



FOCUS

The Journal of the Association of Lighting Designers

"More art, less tools..."

In the shutter cuts this issue:
Prague Quadrennial with Rosy Runciman • Cross-Cultural Lighting •
Knights of Illumination Nominations • Student researches •
'A Theatre Project' reviewed... and much more...

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August / September 2011

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Rick's Resolve

I have been in the US lighting my usual mix of summer operas in Santa Fe again, and while here I was delighted to see that once again a British based creative team has swept up a lot of Tony Awards on Broadway again. This year it was Paule Constable winning for the lighting design of *War Horse* along with her talented collaborators in the play category. Last year it was Neil Austin and the team behind *Red* while the year before that I was thrilled to be part of the *Billy Elliot* sweep.

Not only do we all want to send congratulations to Paule and her team but we should also reflect on what the consistency of these successes on Broadway means. It is no accident that the teams behind all these hits, and many of the other long runners such as *Mamma Mia*, *Les Miserables*, and *Phantom of the Opera* to name a few have all come

up through the ranks of the "subsidised" theatre in the UK. We all learned our crafts and bonded with our teams while working in fringe theatre, regional opera, dance and theatre companies before being lucky enough to share in the creation of a show that the world wants to see.

These successful exports should be viewed no differently than the manufactured goods that Britain used to export all over the world. They are hugely in demand as those goods we used to make and earn countless millions not only to the producers but bring in a lot of tax revenue to the UK. It should be a well-known fact the stage musical *Phantom of the Opera* alone has grossed more money than any single Hollywood film.

The UK is a world leader in the creation of staged entertainment, but this is actually under a variety of threats.

The harsh economic climate has meant that the small subsidies to new work, regional theatres and the smaller-scale companies, where all the creative teams behind the mega-hits learned their crafts, are drying up or at best allowing for less work with less risk and experimentation. In addition the short-sighted raising of tuition fees and the increasing demand for higher education establishments to recruit non-EU students (often at the expense of places for EU and British students who still manage to qualify for a lower fee). This means that the beneficiaries of the Britain's excellent tuition in theatre skills, who will be the future creators of the next generation of global theatrical franchises, will more likely be paying the tax on their earnings to any country apart from the UK.

Having spent the overwhelming majority of the last 24 months lighting shows abroad, on every continent except Africa, I feel a small part of the great

success story that is British theatre. We are a successful British export, and how often to you see those words in a sentence these days?

So even as I wince as I make my next payment to the Inland Revenue on my worldwide earnings, I have to acknowledge that it is a fair return on the small Arts Council grants that sustained little fringe companies and theatres that gave me a chance as I was starting out.

We have to make the government realise that the small amounts supporting the Arts are not just about what shows are being produced currently but they are building the successful theatre industry for the future and the returns on those investments are huge.

I hope that the funding bodies that created the successes of today are able to invest in the future generation of award-winning British theatre.

Best regards,
Rick



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POSTCARDS FROM ITALIA

Mark Jonathan judges Firenze and meets the judges...

As ever, I'm waiting for my bag to be delivered at Florence (Firenze) airport; the baggage handlers must have gone for lunch. As I wait I spot a poster for a concert. Good, I think, culture is alive in Florence. Then I notice that it was dated April and it's July. Mind you, according to posters on the London underground, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg* is still on in the West End. The bags finally appear and I speed into the little city which is baking hot.

I get an email from Margie Heymann (Rosco) welcoming me. It's such fun to have a friend nearby wherever I go. I arrive at a lovely little hotel next to the theatre and Internet access is free. Fantastic, unlike all those travel lodges and the (not very) Premier Travel Inns. I decide that everyone will be having a siesta, so I do too.

