

Technical Data

Cycloramas

The Cyclorama can be defined as follows:—

A vertical surface finished matt white which is used to form a background to a theatre type set. It helps to give depth to a scene and can be constructed of solid material as a permanent fixture or supplied as a removable cloth.

NOTE: When tinted blue, it is commonly referred to as a sky cloth.

Cycloramas vary considerably, from the large wrap-round type used on the opera stage to the lightweight cloth used in a Village Hall. However, they are all required to have one basic common factor: A SMOOTH MATT WHITE SURFACE which will allow good even reflection of all lighting effects. Alternative finishes to the cloth will not give true colour reflection, the degree of reflection depending on the background colour chosen. Blue is a popular colour and should be used only if the cloth is designed for sky effects. The Blue pigment in the paint enhances the blue light used to illuminate the cyclorama, compensating to some degree the lack of blue in the spectrum range of the normal tungsten filament lamp. Lit by any other colour however, reflection from the cloth will be poor or non-existent. (See Notes on Colour.)

In a multi-purpose area or end stage it is often possible to use a rear wall as a cyclorama provided this has a flat plaster surface, free from obstructions such as radiators, pipes, windows, clocks etc. Here liaison with Architects and Planners in the early design stages will avoid these obstructions which unfortunately arise all too often after completion.

Where the cyclorama is made from scenic canvas care should be taken to ensure all seaming is horizontal to minimise shadow. The cloth should be weighted to remove creases and initially the canvas should be treated with a flat emulsion paint to fill up the pores in the cloth and provide a smooth surface. Canvas is available in varying widths to suit stage applications. There are alternative materials which can be considered, although these serve a dual purpose and are more applicable to television situations, so in general scenic canvas is preferred.

Where stage areas lack depth the cyclorama should be kept flat and allowed to run parallel to the rear wall. Curved ends tend to restrict entrances at the rear and reduce acting space. Considerable thought should always be given to the introduction of a curved cloth as this presents problems from the lighting viewpoint; spotlights are not always the same distance from the cloth so patchiness at the sides can occur if sufficient care is not taken.

Removable cyclorama cloths can be supplied in two forms—

- (a) Roller type.
- (b) Barrel with raising and lowering gear.

The former consists of a top barrel to which the cloth is attached by means of tie tapes and a bottom roller some 9–12" in diameter. A system of pulleys is provided attached to the top barrel to enable the bottom roller to be revolved and so roll up the cloth when the appropriate hauling rope is pulled. The equipment tends to be heavy in operation due to the weight of the bottom roller, and there is some sag on the sides of the cloth as it is not possible to seam the edges. Any seaming would cause difficulties in rolling. The system is somewhat awkward in operation and should only be considered for the larger stage.

Method (b) is a less expensive arrangement, comprising a cloth webbed at the heading with tie tapes, which is secured to a support barrel provided with pulleys and rope for raising and lowering. A second barrel is inserted in the bottom hem of the cloth so when suspended it will hang taut. To remove the cloth the top barrel is lowered, the cloth rolled by hand and taken away, the barrels are tied together and raised to clear the stage. Alternatively for low ceiling heights or where a permanently fixed cloth is required the pulleys can be dispensed with and the top barrel merely clipped to overhead supports. There is an added advantage in this method as both sides of the cloth can be used, one being treated as a true cyclorama and the reverse side perhaps being used for a painted scene.

For arena and television work cloths can be supported from tracks and arranged to draw to one side in sections; bottom tubes are provided to weight the cloth when in position.

On very large installations more complex arrangements of the above ideas can be used involving hoists or counterweighted tubular frames on which the cloth is stretched tightly to ensure a smooth wrinkle-free surface.

Cinema screens do not make good cyclorama cloths as the reflective requirements for cinema work are entirely different and to obtain the best results two entirely separate cloths should always be considered.

From a light viewpoint care should be taken to ensure a smooth even "wash" of light across the cloth, and positioning of lighting equipment must be carefully related to general masking to avoid shadows caused by masking borders or splashes from other light fittings, due to poor cut-off. Therefore planning and sight lines should always be taken into consideration when cyclorama cloths are to be installed.