

# A Theatre For All Seasons

The lights have gone up again on one of Britain's finest theatres, The Theatre Royal in Newcastle, following restoration work costing more than £8 million.

As the principal touring theatre of the North, The Theatre Royal has played host to many major companies, including Scottish Opera and Ballet, and is the Royal Shakespeare Company's base during its annual tour of the North East.

In 1985, 151 years after the theatre was built, it closed for refurbishment which has mirrored architect Frank Matcham's 1901 designs. Working from Matcham's original drawings, designer Clare Ferraby has restored the Edwardian colour scheme of dark and pale greens, red, pink and gilt which once highlighted the plasterwork on tier fronts, ceilings and the proscenium arch.

Lighting, of course, became a key feature of the restoration, both for stage and architectural considerations, with Scottish company Northern Light acting as consultants and suppliers for the lighting control system, and installation of lighting being undertaken by Strand.

The control system is a Galaxy 2 Premier with two theatre playback panels, a programmable effects panel and the standard group masters, pre-set masters and channel control panels.

A designer's remote control facility has five infra-red pickup points, two in the auditorium at gallery level, two on the rear of the proscenium arch at fly floor level and one in the prompt corner allowing for a portable receiver downstage centre.

Altogether there are 325 dimmers — 29 × 20A and 296 × 10A. This includes the theatre's original STM dimmers which were re-used to reduce overall costs. There are also 48 independent circuits controlled through the Galaxy.

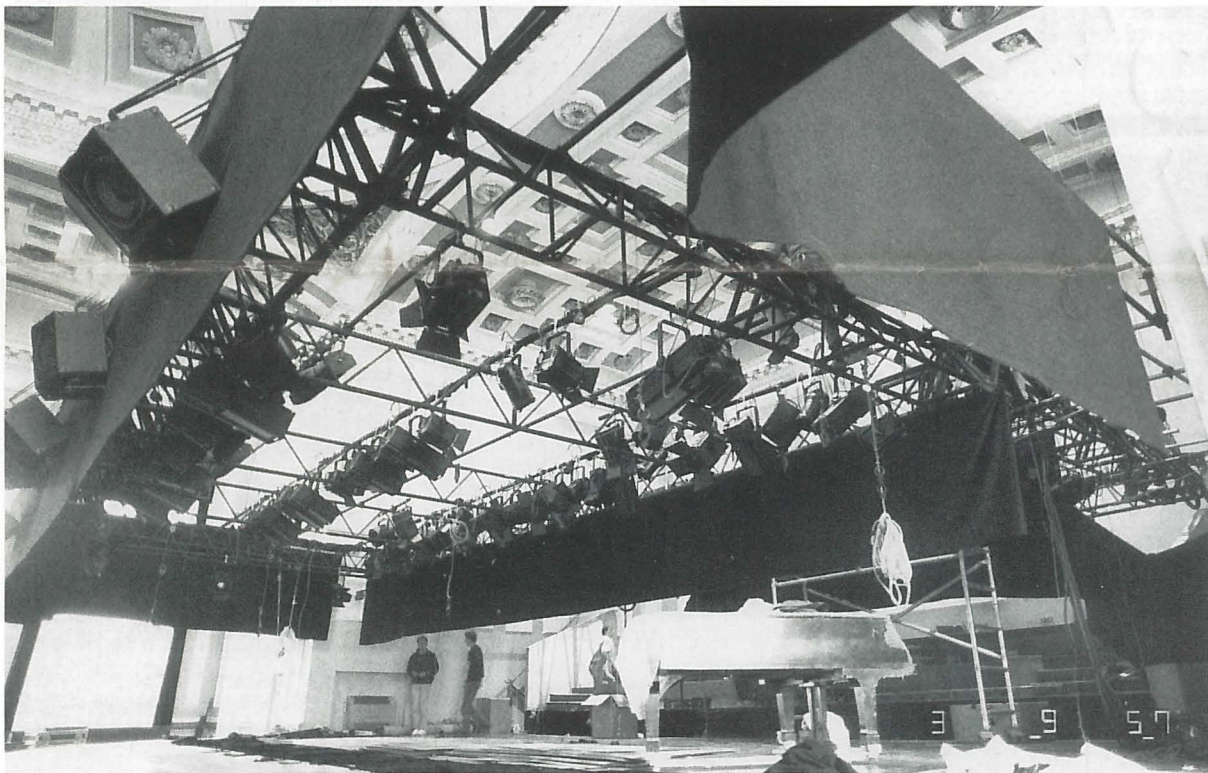
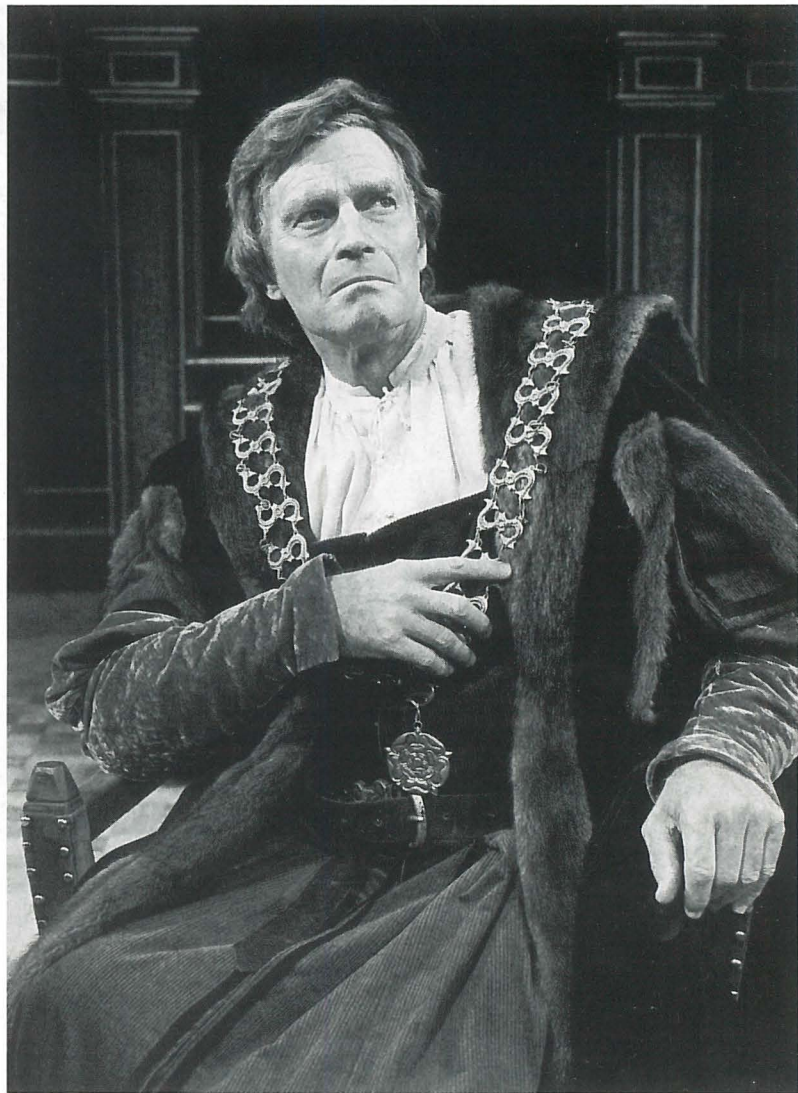
Circuit distribution allows for 100 circuits FOH, 123 circuits at fly floor level and a further 72 across stage level, perches and orchestra pit. The prompt side fly floor has 16 of the FOH circuits, and a further 30 are available for use on both the prompt side fly floor and FOH. These are there to supply equipment on a temporary FOH bridge, which the RSC often has installed. The RSC also frequently uses a tem-

