

*In recent weeks the entertainment world has mourned the loss of the legendary Marlene Dietrich. Here we look at the strange coincidence that has linked the lighting scenes in the*

# Blue Angel

## BLUE ANGEL KEEPS SPIRIT OF DIETRICH ALIVE

**I**n one of those curious coincidences peculiar to theatre, on the very day that the legendary Marlene Dietrich died – May 9 – she was about to be thrust into the limelight again in at least two major European cities.

But the loss to the world of show business was an unplanned publicity coup for the Royal Shakespeare Company's touring production of *The Blue Angel*, which opened for a limited run at London's Globe Theatre in May. This was the story which in film form launched Dietrich's career as an international star in 1930. It features the song for ever associated with Dietrich, 'Falling In Love Again'.

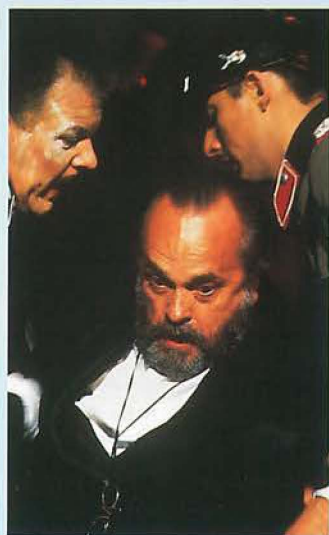
The stage version of *The Blue Angel* also happened to be playing Dietrich's 'home' town (at least before she emigrated to the USA) of Berlin. And the link between the London version of the musical play and the United States is British lighting designer Chris Parry – currently resident teacher of Lighting Design at the University of California, San Diego.

Chris is no stranger to the Royal Shakespeare Company. For 13 years, until 1988, he was attached to the RSC. Over the years he has become renowned both sides of the Atlantic for his lighting designs. In 1987, for example, he won the New York Drama Desk Award and was nominated for a Tony Award for the RSC's Broadway production of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*. He has since gone on to win further awards in California.

The new production of *The Blue Angel* arrived in

London's West End following an extensive British circuit which has taken in The Other Place theatre, Stratford-upon-Avon and such unlikely venues as sports halls and gymnasiums. Chris was invited back from California in April last year to design lighting for the show, and admits he was much influenced by director Trevor Nunn's use of space for the bizarre set.

The play is set in Berlin in the 1920's. It charts the fall from grace of a respected University professor who falls



Philip Madoc as Professor Raat.

in love with cabaret singer Lola – the part originally played by Marlene Dietrich – which in this production is played by the stunning Kelly Hunter. In designing the



Kelly Hunter in the RSC's *The Blue Angel*.

lighting, Chris admits he intended to achieve a strong colour effect reminiscent of the inter-war German impressionist painters, such as Otto Dix and George Grosz.

Surveying the lighting rig, Chris observed, 'There's not a Par Can in sight!' And thereby hangs a tale of the differences between lighting on either side of the Atlantic.

He explained, 'I am a great fan of the fresnel. If I want a colour wash I can either use one fresnel or four parcans, but I don't like joining together a series of lamps to make one area of light. I like the quality of light from a fresnel. I like the smoothness of colour and the single shadow you get.'

On *The Blue Angel* he has used two 2000W fresnels to backlight the whole set. But he says, 'That is one thing I find about working in the United States – lighting designers there tend to use a lot more lights joined together to make a single wash. I have trouble convincing them that it is not always necessary!'

*The Blue Angel* set – partly as a result of its travelling history – is divided into a series of angular spaces, with acting shifting from one area to another – 'very filmic', as Chris says. There were also a number of 'practicals' to be taken into account – street lights and lights behind windows, for example. The show's band has also been incorporated into the stage set, although only three of the six musicians can be accommodated on the small stage.

Principal effects are achieved by 19 colour scrollers, to which Chris paid particular attention, since the nature of the show means that live colour changes are necessary.

Luminaires include a number of old Strand Patt 243's ('The best lamp Strand ever made'), some of which have strategically-placed 'black-wrap' to prevent light spill distracting the audience from the action on stage. The rig also includes Strand Patt 743's, plus 1200W Cantatas, one of which is rigged for a window gobo.