

AVAB's Aurora Borealis

LOOKING AHEAD TO 1992

BY DANA DUBBS

It was a sound level indicator of all things — the Hög Ljudnivå — that introduced AVAB, the Swedish lighting company, to the world in 1971. "AVAB was the market leader for sound equalizers in the early to mid-70s" says current AVAB partner Hans Lau. "Because health organizations in Sweden are very concerned with sound, we made the Hög Ljudnivå, which cuts the power off if the decibel level gets too high. It was very popular among clubs."

But by the late 1970s, AVAB's focus had shifted to lighting. The company felt the field was more interesting than sound, and that it held more market opportunities. Today, sound products comprise less than five per cent of the company's total line.

Today, AVAB is a company worth 125 million Swedish kroners (UK £35 million; US \$20 million), according to Lau, turning out such advanced products as computer-controlled lightboards, digital and analog dimmers, theatrical luminaires with high-precision optics, and rigging control systems. It owns four subsidiaries who are collectively known as the AVAB Group; operates four factories in Sweden, West Germany, and the United States; employs more than 200 people worldwide; and has a dealer network that spans Scandinavia and more than 30 other Western European nations, North America, and Australia.

In anticipation of 1992, AVAB is

looking far beyond its borders. It's current goal — globalization of its products. Under its new grand plan, AVAB will offer the same hardware version of a product in all countries, but that product will incorporate a user interface that can be easily adjusted to meet local needs. The move should make the company's products more accessible to users everywhere, while also improving AVAB's market effectiveness and operational efficiency. The company's first step in this direction is its Expert lightboard, introduced at USITT 1989, Calgary.

Among the manufacturer's strongest markets are the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark. In those nations, AVAB competes with Strand, Lee Colortran, and ADB and has a 50% of market share for theatrical lighting controls among city and regional theatres. West Germany and France are also among AVAB's strongest markets for its total product line. AVAB chiefly competes with Strand in West Germany and with ADB and Strand in France.

Of the company's six partners, three founded AVAB. President and founder Kent Flood is a former computer engineer and former owner of the touring company Teater Fem. He gained notoriety as the technical brain behind Tältprojektet, the touring theatre movement which performed in a circus tent throughout Sweden in the late 1960s.

Starting AVAB with Flood were vice-president and financial director Torsten Palm, a former structural engineer, and Ralph Dahlberg, the company's marketing director and a former filmmaker.

Partner Lau joined AVAB in 1979 with a Master's Degree in Business Administration from Bedriftsøkonomisk Institutt in Oslo. He ran the firm's operations in Norway for 10 years before becoming president of AVAB America Inc. Anders

Customer relations go beyond technical advice and product service. The firm typically contacts professionals during the initial phases of R & D.

Ekvall, director of research and development, joined the firm in 1986 with a background in software and hardware engineering. New York lighting designer Samuel Scripps became a partner in the early 1980s.

AVAB imports components from around the world, but the firm develops and makes all its products in its own facilities. Research and manufacturing responsibilities are shared by AVAB's headquarters in Gothenburg, on Sweden's west coast, and a location in Uppsala. AVAB