. The ease with which M & M's equipment can be linked together, to other Rainbow equipment, and to other lighting technology is a major reason for its respect within the market today.

Hersey's light curtains also tilt by remote control so that the same band of instruments can be a high front light at one moment and a low-angle backlight at the next. There are four cross-stage bands of five instruments each, and since the Rainbow scrollers can be loaded with any

gel, the addition of diffusion media will permit a certain amount of beam angle control in addition to the tilt and intensity manipulation. Thus Hersey can concentrate on his precise accent lights whilst the bulk of the stage picture is accurately covered by the light curtains with colour scrollers.

However M & M Lighting also had the answer for Hersey's requirements for accent lighting with their new Follow Spot Scroller, developed for *Miss Saigon* to a similarly tight schedule. Hersey, who championed the low-voltage beam light as a soft followspot in the United Kingdom,

M & M Lighting also had the answer for Hersey's requirements for accent lighting with their new Follow Spot Scroller.

has often been cursed by his operators who have had to fumble with the heavy, noisy, and awkward colour frames during an in-show colour change. Goldberg's answer to the line operator's nightmare is a seven colour scroller with a local controller for the operator to select colour and change the speed of cue (necessary for control of noise in the very quietest moments).

The followspots are yoke-mounted Reich and Vogel Beam projectors using the 1kw mirror-capped lamps. The scrollers are a slightly larger modified version of the conventional Rainbow Colour Scroller. "The system works like a dream," says Goldberg. "We will have the system with eleven colours later, but the units at present are light years on from the user-unfriendly frames normally found on Reich & Vogel's."