

LIGHTING THE NATIONAL

Next time the stress of lighting appears to be controlling your life, consider the daily problems faced by someone like Peter Radmore, technical manager for lighting and sound at the National Theatre.

From his nerve-centre within the South Bank complex (where some staff who have been there a couple of years have still not fathomed out the maze of corridors, rooms and doorways) he supervises an administrator's nightmare.

The National comprises three separate theatres — the Olivier, seating 1200 people; the Lyttelton, seating 900; and the Cottesloe seating 300. The basis of working is a three-show repertory in each theatre, with occasional interruptions for longer runs.

To manage the lighting for the three theatres and the frequent changes of production and lighting, Peter has a team of 17 people, plus an additional

eight for sound. On the lighting side, eight staff are attached to the Olivier, six to the Lyttelton and three to the Cottesloe, although manning levels for particular performances are below this, to take holidays and days off into account. The various productions can be lit either by one of the in-house staff, or by freelance designers hired-in for the occasion.

The entire lighting operation is dictated by the National's 'bible' — the Rep Leaflet. This gives a spread-sheet view of what is happening (and where), over a six-week period in the National's life. A glance at this will tell the technical staff what they are expected to provide in any area of the theatre complex on any given hour of the day. However, to reach its final version, the Rep Leaflet can go through as many as 45 separate drafts, following close liaison and numerous meetings with all sections of the administration and production staff.

Peter explained, 'It probably sounds more complicated than it is. The fact is we have a pattern of work here which has been operating well over the years and we have the system down to a fine art. This is a matter of necessity. We are in a very expensive business and if we didn't get it right the costs and inconvenience would be enormous.'

He has been with the National since the 'Old Vic' days, joining in 1965 and working up through the ranks as an electrician and then manager.

With the move into the South Bank complex, Richard Pilbrow, through his company Theatre Projects Consultants, introduced the Strand-developed Lightboard for the lighting.

And as Peter Radmore says, 'This was one hell of an innovation at the time. We happened to be the guinea pigs.'

'Over the years we have had an extremely good service from everyone at Strand. About two years ago we had a good deal of trouble with the Lightboard. It had reached the end of its useful life. When the Lightboard was beginning to play up, we did buy two Galaxy back-up systems, which we still have.'

'When we considered replacing the Lightboard, it became obvious, after exhaustive appraisal of available systems, that the Galaxy 2 Premier and the Gemini system, for the Cottesloe, fulfilled both the immediate and the long-term technical and artistic requirements for the Royal National Theatre.'

When the company moved from the 'Old Vic', a fair amount of Strand equipment came with them and since then the bulk of new lighting equipment has been bought-in from Strand.

Maintaining such a large operation also involves considerable training for lighting staff joining the National, but as Peter says, 'Generally we find that if they stay for two years, they will be here a lifetime.'



■ Peter Radmore. 'Exhaustive research' led the National to select Galaxy systems.

LIGHTING FOR THE NATIONAL:

Olivier: Four auditorium bridges and four stalactites used for both auditorium and stage lighting; three lighting slots and three ladders on side walls; follow spots and projection at rear of upper tier; on stage — one row of short lighting boists with height settings and fed electrically from windlasses in grid and a triple back-lighting bar in the form of a bridge at fly floor height between the prosc. walls; 666 circuits with 2.5kW and 5kW dimmers and 70 non-dimmers controlled from Galaxy 2 Premier.

Lyttelton: Five auditorium bridges, two sidewall slots, circle front lighting positions. Follow spots and projection at rear of circle. On stage adjustable prosc. lighting bridges and towers, five stage lighting bars, five adjustable side ladders on each side; 450 circuits with 2.5kW and 5kW dimmers, and 60 non-dimmers controlled by Galaxy 2.

Cottesloe: Lighting positions on central bridges, on tier fronts and over the end stage areas. 180 dimmers, controlled by a Strand Gemini.