MMS for Glyndebourne

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My debut as a TABS writer was in 1964: the title of my contribution was *The New Lighting Installation at Glyndebourne Festival Opera*. The occasion was not only a first for me: it was a first for Strand Electric and it was even a first for Europe because the new Glyndebourne control was the first installation of thyristor dimmers in any European theatre. Nowadays the thyristor is the standard dimmer for all installations from the largest to the smallest, but in the early 1960s it was the very latest new-fangled (and therefore somewhat suspect) device. However it represented the hitherto unattainable goal of a century's development: the load-independent instant-response solid-state dimmer.

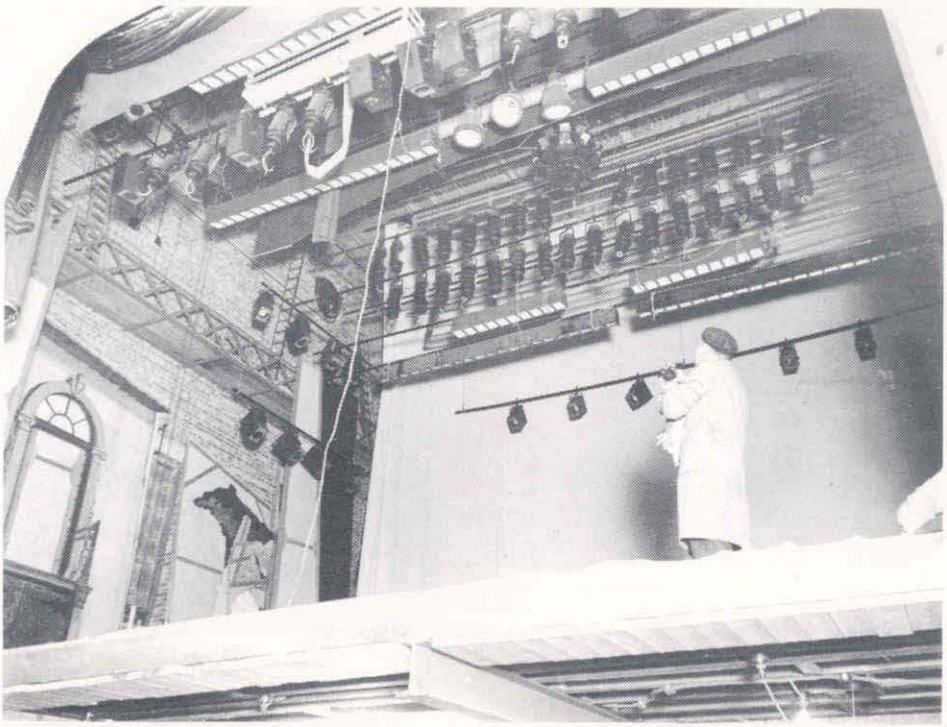
If the sixties brought the *thyristor revolution*, the seventies have brought the *memory revolution* to the control room. And so, in 1977, Glyndebourne have refurbished their lighting by installing an MMS.

Glyndebourne has always been in the forefront of stage lighting control. When the theatre was being built in 1933 its founder, John Christie, was boasting in the "Monthly Musical Record" *The lighting is the most modern in the world. It is the only instance of its kind in England. Last year there were only two in Europe—one in Vienna and one in Danzig.* Thus when the theatre opened in 1934, every dimmer was load independent from 5 W to 5 kW.

THE BORDONI REVOLUTION

The Siemens Bordoni transformer was operated via tracker wires from a Micklewright interlocking manual control which was similar to the standard grand master techniques of the time. The individual dimmer handles could lock (with a 45° twist) to their shafts. Each of the four shafts had a master wheel and any shaft could be clutched as required for raising or lowering by the grand master wheel which had a superbly geared smooth "touch".

