

had had only a couple of wires to attach and, after all, he was an engineer of sorts.

Investigation showed we had had a narrow escape. It was a large ironclad, 250-amp or so, switch – they made them large in the days to which it belonged – and the baconers had left a cable attached and merely thrown the bare ends up on top of a very large gasmeter nearby. Martin had left this cable on, assuming that it was part of the permanent installation, and added his temporary one. Backed-up by a large fuse, it was the old cable which had to burn out, and did, on switch-on. Why the gasmeter was not ignited one can only wonder. Of course the rule with mains electricity has to be 'Never assume anything!'

Curiously, it was the Palladium which was later to present an even greater risk. Returning there after some years in a sanatorium to show a couple of visitors around one morning we descended to the dimmer room and I knocked-off the main over the door. Such a visit involved walking right through the centre of the bank with the 3-phase 400-volt busbars on one side and the dimmers on the other. We stood there while I pointed out our panel wiring and dimmer construction. On going out through the second door into the tiny intake room at the far end I was confronted by a large, obviously brand new, main switch. What's that I ask? – to be told that it was the new main. No attempt had been made to label or remove the old switch. Fortunately my two companions had followed my rule of not touching anything during our passage of the valley of death. As for the two clunks making tea in the intake room that morning ...! They must have heard us moving about next door.

As to *theatre work* itself, my lasting impression is of the sheer professionalism of the backstage staff at the London Palladium. The two balcony Frank Matcham auditorium has a very large seating capacity (2,325) and a proscenium opening of 47ft but backstage the dimensions are very tight. There is really no wing space P. side and nothing much to boast about on the O.P. The grid is only 54ft and the rear wall is angled and is so close to the outer revolve of the stage as to suggest a tangent. Any ground row lighting in that area had to take the form of a long low bridge-truck spanning the floor that moved below. Yet this theatre under George Black was famous for its spectacular productions. The truth was that solid pieces, rostrums and staircases where all constructed to take apart, fold and pack away quickly. Our show *Gangway* thus relied on a combination of orthodox scenery and sets of drapes, taken from some of the Gaumont super cinema stages, plus Nesbitt's clever use of lighting. Most effective of all was the song and

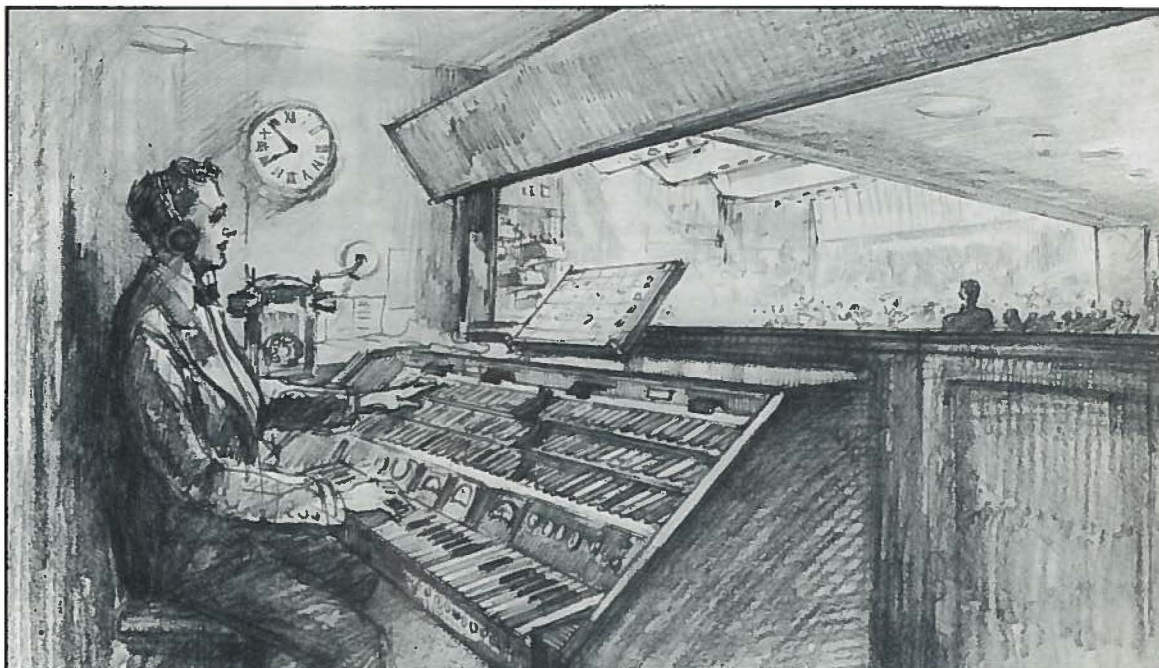
dance sequence with black drapes and stage lit in the main from three bars of 'my' Patt. 56 acting areas (26° beam) hanging vertically overhead – about thirty in all.