Mid-afternoon, I announce

my presence at the rather grand stage door which has two ladies in white coats and a guard. *'Buon giorno. Io mi chiamo Mark Jonathan'* I say in my best Italian. I get to speak to the Technical Director's PA. She tells me that Signor Grassi is out but will be back soon. I say I'll go to the café and she directs me to a little place around the corner. My coffee arrives just as the phone rings. It's Italo, (Signor Grassi). No rush, he says with great warmth that matches the weather. I go back to the theatre, the ladies in the white coats tell me to take the lift to the 5th floor. I meet up with Signor Grassi and have preliminary chats*. They have arranged meetings for me the next day so I set off on a long walk around the city not least to find *Via Bella Donna* (the street of beautiful woman) where I have rented an apartment for my return in

the autumn when I will light the Florence production of Janacek's *Makropulos Case* conducted by Zubin Mehta, directed by William Friedkin.

The next day, I returned to the Via Bella Donna to view the apartment that I booked unseen, except for photos on the internet. It's lovely, with a little balcony looking over the rooftops of Florence. I meet up with the heads of technical and lighting and I'm given a grand tour of the theatre. I was amused as they flung open a little door on the fly floor to reveal a magnificent view of the Tuscan hills. It reminded me

of working at Glyndebourne in my youth and of the magnificent views of the Sussex hills that surrounded the opera house.



The opera house in Firenze was built post-war... fluorescent light illuminates parts of the grey and white auditorium; maybe the coldness appeals to the Florentines, given the heat outside. At least the seats are red and look comfortable. My guides assure me that they are not as comfortable as they look! We spend some time agreeing lighting bars

on the flyplot then I'm taken for lunch around the corner. I try not to sound too nervous as I resurrect my Italian, and I explain that my Italian always improves after a couple of glasses of wine... "Then we shall have some cold white wine," says the technical director. The wine and my Italian flows and it's followed by the obligatory espresso.

I watch the general rehearsal in the afternoon. Those fluorescents don't really fade out... In the interval Luciano shows me some lights in the under stage store. I get back to my hotel just in time to meet Margie Heymann for supper. We walk across the river – it's still really



**At my first meeting with Signor Grassi, I was admiring the picture of the new opera house that is in construction. I asked: "This architect has never designed a theatre before has he?" "No, how can you tell?" replied Signor G. "Well, the white orchestra pit, the dangling strip lights in front of the FOH lighting bridge, the lights that are upside down in the artist's impression, and the 3 inaccessible lighting trusses that are hanging over the orchestra pit."*



hot. Conversation is non-stop and we discuss many things not least Florence, the ever growing *Women in Stage Entertainment* and Rosco's e-colour.

The next morning, I nearly had a 'sense of humour failure' on departure. I hadn't used the mini-bar so I wasn't expecting any 'extras', then the hotel receptionist said *"Butter sir, you musta paya the new tourist tax."* "No," I say, firmly, *"the bill is paid by the theatre"*. Ah, but the problem is that the tax is levied by the city council and not by the hotel and therefore they can't issue a receipt. I herumph. *'Discuss with the theatre'*, I say as I flounce out, dramatically, to buy some stamps from the Tabacchi.

As my taxi arrives, the hotel concedes that they will concoct some sort of bill that includes the ruddy tax. Meanwhile, BBC world

is reporting that the Italian Government is about to approve a 40 Billion Euro cut in spending to balance their budget. I imagine that the new tourist tax will rise and the chance of opera surviving will diminish. On the subject of tax in Italy I have already provided documentation from HMRC to say I'm a UK tax payer and a letter which had to be signed by a notary that declares in appallingly translated English that *"I not have Italian company"*.

In the recent light of the criticism of the UK HMRC it won't surprise you to know that I had to wait for over 3 months for a response to my request for an E101. That's hopeless as I can't be paid in Italy without one. Meanwhile, as I understand things in Italy, I will be taxed for all the benefits that I receive which under Italian Tax law includes my hotels and

airfares that have been paid for by the management when I attended various meetings before the production period.

When I come back to Florence to do the job I'm responsible for booking and paying for my apartment directly, booking my flights; there are no per diems so accordingly, the fee has to be higher. I realise I miss those lovely people who work in opera houses in other countries around the world fixing our flights and finding, booking and usually paying for our accommodation. Italy may be in Europe but it certainly has a different set of rules.

