



Dimmer room showing STM racks and the vast space vacated by the electro-mechanical banks.

MMS System, before that felicity was attained. Back in 1950 the most that was promised was that it would occupy the old switchboard room on the P side of the stage and a small observation window would be contrived in the wall between it and the auditorium. Even this was out of reach on that distant Monday because nothing could be done until the old boards (all three) could be stripped out and the builders take over. So it was that Paul Weston as the operator was seated in the P side scene dock with his back to the stage, which in any case was completely masked-off with curtains. Only one cue was visible and then only as some reflected light high up on the brick wall.

The lighting rehearsal was a full company call. As *Oklahoma* had already run for nearly three years it was hardly surprising that they could not see what all the fuss was about but to myself as inventor of the console and to Paul this was to be the first night of all first nights. To us a new show had to be rehearsed and plotted with a new control any of whose teething troubles had to be covered up. Worse still was the fact that the change to 240 AC had of course brought a new set of lamps. Everything was too bright and there had to be a lot of checking to levels, something the Light Console was not good at! The new MMS would laugh at the problem—even the lack of view—but in those days one did not dream of recording dimmer levels, let alone set out to do it. Since the tools had been destroyed in the Blitz, the console did not then have the Compton instantaneous group memory piston action which was to become a sine qua non on all the larger Strand electro-mechanical installations. What the Drury Lane job *did* have was a couple of splendid rooms under the stage for the dimmers (the old ENSA air raid shelters) and an extra long flexible cable to enable the console to be moved out into the stalls cross-gangway for rehearsals. Thus the much cherished facility of a stalls control was there in the Lane way back in 1950. Though

decidedly primitive when compared with almost anything in control nowadays the organ action had the merit—unusual for those days—of comparatively few wires in the main cable. For this the cross-relay in the dimmer room was responsible.

However except for the one journey from scene dock to switchboard room the console never budged and when a group memory relay was at last added in a room immediately under the console a short cable only was used. This was for *My Fair Lady* in 1958. Incidentally the full set of 216 dimmers was not required until *Gone with the Wind* in 1972. For *My Fair Lady* ten of the circle spots were moved to their proper place on the Upper Circle, a process that has been completed with *A Chorus Line*.

Today visiting the Drury Lane of *A Chorus Line* with our gaze mainly directed at the lighting equipment, what do we find? First of all the stage door and the backstage does not seem to have altered a bit. And the first time that I entered that door was as a schoolboy in 1925. The show then, was another very successful American musical—*Rose Marie*. This visit was destined to have greater significance than one might suppose. Hanging in “number one” was a bar of Patt. 30 500 W 12 in. Sunray floods pointing vertically down and that schoolboy jumped to the erroneous conclusion that they must have narrow angle beams. He went away to light his model theatre with a miniature equivalent and when, seven years later, he joined Strand Electric he had got so used to this form of light that he had to devise a lantern to provide it. The result was the Patt. 56 with its 24° beam and cut-off—the 1 kW Acting Area lantern which for some years became the backbone of the British way of lighting big shows. It still survives in quantity at the Lane—albeit relegated as working lights backstage. And there is a lot of backstage at Drury Lane!

Even the area covered by the six stage lifts (two hydraulic and four electric) takes one

back less than half the full depth. Overhead at that point hangs the cyclorama—a rigid frame affair of three straight sections joined at right angles by sharp curves—said to date from Basil Dean's *Dream*. This cyc epitomises the problem of this stage; very great depth but except for the scene dock already referred to, not much width off-stage.

The proportions of the auditorium itself are quite another matter. They are unbelievably good for a theatre of 2,283 seats. Nor was 1922–3 when this reconstruction took place, a time when one would expect a vintage example of this style of house to turn up. But it did and is still there for members of the audience to enjoy and what is more they can savour so much of the Wyatt 1811 theatre in the front of house approach thereto.

The house achieves its good sightlines and comparative intimacy without cheating with an overwide proscenium opening. It is 42 ft. 6 in. and this show like the others is not permitted to come out of it. That is the cast and scenery are not; but technological theatre is bustin' out all over. Hanging over the proscenium is what appears to be the biggest loudspeaker in the world, while further back at the circle line a sort of building contractor's bungalow has levitated ceilingwards to house five Patt. 765 CSI spots and their five “followers”.

The front of house spots have been removed from the Dress Circle and have been replaced by 22 of Rank Strand's latest and brightest on the Upper. Only the ugly housing remains as a memento of the false start of 1931. There are new lighting positions at the sides of the gallery and a further array of spots down by the proscenium for all to see. When this last position first fell to lighting (for *My Fair Lady*) the most that was permitted was a vertical row of Patt. 23s—and they had to be hidden. Incidentally that show was the first to be “miked” in Drury Lane and it had to be done very discreetly. Goodness knows what the Ghost thinks on his walks when he comes upon the present sound control hogging part of the front row of the Dress Circle! However the lighting control is content to share Box M with stage management centre back of that circle. The MMS has two rate playbacks and one manual plus the usual other items including a mimic for the 240 dimmers. The installation could be expanded to 360 if the need arises.

Let us end on a couple of piquant notes. With this installation the need to bunch circle spots is at last recognised and there is now a *small* patch panel backstage for the purpose. Secondly, owing to the small size of the STM racks it was possible to install all twelve with the 240 thyristor dimmers along one wall of the existing dimmer room. The big electromechanical Light Console banks with their Sunset resistance dimmers continued to work the show right up to the end. This came on Sunday the Fourth of July when the curtain fell on a “star spangled bicentennial gala” *America*. As with *Oklahoma* 26 years earlier, it was Joe Davis who did the lighting; but this time the Strand Contracts department's own speciality—the weekend changeover—took place immediately after.