

Lighting & Sound international

April 2009

entertainment, presentation, communication

www.lsonline.co.uk



The Public

The West Bromwich venue that's divided opinion



On Tour: Metallica

L&SI with World Magnetic



Mary Poppins

L&SI visits the UK tour



Technical Focus

City Theatrical's SHoW DMX

PLUS: All set for PLASA Focus, Leeds; ISCEX 2009 in Review
Lost & Found Orchestra; Clay Paky's Spectacular Classic
Studio Festi at Galeries Lafayette; Audio File; Wilkes Iris

L&SI has gone digital! Register online FREE at www.lsonline.co.uk/digital

Classic Gear: Strand Lightboard

Rob Halliday takes a nostalgic but instructive look back at the tools that have shaped the industry . . .

In 1975, computerised lighting control reached Broadway - but *Chorus Line*'s LS-8 console could only hold half the show at a time. By contrast in the UK, a console appeared that would control up to a thousand dimmers and had integrated control for moving lights, colour changers and more . . .

This remarkable product was Lightboard. Born out of Britain's National Theatre, a project in which Theatre Projects dramatically advanced the state of the art in technical production, it was designed by Richard Pilbrow and his TP team and engineered by Martin Moore and his team at Strand Lighting, determined to re-claim a leadership challenged by Thorn's Q-File.

As the building's consultant, Pilbrow wanted a practical tool to deal with a never-ending rep that would leave little enough time to re-focus lights, let alone having to re-plug and re-patch. The National would have none of that, with enough dimmers (768 in the bigger theatre) to keep everything permanently plugged, and a rig that included Fresnels with automated pan, tilt and zoom in inaccessible areas. Lightboard could run it all, its monitors showing all channels or only active ones to reduce distracting clutter.

As a lighting designer, Pilbrow also wanted - and got - a tool with which an artist could create lighting quickly and fluidly, with powerful cue timing options. Operators were encouraged to work 'heads-up', using a numeric keypad to select channels, groups or whole cues then assign levels while looking at the stage. Manual control was with the level wheel Strand had introduced (and patented) some years earlier on their MMS console. But Lightboard had more than one wheel: the 'palette' module had four (later six) more, to which channels, groups or cues could be assigned and then mixed together to form whole new looks. The wheel assignments could even be recalled later when further editing was required.

Better still: the lighting designer could be hands-on involved. A second palette could be positioned with the lighting designer in the auditorium. Operator or designer could assign things to the palette wheels, then the designer could mix their own cues, literally painting with light. 'Total Lighting Control' was the pre-production name the National's staff knew Lightboard by. That is certainly what it provided.

Two Lightboards were installed at the National, more elsewhere; inadequate ventilation and



The Strand Lightboard at the National's Lyttelton Theatre. Peter Radmore is at the controls. (photo: courtesy Richard Pilbrow)

uneven electrical supplies caused some early unreliability, but the consoles gave a decade's worth of good service before supporting the DEC mini-computers they were built from became problematic. Strand had taken much of what they learnt into Galaxy (and the 'palette' name into an entirely separate product in the US) but, as still seems to be typical, the new product didn't have all of the functionality of the old, lacking tools for controlling the National's moving lights (the National's staff engineered their own!).

There are always lessons to be learnt from the classics. Designers who used it still lament the loss of that stalls palette and the ability to mix their own cues. Who will be the first to offer a contemporary equivalent?

Lightboard at the Strand Archive:

>>> www.strandarchive.co.uk/control/c_memory/lightboard/lightboard.html



SHoW DMX™ is the most advanced and reliable wireless DMX ever!

High Data Fidelity. City Theatrical's award winning SHoW DMX (Synchronized Hopping of Wireless DMX) utilizes a patent pending radio that synchronizes the radio's hopping pattern with the incoming DMX packet to ensure the highest levels of data fidelity ever seen in wireless DMX.

Plays Well with Others. Many venues and shows today utilize multiple wireless broadcast systems in the 2.4GHz band. Strong frequency hopping wireless DMX systems can overwhelm weaker WiFi signals. CTI's SHoW DMX system utilizes a range of user selectable options that allow it to peacefully coexist with WiFi.

And We Have the Data to Prove It! For a full copy of our lab report visit www.citytheatrical.com/labreport.htm



CITY THEATRICAL
USA 201 549 1160 • UK +44 (0) 20 8949 5051
www.citytheatrical.com