Back at the airport, it's under 15 minutes in a taxi that's great. Small cities win as far as I'm concerned. Of course, the flight to London City is delayed...

On ALD matters it will soon be time for the AGM. This is an important one as we say an immeasurable thank you to our retiring chairman, Rick Fisher who has done so much to develop the ALD. In saying thank you to him I hope we will also be formally voting in our new chairman. I think we are extremely fortunate to have secured Peter Mumford as our *chairman designate*. I know that he will bring both new ideas and a wealth of experience. So, please try and attend the ALD AGM. Remember to let the office know so that we can cater accordingly - see page 9. We hope also to have a meeting with Equity on the same evening. I hope I will see many of you there.

As we go to print the nominations for the **Knights of Illumination Awards** have been announced. This year,

it fell to me to attend the judges meeting on behalf of the ALD and I was delighted to meet the judges and hear all the enthusiasm that they brought for lighting they had seen in the productions that they were nominating.

Thank you to David Benedict who chairs the panel and judges plays and musicals with Michael Coveney, while Ash Khandekar and Fiona Maddocks judged operas and Louise Levene and Jenny Gilbert judged the dance and ballet section. I believe that the great secondary win on all this is that theatre critics are becoming much more 'light aware'.

The KOI awards were started by Clay Paky, led by the brilliant Enrico Caironi, with some master-minding from LD Durham Marengi we owe them a great debt of gratitude. 🍷

CROSS-CULTURAL LIGHTING

Nigel Levings

This paper was written to spark discussion at a round table session of the recent OISTAT conference on Lighting Design held in Hangzhou, China.

Due to time constraints it was never presented.

Outside Australia I have lit productions in Russia, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, France, Holland, England, Scotland, Wales, Israel, Canada, Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, the United States and Broadway, which I think for our purposes should count as a separate country.

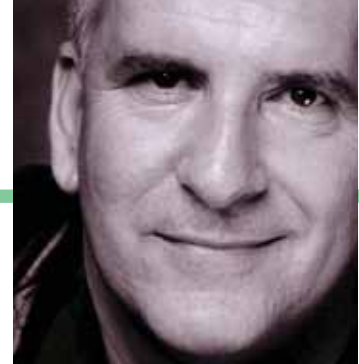
The process of getting a work on to the stage for a performance involves driving a large and at times unwieldy machine. This machine is comprised of people, technology and architecture. It is the total of all the operations required to take a work from conception to performance. The process is universal but the machine operates under different sets of principles in different cultures. It is both a machine and a living organism. A machine in the sense that it only functions when we drive it but an organism in

the sense that it has a life. It includes human beings and how well it functions is dependent on its internal health. Different cultures have different ways in which the intentions of a creative team are conveyed to this living machine. I have found that some of these systems work better than others, but that no one method is the perfect model of absolute best practice, even though some come pretty close.

Lighting designers more than other members of the creative team need to be able to drive this machine in order to create their work and knowing how and why it operates in each distinctive culture is critical to the success or failure of the design. Finding how to get things done, who to speak to, what is the hierarchy of instructions in the system, what are the embedded support systems.

All these are important. But also the question of what is the overall culture of the organism – is there an intrinsically supportive culture or is it a machine that operates best under duress? Some cultures believe that a production is not really any good unless everyone is having a terrible time and the creative team are constantly screaming and shouting.

There is a great deal for theatre practitioners to learn from cross-cultural influences. Those different ways in which the organism functions in each culture. I am always trying to persuade opera company technical managements to institute exchange programmes for stage management, for example, so that companies can be seeded with new ideas and gain the advantage that this cross-cultural fertilisation brings.



