

Lighting & Sound international

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The Police

L&SI reports from Seattle Key Arena

Glastonbury: The Truth

L&SI wipes away the mud from the summer's sound controversy

Technical Focus:

An in-depth look at Robe's ColorWash 700E AT & TF's Touring Power Amplifier update

Greenwich: The Final Frontier

How the Royal Observatory's new visitor attraction is wowing audiences and critics alike

PLASA07 Preview

The first instalment of preview info for this year's PLASA Show . . .

On Tour: The Police

We report from Seattle as the band's long-awaited reunion tour kicks off in the US

Plus . . .

Patrick Woodroffe, Giles Woodhead, Kevin Sleep, Lightfair NYC, PALME Dubai, ABTT London & more



Classic Gear: The Strand 530 lighting desk

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

This one is personal. Think of it as an obituary for a good friend, a farewell to a trusted tool that's served me, and many others, well for more than a decade: Strand's 500-series lighting console.

Making its first appearances in 1994, the prototype took its name - Q-DOS - from its internals, standard IBM PC architecture plus MS-DOS operating system. By launch, things had a more BMW-esque flavour: 430 (486 processor, 30 submasters), 530 (Pentium processor, 30 submasters), 550 (Pentium, 50 - actually 54 - submasters). The aim was for this one range to replace everything from M24 to Galaxy, with the price governed by the number of channels the desk could control and other optional features unlocked by registration codes. There were cries of horror as users of the older consoles discovered their particular favourite feature was missing.

But many hadn't grasped that the console was now software-based; just install a new release and your console gained new (or re-gained old!) functionality. Over time, this brought better moving light support (16-bit attributes, preset focus groups), networking (using Shownet, a protocol compatible with the TCP/IP internet standard), multi-user and multi-console operation with full partitioned channel and cue playback control, the return of old favourites such as automod, an ever-increasing control capacity up to 6000 channels, a 'magic update' command for quickly updating focuses in a show, utilities for getting show data out into other programs and many, many other functions in response to user suggestions. It was friendly. It crashed very rarely. Mess up a cue? Load just that cue back from disk.

In time, the range expanded and evolved: a new case with better quality keys, faster 'i'-series consoles for the biggest shows, the smaller 520, the baby 300s. The result was perhaps the most democratic console range ever: they all used the same software. They worked in the same way. They all read and wrote the same showfiles, talked to each other (and to your laptop) over the network. Learn one, you knew them all. They ran shows in venues from schools to the biggest rep houses and musicals, even the Olympics. For the first time ever, it was possible to set out on tour around Britain with just a disc of your show, confident that you'd be able to load it into the 500-series of whatever theatres you were visiting.

And now, they're gone. Strand was bought by Genlyte, Genlyte stopped development on the 500's software and its successor in favour of re-badging the Horizon range they already owned and attempting to make it a bit more Strand-like. The resulting new Palette range is interesting - but many people would still rather

program on a 500, because they know it, because they trust it, because it's proven, because it's versatile, because it's fast.

The 500s will be missed; in the short term, thank heavens for rental companies!

The final software release for the 500-series consoles, and other support documents, are still available at:

>>> www.strandlighting.com



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