

In a country only one-tenth the size of the United States, Italy boasts over 7,000 dance clubs — 16% of the 35,000 discotheques in Europe. Fifty per cent of these are larger than 7,500 square feet, each accommodating 600 - 700 people. There are more than 600 Italian companies which contribute to the disco industry, employing 10,000 people, with an annual turnover of L2.58 billion (UK £1.25 billion; US \$2 billion). In 1988 alone yearly club returns amounted to L1.29 billion (UK £625 million; US \$1 billion). So when members of APIAD (Association of Italian Discos and Theatre Equipment Manufacturers) took to the podium at the annual Lighting Dimensions International Trade Show held in Nashville, Tennessee last November to talk about club design, people listened. Among the speakers were Dr. Mauro Malfatti, deputy general manager of the Rimini Trade Fair Corporation, Nicola R. Ticozzi, president of APIAD, Silvestro Lolli, club architect, Franco Bertini, owner of Studio Due, a manufacturer of lighting and effects, Marco Bornigia, owner of the Piper disco in Rome, Daniele Canuti, president of FLY, a manufacturer of mixers and lighting effects, and Paolo Sandoni, owner of the Vertigo Club in Bologna. The following are excerpts from that seminar.

Made in Italy

TRENDS IN DISCO TECHNOLOGY

BY NICOLA R. TICOZZI

Everybody knows the importance of Italian production of shoes, clothes and food, but few know that our country successfully exports discotheque and theatre equipment all over the world. APIAD-affiliated companies export 35% of their production, mainly to Germany, England, France, the US, and the Far East. Thanks mainly to lighting engineering, there is something Italian in the most famous discos the world over. All our equipment is appreciated for its originality, design and technical reliability, along with a competitive quality-to-price ratio.

Italian discos can rightfully be considered among the best in the world. A special survey by *Sole 24 Ore*, an Italian daily newspaper, observed that discotheques have a very short life — every four years they are completely renovated. Every year new products and equipment are introduced. This means quite a large investment if we consider that an average expense is from L129 to 387 million (UK £62,580 - 187,740; US \$100,000 - 300,000).

Let me summarize the latest technological trends in Italian discotheque industry. Discos do not stop at dancing any longer. They have become multi-functional houses of entertainment.

Lighting is the most lively sector rich with innovations — light has become the disco world's most important effect. Special lighting effects were created when concentrated lamps were applied to revolving machines. This unit has undergone advanced and complex developments, using special optics and increasing directions of rotation. Nowadays with the help of electronics, the lamp itself moves inside the unit to create colored flashes and light beams. Metal iodide lamps are becoming more and more popular for their greater brightness compared to halogen lamps. Memorized scanner systems for live shows are in great

demand, as well as modular motorized projectors, controlled electronically.

Regulators — Compact disco mixers supplied with leakproof protection enables DJs a wider freedom thanks to their memorized programs. Direction desks have become more and more refined and use computers to increase storage capabilities. Regulators are expected to control motorized projector systems, color changers and special effects.

Sound — Diffusors are becoming more and more compact, while maintaining the highest efficiency, thanks to sophisticated subwoofers. Reproduction quality is preferred to high wattage.

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Mixers make use of faders and micro-processors and enable an easy intervention of the programs in process. The latest turntables are reaching the Italian market to compete with the legendary Technics SL0200. We also use special electronic equipment to grant synchronized operation and limiters, with flashing and sound-signaling of sound level in the venue.

Other interests of great interest are lasers, colored optic fibers, smoke and fog machines producing an artificial "shallow" smoke. Dance floor ceilings come to life with the use of special elevators, positioning the light effect units while unveiling theatre rigging.

Teleprojectors with gigantic screens as well as satellite-receiving antennas are quite popular besides special effects generators, transforming video systems to a scenographical tool.