Differences in lighting instruments are not so pronounced and rarely cause me problems. Some of course are much better than others – if you happen to be lucky enough to work in the strange world of Broadway theatre then you will be spoiled for all future experiences with equipment and crew. But generally I find it is the differences in control system philosophies that causes most problems. Language is not the only issue here. The shortcuts of technical language are not universal. I think there is a lot to be said for international LDs working in other cultures bringing an operator and / or control system with them as part of their team.

Excellence in focusing a production can be achieved through precision in instructions and this can be done with gesture as well as language. I like to encourage and enlist the support of the creativity of the person focusing the light and this takes more language and cultural affinity than gesture permits. Their viewpoint is often clearer than mine and as long as I can convey the intention of the focus then there will come a point where I will feel I can trust the judgement of a specific crew member. In some cultures I have found this can cause big problems where it is seen that the proper hierarchical protocols are not being followed. The “lowly” crew member up the ladder seems to be making decisions which are considered in these cultures to be the preserve of the department head.

Excellence in cue structure is another matter and here there is no substitute for a perfect understanding between designer and operator. Both language and culture can now become a barrier. As designers we need the most seamless integration between our eye and the control system output that we can possible achieve. The almost symbiotic relationship that develops between a designer and a good programmer gets close to this and is one reason why I think we should start to raise this topic at a contractual level.

For lighting designers on the international circuit, in terms of creating the lighting design there are pitfalls in language, in culture, in operating structures and in technology. But there are also the universal problems of the road warrior – loneliness,

boredom outside work hours, the struggles of feeding yourself in a foreign culture, of being away from family and friends and of creative artists being stuck in ugly and faceless hotels or apartments. ❄

*A shot from a recent production in Adelaide of the opera **Maria de Buenos Aires** for which I designed both set and lighting.*



For Auld Lang Syne

*“So there’s a hand my trusty fiere
And gie’s a hand o’ thine
And we’ tak a right gude-willy
waught
For auld lang syne..”*

...so sings **Nigel Lawson Dick**



And so it was on Wednesday afternoon there gathered many ‘trusty fiere’ round the ALD stand and the ‘gude-willy waughts’ flowed free. A companionable gathering of lighting luminaries celebrating the publishing of Richard’s book, renewing old acquaintance and sweeping away the years. And what a visionary was the young stage manager man Pilbrow to have dreamt up a concept and company name to give him such a wonderful title for his autobiography – *A Theatre Project*.

Well - this was the ABTT show come round yet again and here we were squidged into a corner of the basement. There’s a handy fire escape staircase close by which, once unbolted and unbarred, offered the simplest of access so arrival and setup was made easy. And for all those

kind people who enquired after my car it had recuperated well but now has another unpleasant lurgy necessitating rather more serious surgery – but it will recover!

The show as a whole was quieter, we feel, that being a collective ‘we’ rather than a Royal one. Some of the stands did report pretty active trade (and draught bitter or a generous supply of flavourful Pimms does aid the cause) but even the hoovering hoards of students seemed to have lost some of their suction.

So this year it was mainly about members dropping by, meeting and passing the time of day between seminars, launches and presentations. And how good it is to see them all, catch up with news and be assured that there is a good buzz round the Association. See you at PLASA. 🍀



Office Oracle

News from Ian's production desk

New ALD Postal Address

The ALD now has a new Postal address for its correspondence. Please update your records to reflect the change and start using this with immediate effect. The address is:

**PO Box 955
Southsea, PO1 9NF**

The old Oxford PO Box address expired at the end of July, and any post sent to it after this date will be returned to sender or destroyed. If you have recently sent something to the office that has not been acknowledged please email so that we know to expect it or let you know if it has actually arrived as we have been experiencing a rather erratic redirection service for Royal Mail.

2011 AGM

Due to the non availability of key members of the ALD's Executive Committee on the previously announced date we are sorry to announce that we have had to bring the 2011 Annual General Meeting forward to **Wednesday 24th August**. It will take place in the first floor function room at the:

**Theodore Bullfrog Pub
in John Adam Street,
London, WC2N 6HL.**

We are hoping to have a couple of guest speakers to start the evening off from 6.30pm, with the main business of the meeting to start about 7.15pm. The main event of the evening is to vote to elect the new Chair

of the Association, as well as other officers and Executive Committee members.

