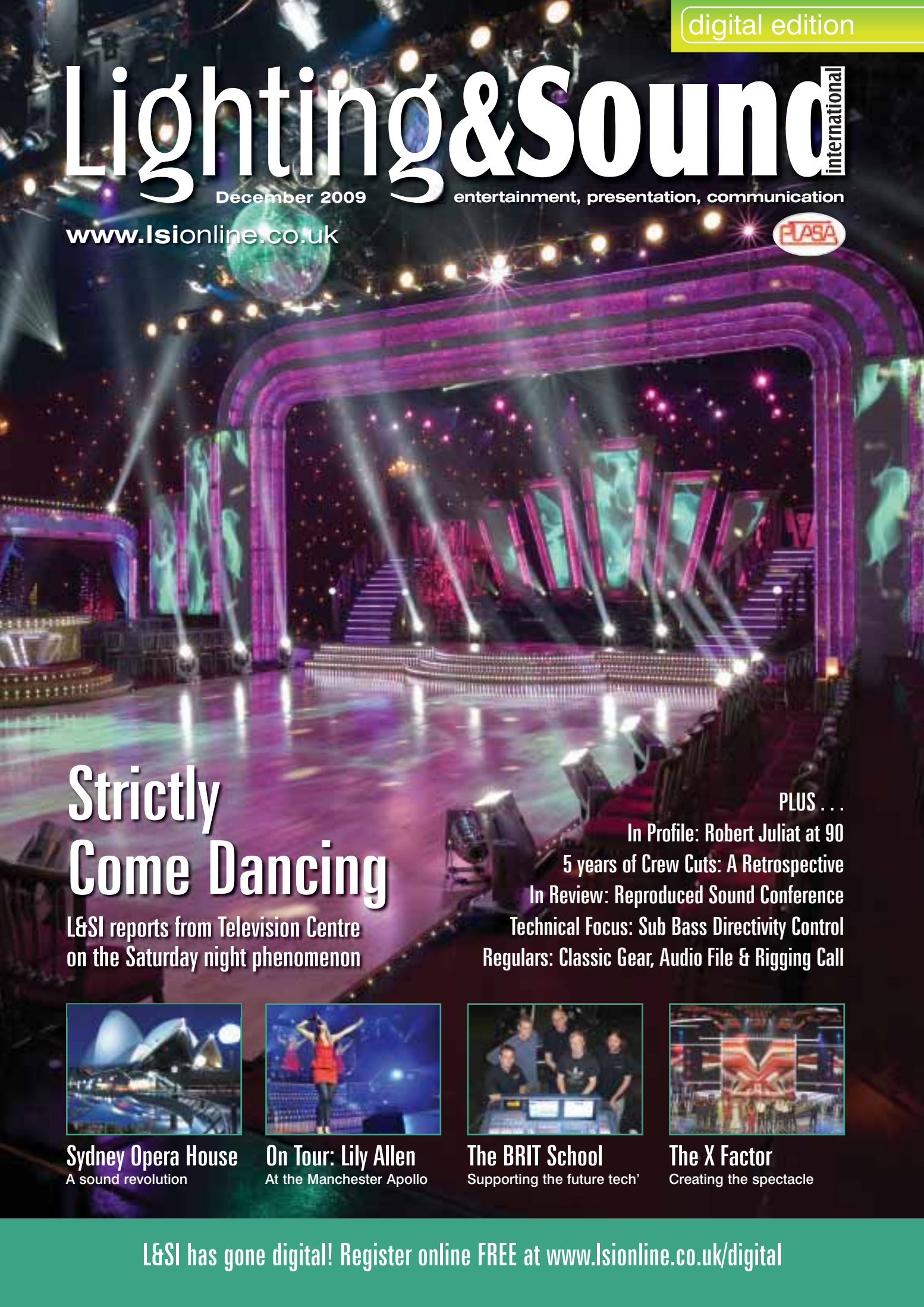


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Classic Gear: The Super Trouper

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

There are many items of lighting gear that can be called classics. But there's probably only one that has been immortalised in a chart-topping pop song. That item would be the Super Trouper followspot.

Strong, the Super Trouper's manufacturer, didn't start out in the entertainment lighting business - Harry H Strong started the company in 1926 to sell the products he'd designed to automatically manage the arc gap in carbon arc cinema projectors. Over the years the company's reputation for high output, reliable products spread, so that people beyond cinema turned to it for help: in 1948 the ice show industry asked for a lightweight, high-output spotlight that would be easy to tour - or 'troupe' - with their travelling shows. Strong took the AC arc lamp used for 16mm film and slide projectors, and added a lens mechanism to make the Trouper followspot; the Trouperette, using a 1kW incandescent lamp, followed. Both were mere rehearsals for a spotlight that would be the brightest in the world on its 1956 debut: the Super Trouper.

In its original form, the Super Trouper built on Strong's experience with carbon arc lamps: designed for arenas, stadia and the largest theatres and auditoria, the unit's high output

gave a brilliant, white light that quickly found favour with star performers, while pleasing the electricians with its ability to run from a standard 110V outlet.

The biggest evolution in the Super Trouper's history came with the switch from carbon arc to xenon as the light source. The first xenon units, introduced in 1971, were capable of giving a 100 footcandle spot at a throw of 350 feet, while allowing the operator to concentrate fully on the stage rather than worrying about maintaining the arc. The xenon unit ran alongside the original arc unit for a decade, the arc Trouper eventually discontinued in 1981, just a year after the spotlight's name hit the general public's imagination.

That leap came courtesy of the Swedish super-group ABBA, who used 'Super Trouper' as the title of both a new song and the album that contained it. It is perhaps surprising that a band who were never particularly prolific or enthusiastic live performers should focus on a piece of live performance equipment - though they had been touring the year before, which is perhaps where they heard the name.

While ABBA disbanded soon after that song's success, the Super Trouper continues to this day, continuing to evolve as technology allows



A Xenon Super Trouper long-throw followspot - one of the later incarnations of the famous name . . .

(the original reflectors, electroformed nickel with a rhodium plating, now replaced with reflectors with dichroic coatings; the power supplies updated). Most recently, Strong have launched the Super Trouper III, updating the lamp to a 3kW lamp for an even higher output.

One unfortunate irony? When ABBA's music returned, in the smash hit musical *Mamma Mia!* which does contain the spot's namesake song, the chosen followspots were not Super Trouper . . .

The Super Trouper: [//tinyurl.com/yg6ro1t](http://tinyurl.com/yg6ro1t)

History of Strong: [//tinyurl.com/ygvnclk](http://tinyurl.com/ygvnclk)

Full Lyrics: [//tinyurl.com/dh1cb](http://tinyurl.com/dh1cb)



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