

London's New Theatre Museum

Early Strand Equipment Featured in the Capital's Latest Cultural Collection

In the beginning all is well. One enters the new Theatre Museum, the recently opened branch of the Victoria and Albert at the corner of Wellington Street and Russell Street in Covent Garden, and immediately encounters the giant gilded angel which for so many years adorned the Gaiety Theatre that stood in the Aldwych. One buys ones ticket at a delightful box office translated from the Duke of York's Theatre, and provided one lifts ones eyes above the cafe servery there is a nicely cleaned up Strand Grand Master, complete with its working light 'Strand Electric and Engineering' translucent name panel. A few 23's and 243's are clipped to the perch rail. We, dear Reader, know that perch boards are now a true rarity, but this is a museum and we are looking at the past.

We then go down a long zig-zag ramp that takes us to the below ground galleries and the lecture theatre. This ramp is very well, and rather theatrically lit, using a row of GLS lamps at about one foot centres. But this is the last good lighting level the visitor will see. I suppose from the start one has to appreciate that the Museum concentrates on costume and scenery design, plus some ephemera and some paintings. Our interest - that is technical theatre - is covered only by the lighting already mentioned and a couple of early sound effect machines. For example, the whole great era of eighteenth and nineteenth century stage equipment is virtually ignored. The world of creativity of the modern lighting designer is also totally absent except in a few National photos. But perhaps this is all considered too modern for a museum.

The main quarrel I have with the subterranean galleries is that one can hardly see what is in the various full height



The Covent Garden Theatre Museum.

display cases which line the gallery. Ones first impression is of a shopping arcade on a Sunday morning, so low are the light levels. I imagine this is the deadly hand of the arch conservationist who fears that adequate light levels will destroy the exhibits. Surely it would have been possible to have a preset button for the interested viewer to push to provide a better light-level for, say, a minute, leaving the maintained lighting at its non fading low level? Perhaps a theatre lighting manufacturer could have been asked.

There is a very nicely done 'Foyer' where the paintings are displayed. This really does come off. A beverage in ones hand and a crowd of fellow enthusiasts would make this space seem truly theatrical. It even overcame a damp day, the editor alone in his glory and absolutely no beverage in sight. But, again, there are none of those delightful brass picture lights, and one does have to peer so to make out the likenesses of various Victorian thespians.

Some years ago an advertisement in "The Times" personal columns ran: "Wanted - Loud Secondhand Gramophone for Reprisals". I thought about this as the Mussak in the galleries and even in the Gentlemen's Convenience, discoursed non stop 'My Fair Lady' and similar airs. Perhaps the music could be limited to this latter location, where incidently, even the wall tiles depict scenes from Shakespeare. I stood briefly before King Lear, while Hamlet supported a paper towel holder and Lady Macbeth, most appropriately, provided a fixing for the liquid soap dispenser.

There is a lecture theatre in the modern manner, somewhat misleadingly called "The Theatre" and every hour there is a well

done audio visual show depicting how the Bristol Old Vic went about putting together their 1982 production of Pinero's 'The Magistrate'. This covers not only the work of the actors, but also that of the theatre and production staff of whom an audience is usually and properly unaware. At least here the Lighting Designer's work is shown, as is an MMS, so Strand gets another look in.

The 'voice over' is that of Mr. Donald Sinden. A very good choice, as in spite of his frequent and popular television appearance he still somehow remains in the public's mind as a 'theatre actor'.

It is fortunate that the lecture theatre is given over to electronics, as it would not be at all an easy spot to lecture in - but perhaps



The Angel from the roof of the old Gaiety Theatre.

there are no plans for any talks. If so this is a great pity, as any good museum likes, ideally, to be a research library and a forum as well as a collection. (The library aspect is covered in a building in a different part of London).

To sum up. If one has a general theatre interest then obviously the official theatre museum in the world's greatest theatre town must be visited. But even if one is a narrow technician then, to quote Michelin the Theatre Museum is at least "worth a detour".