We will be providing refreshments, including food, for at least part of the evening, and after the AGM business is completed, members are invited to stay and have a drink and chat, and this will act as our **August Social evening** for members instead of our regular gathering at the Coach and Horses at the other end of The Strand.

*PLEASE confirm your attendance with the office **BEFORE 17th August** so that we can plan the catering.*

Subscription Fees

2011 / 12 subscription fees are now overdue for payment. As laid out in the constitution the deadline for payment was

1st July 2011. Therefore **this is your last reminder to pay**. If you do not pay by standing order and have not paid, you will soon be receiving a reminder letter, but this will be the last edition of *Focus* you will be receiving until the arrears are paid.

If you have sent us payment recently through the post to the Oxford PO Box but have not yet received a confirmation that it has been received, please contact the office as a matter of urgency, as we have been experiencing issues with the re-direction service supplied by Royal Mail

Apologies to members who pay by standing order, as my work commitments this year has meant that the £20,000 deposited into our

bank account during the first six days of April still needs to be reconciled against the database. Hopefully this will be done during August.

If your standing order has not paid the correct amount, you will also be receiving a letter to ask you to pay the arrears. If you are an **Associate member** who has not upgraded their standing order to reflect the change from three years ago, your membership is at risk if you do not pay any outstanding amounts as advised.

However you pay your subscriptions we do ask members to include their membership number as a payment reference to help speed up this process.

Office Oracle

News from Ian's production desk

PLASA Show 2011

As ever the ALD will be exhibiting at this year's PLASA show at Earls Court between the 11th & 14th September. Our stand will be in the general vicinity of recent years: in Earls Court 2, close to the Technology in Worship Lecture space.

As part of their membership, ALD members receive a complimentary ticket to the trade show and you can register for your free entry at the following link: www.plasashow.com/ald

The winners of the Michael Northen Bursary will be having their work displayed on the stand, and the presentations will also take place at some point during the show. The ALD is also hosting one of the



PLASA seminars on the next 50 years of lighting design, which is to be chaired by our out-going chairman Rick, and we expect a lively debate! You can find more details about the seminars on page 12.

Attention Student Members!!

You are about start the new academic year. Do you have your term time address on our database? Do we have

the correct one? If you graduated this summer are you moving away from your study area?

We frequently receive post returned to us as 'Unknown at this address' during the autumn. If you have moving over the summer, please ensure that you update your information on the website directory or contact the office. An incorrect address can result in you not receiving membership renewal notices, and places the continuation of your membership at risk.

Sponsored Student Scheme 2012

This corporate members' funded scheme for students studying on Higher Education courses with an element of lighting design will open

again for applications at PLASA 11. The closing date for applications is Christmas 2011.

All current student members will be contacted at the start of September with an application form to fill in and return to the office complete with proof of your student status in order to maintain their current membership beyond April 2012.

Please note that even if you are currently a member of the scheme you will need to apply again to continue your free membership through to April 2013. If you do not, your membership will revert to a normal student category and you will need to pay the annual subscription for a student.

We would also be pleased to hear from our corporate members with ideas for meetings or experiences tailored specifically to the sponsored students.



ALD's 50th anniversary

It can't have escaped your attention that we can trace our roots back to 1961. As part of our celebrations this year, *Focus* will be marking the event with a special issue with reminiscences, photos, fun and competitions, and maybe a poem(!) compiled by our guest editor and Fellow, none other than #16 James Laws. We are also looking

Office Oracle

News from Ian's production desk

forward [*big hint*] to the assistance from our President and Fellow #1 Richard Pilbrow (not forgetting #20 – Molly Pilbrow – who apparently knows where the skeletons are buried), and of course our other distinguished Fellows messrs. Andy Bridge, Bob Bryan, Jerry Godden, David Hersey, Mick Hughes, Ken Miller, John B. Read, Francis Reid, Lennie Tucker and John Watt. The secret handshake of Fellow Laws will be advancing for your thoughts in the coming weeks, we're sure. Be warned!

