



HEATHCLIFF

When rock'n'roll meets theatre...

The stage show *Heathcliff*, starring Sir Cliff Richard and based on the book he co-wrote with Frank Dunlop, began its UK tour at Birmingham's National Indoor Arena on October 16. The show, based on Emily Bronte's *Wuthering Heights*, stars Helen Hobson as Catherine, playing opposite Sir Cliff – billed as plain 'Cliff Richard' on the show's publicity – and there are a few, well, *developments* of the original plot. Like, pirates and stuff. It's beautifully produced, with multiple projections adorning the set, a quadrasonic sound system and a fluid lighting design by Andrew Bridge. Production director is Dick Parkinson, with costume designer Jo Vanek, lyricist Tim Rice, director Frank Dunlop, composer John Farrar, production music director Mike Moran and orchestrator Sean Callery. Putting *Wuthering Heights* onto the stage has been Cliff Richard's dream for many years. **Mike Lethby** saw the show and talked to the production team at the NIA

Following production rehearsals and restricted previews at Earl's Court 2, the show, with music by John Farrar and lyrics by Tim Rice, opened with a three-week season at the National Indoor Arena in Birmingham on October 16. It will go on to play the Edinburgh Playhouse, the NIA again for a short run and Manchester Palace Theatre, before coming to London in early February for a season at the Labatt's Apollo in Hammersmith, which runs through to July 1997.

THE SOUND OF HEATHCLIFF

For Britannia Row Productions, this is a tour which has probably entailed more heart-searching and

thinking than any of their of their more conspicuous recent high-profile jobs with Oasis, Pink Floyd, or their annual run of major festivals.

As FOH engineer (and co-designer of the *Heathcliff* sound system with Mike Lowe and fellow BRP regular John 'JJ' James) Colin Norfield puts it: "This show is part theatre and part rock'n'roll." And then some. Starting a high-profile show at the NIA in Birmingham and then going on to play theatre venues – after production rehearsals in the even-more different environs of Earl's Court 2 – was, most would agree, not exactly the audio pro's dream ticket.

Brit Row has worked with Cliff Richard since his

anniversary tour in 1990 – originally fielding a PA rig based around Turbosound TMS-3s. Prior to that, the artist had operated his own sound rig.

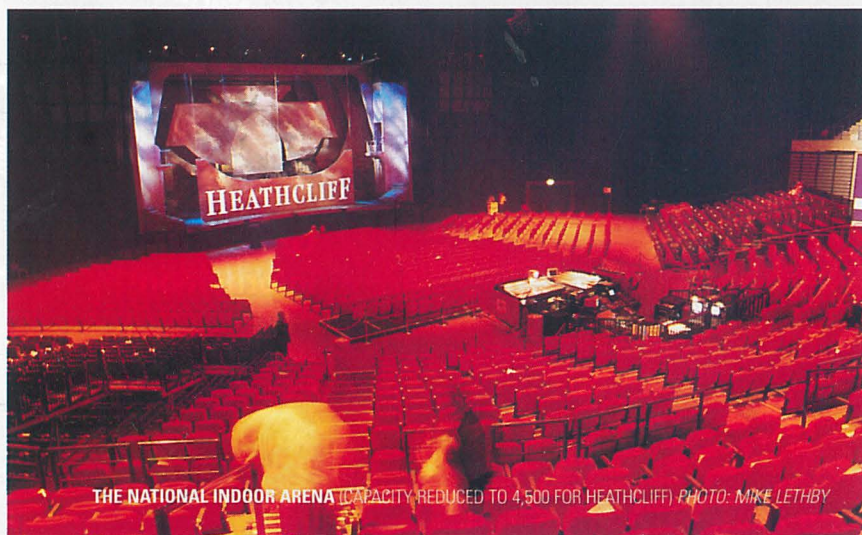
Colin Norfield himself has actually had 24 years with the artist, back since what he calls "the days before touring PAs", and back when he worked for Orange Music, who had one of the first PA hire companies – out with the Four Tops, Temptations and Richie Havens on eight-week tours of Europe. Thus the three men bring a wealth of experience to the production.

"A Cliff tour came along," he recalls. "I remember them saying 'it's not a rock'n'roll show, you know, leave a bit of space for Cliff'. He's great to work with, a real pro, and I don't think you'd find anyone with more enthusiasm; he really spurs you on. He's a perfectionist; he'll do anything you want to try and make it better and he's always striving."

This is a quiet show, Norfield adds, partly in the interests of vocal clarity and partly in view of the family nature of the audience. "You can only make it as loud as the quietest thing, and dialogue is very important in a musical.

"On a rock'n'roll show you mix the band first and then get the vocals over the top, but here the vocals have to come first. It's very different to working with him on a rock show, it's scenery, it's set, it's choreography. I'm trying different ideas but the vocals are all-important. The other thing is that there's no hand-held mics: all the radio mics are in their beards and so on, so again, levels are critical."

Despite their pedigree in pure rock, Britannia Row do number among their theatre musical credits such productions as *Blood Brothers* and *Hot* ➔ p29



THE NATIONAL INDOOR ARENA (CAPACITY REDUCED TO 4,500 FOR HEATHCLIFF) PHOTO: MIKE LETHBY