The Box Office from the Duke of York's Theatre.



The Foyer Gallery.



The ground floor Cafe.



Strand grand Master and Vintage lanterns in the Museum Cafe.



Even the loo tiling is Shakespearian!

New U.S. Marketing Appointments



Steve A. Norman, Marketing Specialist

Steve Norman has joined Strand Lighting North America as a Marketing Specialist and Management Trainee. Steve recently graduated with a Masters of Business Administration degree from the University of Michigan's Graduate School of Business Administration. Prior to that, he attended Michigan State University where he received his BA in Design and Directing.

Steve has worked as a production manager and lighting designer for The Joffrey Ballet Center's Concert Dancers plus regional theatres. His first lighting design and training during his high school years was with Strand Lighting's Micro-Q lighting console.

Also working as a computer consultant for UNISYS during graduate school, Steve is eager to combine his experiences in marketing, computers and theatre to further Strand's position as a worldwide leader.

Jim Holladay has become the new Product Manager - Automated Fixtures for Strand Lighting North America. He has relocated from New York City, where he was Electronics Manager for See Factor Industries, Inc., a production rental house.

Since Strand's Automated Fixtures first became available over a year ago, he has been involved in their development and implementation.

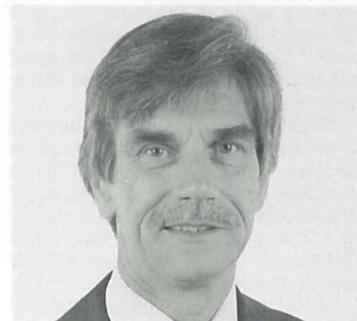
As Electronics Manager, he designed and constructed custom dimming racks to facilitate the fast paced rock and roll touring business. He was also responsible for the system design of the concert sound reinforcement system, capable of doing large venues.

Jim also toured with several acts as crew chief, master electrician, and to field test custom made equipment for specific bands.

He is now interested in applying his experience to the development of automated fixtures, a product whose potential is only now being fully realised.



James Holladay, Product Manager, Automated Fixtures.



Brian J. Hartley, Production Manager Luminaires.

Brian Hartley has joined Strand Lighting North America as Product Manager - Luminaires. He was formerly the Equipment Sales Manager for a Strand Lighting dealer in Burbank, California.

He has been dealing with the Quartz-color fixtures since first using them at Edward's Air Force Base, California during the first night landing of a NASA space shuttle.

Brian, a former Promotion Manager in the British newspaper industry, emigrated to the USA from Portsmouth during July 1976. He entered the motion picture industry at MGM Studios as a lighting technician and worked on a variety of productions for film and television.

As a lighting "Best Boy" he worked on the television series "Barnaby Jones", "Rockford Files" as well as motion pictures including "Semi-Tough", "Who'll Stop the Rain" (Dog Soldiers), "Being There" and "Herbie Goes Bananas".

Brian, who has made his home in Glendale, California looks forward to his new career - and helping to further sales of all Strand Luminaires.



Left to right - Juanita Sabell, Paul Carter, Jeanne Washington, Yao-Fu Huang, Donna Appleton, Peter Rogers, Chris Mentis, Jean Crawley, Marilyn Macdonald, Nick Giannopoulos.

Calling Canadian Readers!

Are you an amateur lighting lady in Aklavik, or possibly a studio electrician in Avalon? According to the Editorial atlas ("Great Britain and her Dominions and Lands

Across the Seas", Published in 1901 for 5/6d) you are resident in either the top left or bottom right corners of your great country. In either case I am sure you will not often visit our staff in Mississauga, so by means of Strandlight they are visiting you on the occasion of their summer picnic.

Peeping over the Gongman flag I see an Alfa Romeo umbrella. Presumably a Quartzcolor flag was not around, so our staff obviously devised this alternative graceful tribute to Italian design and engineering.