We would be delighted to hear from anyone with anecdotes, views, thoughts and memorabilia to help us celebrate this landmark, especially from the pioneers of lighting design who

created this vital association of like minds – many of whom are still actively involved in supporting the ALD and particularly students and our 'emerging' lighting designers.

Membership Drive Promotion

As announced in the last issue, it was recently agreed by the Executive that there would be a small promotion to encourage membership uplift. Therefore if a current member introduces a new member to the Association then they will receive a discount of £5 on their subscription for 2012/13.

And more! That is five pounds discount for *each and every member* that successfully completes the application procedure

and fulfils the criteria to become a member in any category. Therefore if you are a Professional introducing 15 new members, then next year is subscription free! Applications for the Sponsored Student Scheme are exempt from this promotion however.

Please ensure that your name as on the ALD database and membership number is on each application form and your account will be credited when they receive their welcome pack on their doorsteps.

Get recruiting!!

Our latest potential recruit? One Exec member who has made a start on recruiting the next generation is Will Evans. We should all like

to congratulate him, and of course Bethan (without whom nothing would ever happen on stage), for the birth of their daughter Seren Meghan Evans born at 10.04 on Thursday 21st July weighing 6 pounds 14 oz (or about 127 footcandles).

We await news of whether Seren's first words are 'ALD' or 'SMA' but we hope that she will find a role in a profession that pays better than either lighting design or stage management so she can maintain her parents in comfortable retirement! 🍀



Diary Dates

24 August 18:30 for 19:15.

ALD AGM, Theodore Bullfrog Pub in John Adam Street, London, WC2N 6HL
plus: monthly members' social evening

11– 14 September PLASA2011, Earls Court, London *

11 September: 4th Knights of the Illumination Awards*

The Next 50 Years of Lighting Design – An ALD Seminar @ PLASA2011

29 September

STLD Visit to RST Stratford (see p.13)

30 September

Monthly members' social evening, Coach & Horses, Covent Garden

28 October

Monthly members' social evening, Coach & Horses, Covent Garden

25 November

Monthly members' social evening, Coach & Horses, Covent Garden

2012

17-18 April PLASA Focus, Leeds*

13-14th June ABTT Theatre Show, London *

** The ALD will have a presence at these events.*

Contact us

The Association of Lighting Designers

PO Box 955, Southsea, PO1 9NF

Tel: 07817 060189

office@ald.org.uk www.ald.org.uk

The Executive

President: **Richard Pilbrow**

Chair: **Rick Fisher** rick.fisher@ald.org.uk

Chair designate: **Peter Mumford** peter.mumford@ald.org.uk

Deputy Chair: **Jason Larcombe** jason.larcombe@ald.org.uk

Administrator and Treasurer:

Ian Saunders ian.saunders@ald.org.uk

Professionals: **Mark Jonathan** mark.jonathan@ald.org.uk

Corporates: **Iain Quinn** iain.quinn@ald.org.uk

Student issues: **Jack Knowles** jack.knowles@ald.org.uk

Meetings: **Will Evans** meetings@ald.org.uk

Education: **Nick Moran** and **Scott Palmer** education@ald.org.uk

Committee members

Andy Collier andrew.collier@ald.org.uk

Paule Constable paule.constable@ald.org.uk

John Leventhall john.leventhall@ald.org.uk

Declan Randall declan.randall@ald.org.uk

Tom Dexter Scott dexter.scott@ald.org.uk

Johanna Town jo.town@ald.org.uk

Focus Magazine

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Editor: **Andy Collier** editor@ald.org.uk

To submit ideas for articles, information, correspondence, corrections and any comments about *Focus*, please email **editor@ald.org.uk**.

