

THE CONTRIBUTION OF LIGHTING

The overriding priority just has to be **visibility**. Having decided what we want the audience to see, we must ensure that they see clearly and without strain – if in any doubt, up half a point in brightness!

But this can be a **selective visibility** concentrating the audience attention on chosen parts of the stage action.

The lighting can contribute to the **atmosphere** of a scene. In a naturalistic play this can mean a light quality that conveys the season of the year, the time of the day and the state of the weather. Or it can be emotional messages from colour tonings of cool sadness to warm happiness. Or perhaps the menace of contrasts between light and shade.

Light should always **enhance** the look of a production, helping to reveal the form, colour and texture of all components of the stage picture whether scenic elements or actors.

And Lighting's contribution can be totally **fluid** – particularly in terms of *selectivity* and *atmosphere* – whether by sudden dramatic contrasts or subtle subconscious shifts of emphasis.

LIGHTING THE ACTOR

Perhaps the most fundamental problem in lighting an actor is that the most selective light (and the one throwing minimum shadow behind the actor) is the one that shines vertically down. Yet this does not reach the actor's eyes and teeth (Fig 1).

To enable the actor's face to be seen, light must come from a position to the front of the actor (Fig 2).

So when considering the size and shape of stage areas to be lit, it is important to remember that we are referring to light at the actor's face level – and that this does not normally correspond with the lit area of stage floor.

Thus an actor may stand within a pool of light on the stage floor yet his face will miss the light (Fig 3).

Or indeed the actor may stand outside that pool of light while his face is fully lit (Fig 4).

So we must think in section, as well as in plan!

Fig 1

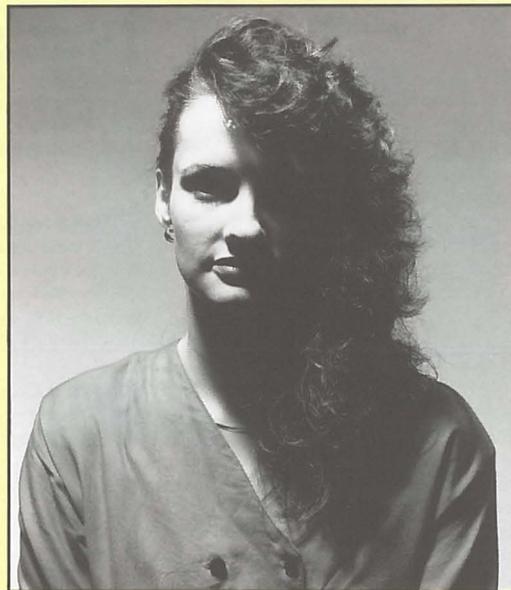


Fig 2

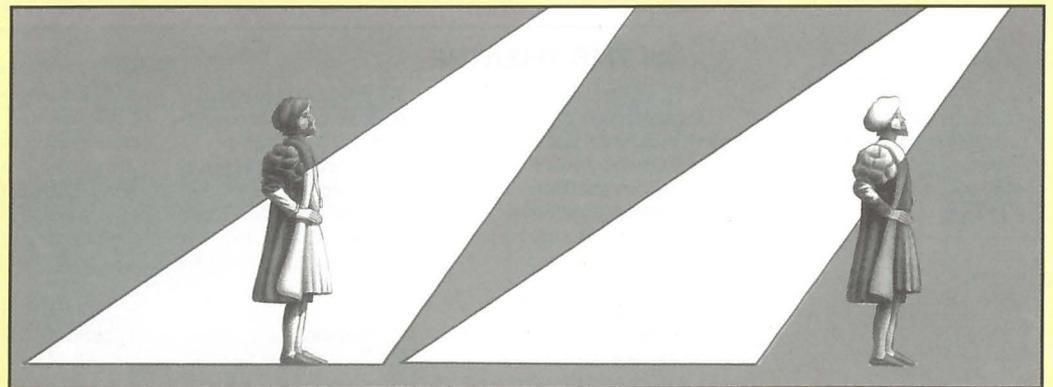
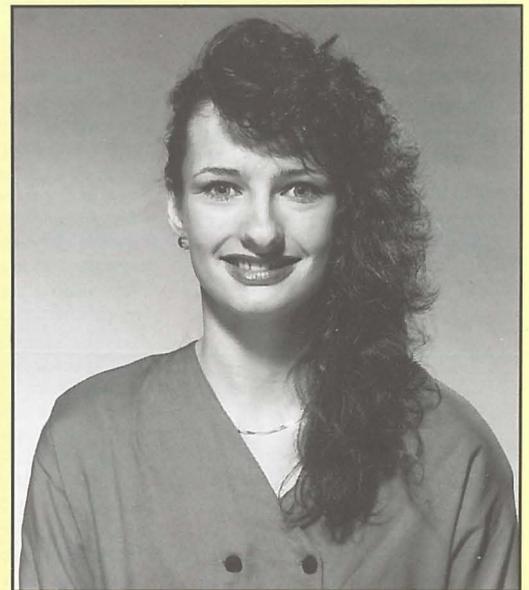


Fig 3

Fig 4

SOME PITFALLS

Concentrating on a few moments of special effects at the expense of general lighting for the whole evening ... dividing the stage into too many tightly defined areas for the amount of available equipment ... failing to overlap areas, upstage and downstage in addition to left and right ... choosing

colours, especially in a musical, that do not give a sufficiently contrasty palette ... placing too much faith in logic and realism rather than theatricality ... focusing with beam edges that are too hard and therefore too noticeable ... being too ambitious for the time available to rig, focus, plot and rehearse.