Apart from following the German tradition of up being off and down being full-on, the system varied from standard British practice in other ways. There was no switching of any kind, not even a DBO (the power to the bordoni was fed via three separate massive oil breakers—one per phase—which served as protection as well as mains on/off). This was never a hardship because instant cross-cuts and instant blackouts are extremely rare in opera. What was essential for the new standards in opera production that were to be established by Glyndebourne under Carl Ebert's direction was accurate level presetting.



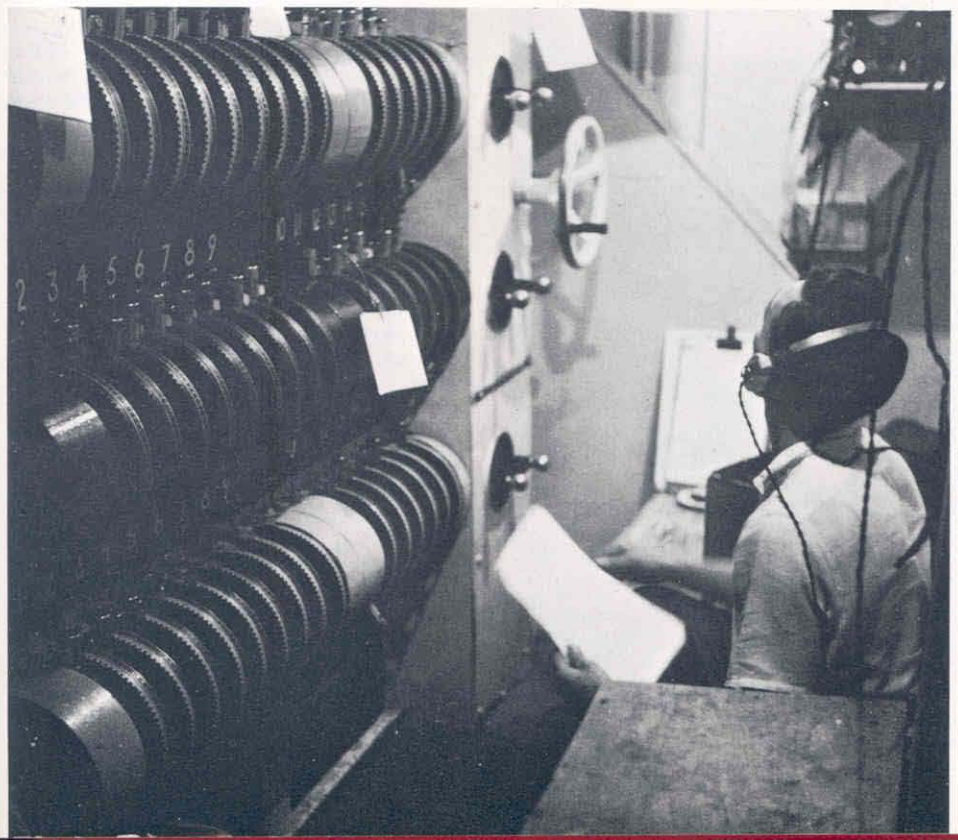
An early photograph of Glyndebourne lighting, possibly of the very first (1934) stage before the fly-tower, scene docks and plastered cyclorama had been added. The cylindrical horizon floods and the cloud machine indicate German rather than British practice. The back lighting spot bar is interesting for that date.

To achieve this, the 40 numbered level points on the dimmer scales were notched to accept up and down "stops" which limited travel on the next move to a preset level. The system was installed in a side box which, although it had only a restricted view of the stage, had an excellent feeling of contact with the performance.

So John Christie's boast was fully justified: load independence and level presetting were ahead of standard British practice: not just in 1934 but also for a considerable time to come.

Certainly until the early fifties when magnetic amplifiers, thyratrons and servo-mechanics started to reveal tantalising glimpses of the future. This period never quite produced as good a control as it should have done, for the best desk-philosophy never came together with the best engineering and the best dimmers. Around the world there were lots of good desks working poor dimmers and vice-versa.

Fortunately, Glyndebourne's original control was good enough to soldier on



60-way Bordoni control 1934–1963.