Owing to space restrictions, we regret that we do not accept press releases for publication in *Focus*. However, Corporate members of the ALD may send press releases to the ALD office (office@ald.org.uk) so that they can be posted on the News section of the ALD website for immediate and wider coverage. Corporate members only may advertise in *Focus*, please contact the office for details. Editorial guidelines for authors are available on request from the editor.

The opinions published within Focus are not necessarily those of the ALD. E&OE.

New Members

welcome to...

Professional Designer

Ian Sommerville, Edinburgh (rejoining)

Ben Cracknell, Cambs. (rejoining)

Associate Member

Marty Langthorne, London

Clare Fox, London

Corporate Member

Chauvet Europe Ltd

Meeting at the RST

The STLD and ALD visit the home of The Royal Shakespeare Company



Members of the ALD are invited to join the STLD in this rare opportunity to tour the new Royal Shakespeare Theatre in Stratford, enjoy lunch, and a matinee performance followed by dinner. Guests are also welcome if there are spaces available.

Date: Thursday 29th September 2011

Programme:

07:15 Coach leaves Kings Cross, London - opposite M&S building. Coach calls in on A40 near Ealing and M40 at Beaconsfield. Ask for details.

10:00 Arrive at RSC Stratford-upon-Avon - head for the 'Ruinart' Circle Bar - coffee break and talk by the people who were involved in the RSC's transformation project.

11:00 A tour of the new theatre.

12:30 Light snack.

13:15 (for those with tickets) watch a performance of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*

16:30 Society dinner in the Rooftop restaurant.

18:30 Approx coach leaves for London.

Cost: Tickets for the performance only are £32 each and there are a limited number available. The ALD/STLD dinner is £20 per head including wine. Total Cost: £52

Are you coming? To reserve a place for any or all of the day, please contact us no later than **Monday 12th September** at meetings@ald.org.uk clearly stating the following:

- Number of tickets for the performance (ALD members will have priority before guests)
- Places required at the dinner
- Whether you will be using the coach travel and if so which pick up point?

Please make your cheque payable to ALD and it send to

ALD, PO Box 955, Southsea, PO1 9NF [**Note: New Address!!**] stating clearly whether you wish to attend the performance and the dinner or just the performance.



Hailed as the best new theatre in Britain, we will be shown round by those who made it possible.

The day will be rounded off with a meal together in the company of our colleagues in the Society of Television Lighting Designers.

**Generously sponsored by
Stage Electrics and Thomas Engineering**

“This PLASA is not be missed,” says your editor after reviewing the previews.

“With plenty of *seminars* and a hands-on *LED-shootout*, PLASA 2011 is full of lighting promise.”

If, like me, you are a seasoned many-time visitor to PLASA and of a slightly cynical point of view, it may have crossed your mind to ask, “*Do I really need to go again this year..?*” If it has, then I would very strongly recommend you unreservedly should answer “YES!” and **sign up NOW**. Having had the opportunity to review the PLASA 2011 line-up, I have been overwhelmed by the many compelling reasons to visit this year. Even for this old sceptic, for the first time it looks like one day is definitely not enough!

In addition to the world-class line-up of manufacturers and new products, it’s the range of side shows which will undoubtedly make this a PLASA to remember. Before going too far into the confetti of press releases, we need to start with thanking PLASA for their on-going support for the ALD. Members may take their free entry for granted, and our stand space equally as an expectation, but it is very much appreciated.

So, what is there to see? As an ageing aficionado, I remember the ‘memory desk’ years, the ‘laser’ years, the ‘wobbly light’ years, the ‘artificial flame’ years, and of course the most recent ‘LED’ years where every stand seemed to have read the same fashion style guide for the forthcoming season. Whilst I’m sure that we will see more LEDs this year, I have a distinct feeling that it could at last be the tipping point for theatre lighting designers with promises of much higher power

‘conventional optics’ spotlights appearing to join the already established plethora of wash lights and ‘everything-changing’ automated fixtures.

