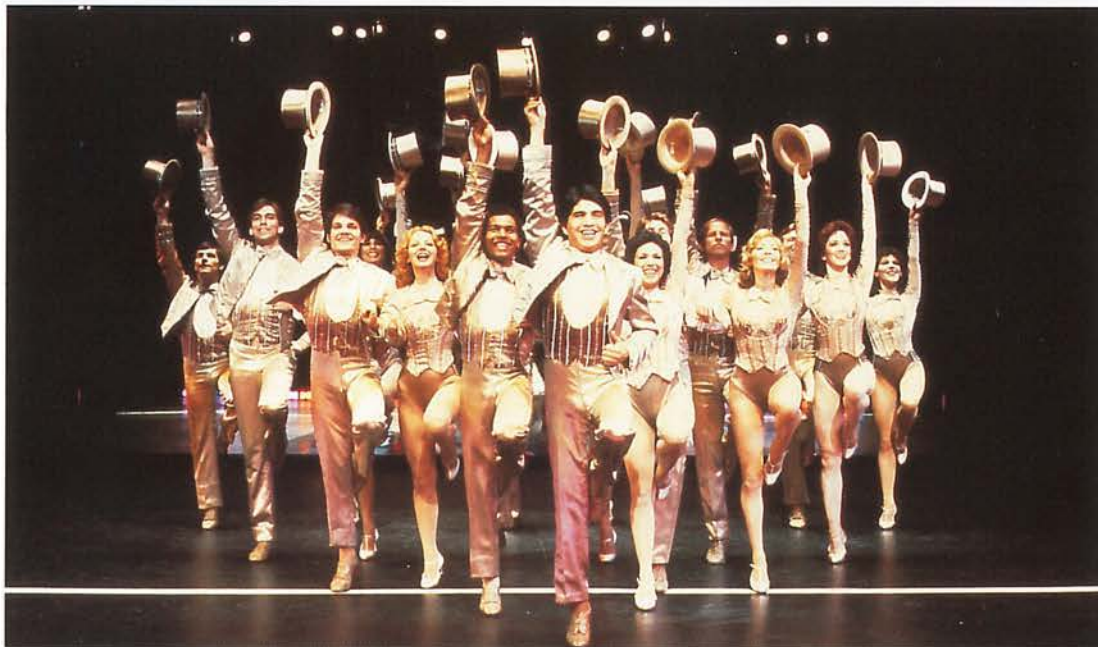


Lights! Interviews the man behind Broadway's best-known lighting rental company....

"BREAK A LEG"



The show that changed our industry: *A Chorus Line*

Photograph by Colin Levy for Asylum Productions

Francis P. DeVerna is a respected member of the New York Theatrical industry. Known to his friends as Frank, he is one of the third generation of a family to work in the "business". His father was a stage carpenter for Broadway plays and CBS Television, and his grandfather was a property builder for the Metropolitan Opera.

Frank, a native New Yorker, began his career, while still in school, working at the Ziegfeld Theater on the production *Showboat*. In the 1960's, he was president of the Local No 1, I.A.T.S.E (New York City stagehand's union) and now heads a hire company, Four Star Lighting Inc., which for the past quarter century has provided lighting for the vast majority of Broadway plays.

When Frank joined Four Star there were three partners. One of whom was Peter Feller, a legend in the New York theatrical industry. In fact, The League of American Theaters and Producers awarded Mr. Feller a special Antoinette Perry Award (Tony) for his many contributions. Frank said, 'I learned a great deal from Peter, and he is still a good friend.'

In 1971, there was an amicable buy-out of the other partners, and since then, Frank

has been Four Star's President. He believes that industry confidence in Four Star is due in large part to the highly trained and experienced staff that it employs. He stated: 'We are in a service industry. I like to think that our success is due to the fact that over the years we have supplied lighting designers and producers with equipment and special effects that they wanted, and stayed within the budget for their shows.'

Frank said that there is great camaraderie in the New York Theater. He explained, 'There is such a personal involvement and commitment to the business that whatever the show, you are right there rooting for it on the first night. It does not matter which company provided the lighting, you want the show to succeed because it is good for the Theatre and you care about all the people who worked so hard to put the show on.'

One of my biggest thrills was the design of *A Chorus Line*, which changed our industry. Before that show, we were using resistance boards to control the lighting. Tharon Musser, the lighting designer of *A Chorus Line*, designed its lighting to include a computerized control system - and Broadway took a great leap forward. 'Since then, Frank has witnessed the general acceptance

of the Strand Lightpalette as the industry control system.

Frank went on to say: 'In recent years, I believe that the imported British musicals helped to stimulate our industry. The cost of putting them, any musical, on is high, and it takes a long time to put such a project together. But the rewards are high and long term if you have a successful show.'

To an outsider, Four Star's biggest problem would seem to be one of maintaining a sufficient stock inventory to keep all the static and touring shows well serviced. In addition to static shows on Broadway, the company may be hiring out (by the week) complete lighting and control systems for a show which may go on tour around North America for up to three years.

So how much stock does Four Star own? Frank raised his eyes heavenward. 'Don't ask! It runs into many millions of dollars. With some of the items - lighting control systems, for example - the investment is enormous.' Similarly, so much cable is needed that Frank would not be in the least surprised if Four Star owned enough cable to encircle the Globe.

In theory, the stock is housed in Four Star's plants in Mount Vernon, New York and Los

Angeles, California. However, in practice - and much to Frank's undoubted relief - the bulk of it is on hire and earning its living either on Broadway or on tour.

The success of major musicals on Broadway, with many shows later going out on extended interstate tours, has been good news not only for Four Star but also for Strand Lighting. The "partnership" between the two dates back to Four Star's early days, when Strand traded as Century Lighting. The result is that where Four Star are providing lighting for a show, it is generally with a Strand control system. Dedication to service has developed a bond between these two companies.

Apparently, Four Star has earned the respect of the industry. Many of the great lighting designers have used its services. To name a few (in alphabetical order): Martin Aronstein, Ken Billington, Andy Bridge, Pat Collins, Peggy Eisenhower, Jules Fisher, Gilbert Hemsley, David Hersey, Allen Lee Hughes, Neil Peter Jampolis, Natasha Katz, Tharon Musser, Richard Nelson, Dennis Parichy, Richard Pilbrow, Marilyn Rennege and Jennefer Tipton.



Frank said, 'I have great admiration for the innovation of lighting designers. We are always learning from them.' Working closely with such professionals means that Frank and his staff must keep constantly abreast of developments in the industry's technology. But as Frank admits, 'I have learned much by osmosis. By sitting in on meetings and asking questions, you increase your knowledge. Particularly since 1976 when it became necessary to understand the operation of a computer board. Now, while not all of us could repair a board, at least we understand it.'

Strand Lighting has made the job easier. Their products are excellent, and so is the back-up that we receive from the company.' ★