

M.P.S.

FPB/PA:

14th February, 1962.

Mr. Thomas Porter,
Royal Adelphi Theatre,
Strand,
LONDON W.C.2.

Re: New Lighting Console.

Dear Mr. Porter,

Mr. Bear has passed me your letter dated February 5th for reply. In so replying I have most carefully weighed on the one hand the discussions with your Mr. Wilson who has obviously brought a lot of thought to the matter and on the other the need to launch this thing as quickly as possible with the minimum technical trouble. In doing this I have reminded myself that whenever there is a doubt one way or the other one must say that this particular switchboard is being installed for the new production 'BLITZ'; nothing we do should jeopardise this for after all were it not for this production Mr. Rylton would not in fact be buying a new switchboard for this theatre. He would retain the present Light Console.

In a case like this one is in rather a different position to that at the usual theatre where in fact some quite obsolete system is replaced by a new preset system. At the Adelphi you have at the moment, a switchboard which is quite capable of carrying out certain forms of lighting very well indeed. Indeed probably better than any other system. The particular form of lighting I have in mind is that of the type which one encounters at the London Palladium, the variety revue type. What we are in fact substituting is a switchboard which will carry out lighting of a kind usually referred to as 'straight'. This lighting involves the setting of large numbers of dimmer levels and this requirement which nowadays exists even in musicals is the one that an operator finds terribly difficult to fulfil on the Light Console.

The new switchboard will carry out all such preset lighting rapidly and efficiently because this is what it is designed to do. Not unnaturally, however, it will not carry out the older type of lighting so effectively as the switchboard designed to do that, i.e. your present Light Console.

Assuming, as one must, that one designs this control to suit the style of lighting thought to be likely to be encountered in 'BLITZ' then there arises the question of how far one can nevertheless incorporate certain compromises to enable the system to function in the same way as the switchboard it replaces. And this is where Mr. Wilson's requirements come in. Unfortunately these requirements fall foul of the System CD, as the new Preset control is called. It may be asked, how do we know this? The

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answer is that the first CD controls at the Palace Theatre and afterwards were designed to ape to a very large extent the Light Console which they were superseding and as each installation has developed since, we have found it more and more necessary to remove the traces of Light Console and to concentrate on solving the problem of a preset board. The system of fixed masters and colouring of keys, which is absolutely vital to the Light Console has been one of the things we have discovered that it is essential to get rid of and the Adelphi provides no exception to this. The backbone of the new control is in fact flexible grouping which can be arranged to suit the requirements of the particular moments in any production. Hence, we are providing 20 memories instead of just 7 as you have at present.

Not only does the light of experience after making some 60 system CD's insist on what we propose, but the technical requirement of producing something in a hurry, also endorses it. We must keep our cables in sequence and use as much existing wiring as we possibly can. To do this we have to take the same stopkey order as on the present Light Console which is spread over 3½ rows and spread this sequentially over 6 rows. The choice of 6 rows is governed by the inability to get the equipment into the room any other way. By making it 6 rows we can in fact get units, narrow enough yet not too tall for operational comfort, to be able to fit the room.

As lighting layouts for productions have become bigger and so different from each other: (Lanterns even where grouped seldom however, if ever, finding themselves corresponding to any existing group of outlets in the theatre). The sequential control number originally engraved as an adjunct for testing has become the only sensible reference throughout. Thus your controls will now bear this number in bold and any other detail will be relegated as auxiliary and indeed ~~on~~ a brand new installation would not appear since nowadays no form of permanent layout is envisaged for the typical West End theatre. These things are not a case of "Strand knows best" but arise from an inquest among a number of users (lighting designers and operators) after the Royalty installation had failed to meet the challenge of its first production.

We are able to make two concessions which we hope will go a long way towards fulfilling Mr. Wilson's requirements for shows other than 'BLITZ' or rather for shows lit in the older Palladium manner. The first of these is that we shall continue to number the stopkeys from the bottom left upwards instead of from the top left downwards, row by row, as is present day practice. Seeing that the room imposes a quite different appearance on the desk from that encountered at, say the Strand or the Aldwych theatres to quote but two, there seems no particular danger in this. Though it is curious that in fact the reversal to numbering top downwards was adopted at the express requirements of the users already referred to above. The second and more important concession we are able to make is to provide while wiring so that we can ultimately incorporate the four master group tabs identified by the colours green, white, red and amber.

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Mr. Thomas Porter, Royal Adelphi Theatre.

This provision will not be effective in respect to the lighting layout for 'BLITZ' seeing that some of the Front of House lighting will consist of dimmers borrowed from behind the tabs, noticeably certain dips. We shall therefore wire the couplers to the dimmers specially for 'BLITZ'. But once this production leaves, we can, with little difficulty bring back the Compton groupings on the existing relay and transfer the wiring on the dimmer couplers to correspond. Obviously it is undesirable to do this at this stage because the fact that the Compton grouping (which must be left undisturbed) and the dimmer coupler groupings were different would set the most dreadful traps.

We have put this work in hand now as there is literally no time at all to spare and the various cables and the order of them has had to be determined immediately. In conclusion I would like you to believe that we are planning this system after very careful consideration and feel convinced that not only is it essential for the impending production, but that it will, in any case, provide the theatre with a better service than can be got out of the present Light Console. It will not perform the same services but taking into account the change in lighting techniques in the time since the Console was first invented there is no doubt that the new control is the one for today. The writer says this with conviction, although the switchboard thereby condemned, the Light Console, is his own cherished invention and still his favourite switchboard. But one must remember it was invented in 1935 even though it was installed in the Adelphi until some seven years ago, and lighting has changed beyond recognition since those days. It is fortunate that we are able to use so much of the old Light Console mechanism, which has been splendidly maintained in excellent condition in your theatre to form the basis of this new type of pre-set desk. It is literally the change in lighting technique which is dictating the change at the control console end.

I am sorry at the extreme length of this letter but have felt that the whole matter merited consideration at length.

Yours faithfully,
for and on behalf of
THE STRAND ELECTRIC & ENGINEERING CO., LTD.

F.P. BENTHAM.
Director.