

## LIGHTING THE MODEL THEATRE

### Build Your Own Model Theatre.

By Anthony Noble, illustrated by Diana Tall. *Stanley Paul*. 9/6.

Model theatre seems inevitably to invoke dewy-eyed reminiscences of "penny plain tuppence coloured", Pollocks toy theatres. As a youth I was intolerant of those who played toy theatres and regarded my own passion—my own model theatre—as something apart. So in the event it proved. My model theatre was as far removed from toy theatres as fine-scale model railways are from toy trains, however good the latter and some are very good indeed. My model theatre backed up by experience in amateur lighting and scenery enabled me to join the Strand Electric from the GEC at 21 with a wealth of ideas and a critical, trained eye. Perhaps the twenty-eight years that have followed have been an unconscious battle to make possible on the large scale of a real theatre the effects and facilities I had come to expect in my model theatre. My work in Colour Music certainly had its origin in the fact that the lighting soon outstripped the acting potential of my model theatre as a means of expression. If something *serious* had to be said then lighting variations on a suitable setting to music could say it much better than words backed up by frozen figures pushed on and off. This technique only satisfied the annual pantomime and figures eventually vanished for good, except where necessary to give scale to a setting. In those days I gave the scenes titles in much the same way as a painter. An example has just come into my mind; one set built around a flight of steps was called "High Treason" and the lighting variations to the solemn half of Liszt's *2nd Hungarian Rhapsody* did the rest. (I wonder what music I would choose today!)

The point I wish to make is that the lighting equipment was capable of really serious work, so much so that it was this item which gave the theatre life and set me on my career.

Serious model theatres take various forms and I well remember a wonderful stage construction (by a contemporary of mine, now a well-known designer) partly of Meccano with rising and falling stage floor on lifts, etc., in the manner common in the German Theatre.

It is Mr. Noble's approach to the serious model theatre instead of the over-sentimentalised toy theatre which warms me to his book. Some of his constructional detail strikes me as obvious, showing the same tendency as in certain American publications to regard the reader as a complete noodle. Probably I am not a fair judge as I have always been intolerant of detail instruction and like to be shown the target rather than the method. To people to whom construction does not come naturally, Mr. Noble's method will be ideal. He may well inspire the growth of a new hobby, model theatres to follow model aeroplanes and all the rest.

By the way, a word on lighting. Strand do not and do not want to make model stage lighting. Sporadic attempts by ourselves in 1936 followed by others have failed. The whole tendency, due to the large amount of hand work which springs from small demand, is to find a very small object produced for a very large price!

Mr. Noble gives instructions how to make spots and floods and I would endorse his remarks here with the warning, *Do not allow scale to put you in a straitjacket*. I would advise the type of units and positioning that gives the best effect in the model theatre. Later one may transfer the intent, but not the exact method, to the production on a real stage. What a model theatre gives is an insight into the potentialities and a feel for lighting. Handling lighting only in the odd moments when a full-sized stage is available will cramp one's outlook.

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