porary forestage, so permanent FOH positions have to allow for steep-rigged lanterns.

Lighting positions at grand and upper circle are removable and the only permanent positions are the gallery front and ceiling. An adaptable front gallery lighting position has been created by removing the former front row of seats and installing a double support bar at the back of the gallery frontage. By doing this, lanterns can be rigged in any position by adding a support tube or a 90° overhang bracket, as necessary.

In the prompt corner, a working lighting control panel has been installed to give the stage manager complete control over performance and fit-up lighting. The system has been designed around a programme controller which provides the logic control for the output contactors from the outstations around the stage area, and the stage manager's control panel.

The Theatre Royal re-opened with 'A Man For All Seasons', starring Charlton Heston in the role of Sir Thomas More. (pictured right)



## The Fringe Benefits from Strand

by Hugh Vanstone

In 1981 The Assembly Rooms in Edinburgh were taken over for the festival period by a company called Assembly Theatre when the venue faced being empty after the 'Festival Club' moved out.

Over the past seven years it has been transformed into a remarkable theatrical centre, and is now regarded as the place to perform during the fringe festival.

Every summer, Assembly Theatre builds five temporary theatre spaces within the Assembly Rooms building. Performance slots in these theatres are then allocated to various companies both from the UK and around the World, by the artistic director of Assembly who is responsible for the overall programme.

This year approximately 60 companies played over 600 performances in three weeks. (The equivalent of one performance a day in a theatre for more than one year and eight months).

The operation of converting the building

into five theatre spaces takes 2600 man hours over just four days. Five articulated lorry loads of equipment are used to build the temporary theatres, which contain: ● 1177 temporary seats ● a mile of scaffolding ● 1500 scaffold fittings ● 500 feet of trussing ● four miles of adhesive tape ● eight miles of electrical cable ● 600 lanterns and ● 280 ways of dimmer.

During the festival there is a full time technical staff of 26, including an electric department of five. To remove the whole, after the festival takes 1400 man hours over just two days.

In 1987 the substantial lighting hire con-



tract was put out to tender, and was eventually won by a main Strand dealer, Stage Electrics of Exeter. Due to the quality of their equipment and high level of service, they were awarded the contract again in 1988. Over the last two years they have supplied the complete lighting rigs, almost exclusively consisting of Strand lanterns and control systems.

