

# Lighting & Sound international

September 2006

entertainment, presentation, communication

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## LOVE at The Mirage

Cirque du Soleil's latest spectacular



## Guns n Roses On Tour

The long-awaited touring production from the bad-boy rockers

## Technical Focus: The VL500

Vari-Lite's 80V VL500 luminaire in-depth; PAVA: equipment, requirements and more

## PLASA'06 in Preview

More expected highlights at PLASA'06

## Courtyard Drama

L&SI visits the RSC's new temporary theatre

## Tony Gottelier remembered

Friends and colleagues pay tribute

## PLUS!

- PRG Europe - then, now and tomorrow
- Education: Northbrook College & Deep Blue Sound
- Euro Festivals: Benicassim, Montreux, Vienne
- Designing for the British Motor Show
- Canegreen's Pete Hughes in Profile
- Massive Attack on tour

# Classic Gear: The Revox B77 reel-to-reel tape recorder

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

It might be a technical theatre exam question: "New technology has affected sound more than other backstage areas, discuss". The short answer: the stage crew are still loading counterweights, 20-year old lights still have uses, but when was the last time you saw sound effects played from a Revox?

It's amazing how quickly a skill can vanish: sound editing now means ProTools, but until relatively recently it meant dragging open-reel tape across a playback head, marking your spot with a Chinagraph pencil, cutting the tape and splicing it to the next piece of tape. For many, the tool of choice for that work was the Revox B77.

Introduced in 1979, the B77 1/4" half-track open-reel analogue tape recorder replaced the 12-year-old A77, adding logic control for more precise playback operation as well as auto-stop between tracks via an infra-red detector that sensed clear leader tape. Edit mode activated the playback amplifiers and changed the function of the wind buttons, making them respond only when held and so allowing quick searches for an edit point; final, precise positioning could then be performed manually for edit-point markup, with the tape then being moved to the B77's built-in edit block for cutting and splicing (the analogue version of cut-and-paste, perhaps?).

Low- and high-speed models were offered, running at 3.75/7.5ips or 7.5/15ips (inches per second, for those too young to remember); the later Mk2 version added +/-10% speed control. Playback was by three AC asynchronous motors with servo electronics to ensure speed stability



The B77 from Studer-Revox.

regardless of variations in load or electrical supply, and the B77 featured die-cast components for the motor chassis, pinch roller arm and other key components and all-metal record and playback heads; Swiss engineering in the finest sense, hugely reliable and, most importantly, offering great sound quality. 'Real to reel' as the advertising material put it when showing the B77 recording a live session.

If you worked in sound and didn't have a B77, you probably aspired to one. Studer Revox produced over 50 variations on the B77 over the model's life to ensure that there was a version to suit everyone's

needs. It was the workhorse in most theatres and for most theatre sound designers.

Then suddenly, it was gone - killed by the range of reasonably-priced samplers offered by Akai and then by the ever-increasing audio capabilities and storage capacities of desktop computers. There was a handover period, when the expense of memory meant that the Revox was still used for the long effects, with the samplers providing precision for spot moments. And there were some hairy moments when the new-fangled samplers crashed and the Revox saved the day. Now they live on only in the hands of collectors, audiophiles looking for high quality replay of analogue tape.

See the 'Real to Reel' ad:

>>> [www.reeltoreel.de/Revox/Anzeige14.htm](http://www.reeltoreel.de/Revox/Anzeige14.htm)

Visit Revox today:

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