The ex-King Street light console had only 39 dimmers, mostly resistances but some experimental transformers as well. What it did have was the whole series of special contactors used to change-over from all the colour lighting in the auditorium to the lighting and special effects on the stage of that late temple to colour music (CUE No. 17). There was also the Palladium's existing installation, controlled from a Strand

was in the orchestra pit and the whole show had pace and sparkle, tuneful music with striking lighting effects. This went on twice every day with three houses on the two or three matinee days each week. There were also a couple of acrobats who preceded a musical 'scena' with Booth & Ziegler plus chorus, called 'My Paradise Garden' – a sugary item owing nothing to Delius! When we came to this at rehearsal, Nesbitt simply asked me to 'ad lib' the scene. It was never plotted and subsequently always vamped; which made it fun to do. Once Paul and I had handed the console over to Hilda

'and now for the first time on any stage, let me introduce Mr. Bentham.' I really wondered what was to happen next, seated up there at the console. There was not long to wait: on came an actor suitably seedy with overall and reluctant shuffle. Trinder then went on to introduce Mr. Jeyes whose fluid was so extensively used in the theatre. I remember when dropping in via the stage door one afternoon some time later, I was greeted by an actor with the words 'I have just taken your call' which flummoxed me for the moment.

That show *Gangway* and its Nesbitt successors there proved the



An illustration of the Royal Festival Hall light console from the Illustrated London News, September 8th 1951.

grand-master on the P. side pros. perch. Thus such mundane things as battens (there were no floats) could be left to the G.M. and important items like the Patt. 56s belonged to the console. Some items were literally swapped between the two using the change-over contactors; and very specials, like the 'Night and Day' spots, were patched-in remotely and discarded at will from the console. Such patching was only a wartime measure and in 1949 all this was replaced and the stage re-wired when 152-way Light Console was put in to have, as it turned out, a run of twenty years.

It is difficult to put a name to a show like *Gangway* now. Perhaps, wartime revue is what sums it up though revue in the real sense it certainly was not; nor was it just a Variety show. Tommy Trinder, Bebe Daniels & Ben Lyon, Webster Booth & Ann Ziegler, Edmundo Ross and his band, and the Caroli brothers (the Blackpool Circus clowns) were all in the one tight-packed show complete with chorus and showgirls. Wendy Toye did the dances, Debroy Summers

(Hilary Gould), who was to become the resident operator I often used to drop in of an evening and she would take the opportunity to go outside and relax while I kept my hand in with this number. The acrobats were a front cloth act and on one such occasion something went wrong early, cannot remember exactly what but it was a case for an immediate blackout. I could just see the cloth fly away and the band in the pit went into Paradise Garden. The stage was sans girls, sans Webster and Ann: the stage was *mine* and full opportunity was taken for a console solo on the set until one by one the stage filled up.

A few seats had been given up at the extreme end of the Grand Circle for the console and separated by just a rail from one of the two exit gangways we were queried from time to time as to why they had heard no organ during the show. The contact with both stage and audience from this position was marvellous. When at the opening matinee Tommy Trinder began to describe how Nesbitt lit the show by just sitting in the stalls and calling 'Mr. Bentham ...' and so on for quite a bit, ending with

suitability of my Light Console for one man control of the lighting for spectacle. It made the great post-war console installations at Drury Lane, the (old) Stoll theatre and the London Coliseum virtually certain. As to export, an area in which the pre-war Strand Electric had been weak indeed, what was needed was a brand new building here to join the Palladium and Lisbon as prestige show-offs. As soon as the London County Council announced that they were going to build a permanent concert hall as part of the 1951 Festival of Britain I itched to get my hands on it to create something special there. Unfortunately although Strand Electric was the only firm approached by the LCC Chief Engineer's department, the task of putting forward a scheme went, as non-theatre, to a director Hugh Cotterill who could by no means be described as a Bentham enthusiast!

He quoted for some acting-area floods (Patt. 56) over the concert platform and a remote dimmer bank with an 18-way panel based on the 1934 Covent Garden Opera House principle but with a motor-drive. He