The task of supplying the rig is not as easy as it sounds, as the specification can change substantially right up to the closing of the truck doors as lighting designers from 60 companies decide to change a Prelude for a Cantata or add a couple of Coda floods.

The sophisticated computer controlled hire system now in operation at Stage Electrics alleviates some of the problems associated with these last minute changes. It is possible to check instantly the availability and location of equipment at the touch of a few buttons. It is even possible to tell if a few additional items will overload the lorry as the total consignment weight is shown on the hire contract.

It will be possible in future years to loan the Assembly a computer terminal to link with the main processor so that their own staff can make instant amendments to the hire contract themselves, and improve efficiency of the operation.

Taking a tour around the building, the first theatre likely to be discovered is the Supper Room, as it is used as a cafe and bar during the day. In the evening it converts to a 150 seat cabaret venue with an end stage and, lighting wise, a Tempus control system with Prelude lanterns.

The busiest theatre is the Wildman Room, a thrust stage surrounded by 120 seats, with seven performances a day, the first starting at midday, the last at midnight. A 24-way Tempus 2G control with Preludes and Cudas comprise the lighting rig.

The Profile lanterns are lifted to their high stirrup position to avoid reducing the already limited headroom under the grid which is flown beneath a suspended ceiling. As the turn round time is so short (30 minutes) there is a rig of Prelude F's to provide general coverage and each shows 'specials' are also permanently focussed and plugged on the grid, and then patched in at the racks for each company as required.

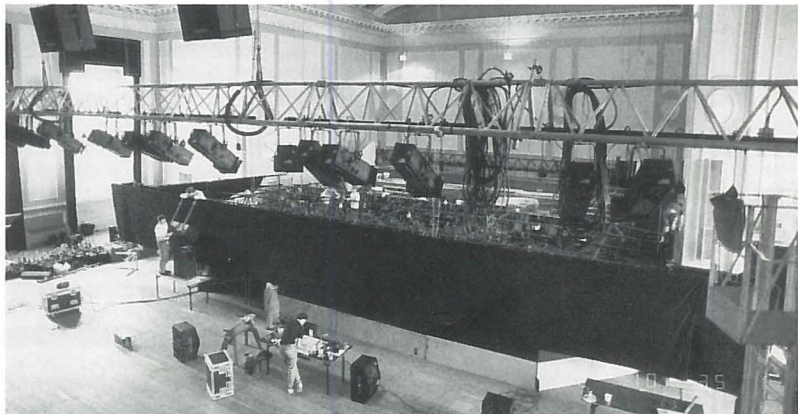
A 36-way Tempus system is used in the

the existing balcony, making the total capacity 748. Here there are generally five shows a day with one hour change-overs between them. But as the repertoire is constantly changing during the festival, any spare time is taken up with get-in and rehearsals. The theatre is in use from 9am until 2am the following morning for the best part of four weeks.

A Gemini memory system complete with riggers control is the chosen control. Lighting designers from all over the world, some of whom have never used a resistance dimmer before, let alone a computerised switchboard are quick to master the controls. The equipment proved particularly useful when BBC Scotland installed a supplementary set of dimmers and luminaires for a TV recording, as the multiplex line simply extended to their racks using the spare control ways on the Gemini for their rig.

The rig incorporates everything from Minims to Cadenzas with occasional old favourites thrown in such as Patt 137's with photo flood lamps for lighting effects. Iris 1 flood lights are selected to light the cyc whilst Cantata profiles fitted with semaphore type colour change provide light from the FOH position.

The equipment, supplied by Stage Electrics comprised 150 Harmonys, ninety



Edinburgh Suite, an end stage with 152 seats. Here, with the limited electrical supply and weight restrictions on the grid, 650 watt Preludes again prove the best option.

On the first floor is the Ballroom, certainly the most beautiful room in the building, which was originally opened in 1787. There are three spectacular chandeliers worth in excess of £30,000 each, around which the aluminium trussing is rigged. With just millimetres of clearance a steady hand is required when winching the grid into position.

In the Ballroom 342 temporary seats and a stage 8m wide by 9m deep are installed. A 60-way system controls an assortment of Preludes, Cantatas and Cudas.

The largest theatre in the building is the Music Hall where 415 temporary seats form the 'stalls' which rake up to join with

Preludes, a Gemini, a 40-way AMC, 18 and 12-way Tempus plus Solos, Irises, Cadenzas, smoke machines, semaphore colour changers, 58 internally wired six lamp bars, eight miles of cabling — including 2000 metres of Lectriflex multicore and 63A, 100A and 125A 3 phase mains cables and distribution.

And — you have all guessed it — four Patt 23's, without which no theatrical event seems to be complete even now, some five years after the last one left Kirkcaldy.

Some overseas readers might be surprised that theatre lighting for an Edinburgh Festival production should be hired from four hundred miles away. Such, however, are the number and size of Festival events needing our type of lighting that probably every Strand agent in the U.K. has much of his hire stock within a Cadenza's throw of the Royal Mile for that four weeks! ■