And it also seems that discussions are moving on from energy efficiency to the quality of light (hooray!) as will be explored by Fred Foster of ETC on Monday afternoon, who is giving the Gottelier Masterclass on *A Call To Arms – We Must Protect the Quality of Light*.

For those with an itch to try their hand at lighting for TV with the very latest technology, the STLD is hosting a unique ‘LED fixture shootout’ experience – case-study seminars and the chance to play in a purpose-built ‘mini TV studio’ with a range of LED washes, soft lights and key lights then see the results via HD broadcast cameras with help from a lighting director and studio electrician. It will be interesting to see if the question is answered: “*Can you light a TV set entirely with LED fixtures?*”. The practical sessions (which need to be booked in advance) will alternate with case study seminars including a recreation of ITV’s LED-equipped Daybreak studio, ENG lighting using LED, new ideas on lighting dance with LED fixtures, portrait lighting, and best practice in interfacing LED fixtures with a lighting desk.

Continuing the theme of sustainability, take a look at the Theatres Trust Ecoventure feature, the area that gives visitors a unique chance to see

how 48 pioneering London theatres are putting sustainability into practice.

The ALD is taking part in PLASA’s extensive free seminar programme at **2-3pm on Sunday 11 in the Victoria Room, Earls Court 2**. Entitled *The Next 50 Years of Lighting Design* it is part of our 50th anniversary celebrations. Chaired by Rick Fisher, panellists Rob Halliday, Durham Marengi and Alex Wardle (and you!) will be discussing what the next 50 years might hold for lighting design and lighting designers including issues such as: “*What will / should we do differently in the next 50 years?*” Is there a Great Innovator - a modern Appia - out there at the moment? How should lighting designers influence the development of the tools they work with? Is the role of the stage lighting designer a passing fad and are we all destined to become video designers? We expect a lively debate! You can book online at www.plasashow.com/education/

Other seminars of particular interest to ALD members are: *Lighting Visualisation at The Royal Opera House*, *Smart Design in 3D Theatre* - James Simpson (Sunday), *Lighting for Video in the Large Meeting Environment* - Andre LeJeune (Monday), *Lighting Big Events for Television* - Bernie Davis (Monday), *How the Sun works and why the fixture weighs so much!* - Philip Norfolk (Tuesday), *New Models for Working* - WISE (Wednesday).

Oh yes... I’ll see you there, alright! 🍷



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plasa events

Rosy goes to Prague

Our guest reviewer, **Rosy Runciman**, wonders “*where to begin describing those 10 hyperactive days that made up the 12th Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space?*”

Page 16

PQ is always a feast of mixed delights in a magical location that draws one back every four years to admire, laugh, enjoy, be surprised and bemused.

The serious fire three years ago in the Industrial Palace, where much of the PQ is usually held, meant that in 2011 the different sections of the exhibition were spread out around Prague. As one would expect this created advantages and disadvantages. The 62 National exhibition stands relocated to part of the Veletržní Palace or Czech National Gallery for 20th and 21st century art. There were some very good exhibits, but overall I felt they were somewhat compromised specially here. The change of emphasis in the PQ title for 2011 also brought a noticeable move towards national exhibits that were installations rather than being about the best of their theatre design over the last four years. Some combined the two highly successfully. **Turkey** being one such example where they recreated a carriage of the Orient Express, made to look longer when you walked in with a mirror at the far end, seated inside were costumed figures and the luggage racks were stuffed with wigs, props and musical instruments. In the window spaces production photographs slid by just as the scenery and landscape would on a moving train. It was clever and fun.

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P Q
011 PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL OF PERFORMANCE DESIGN AND SPACE
PRAŽSKÉ QUADRENNIALE SOFNOGRAFIE A DVACETIHO PROSTORU



Romania combined a spiritual installation [*above and right*] based on an ancient legend about the building of a monastery with novel light buckets in which were displayed photographs of contemporary performances. Soft, changing light between the monastery walls was an integral part of this installation that gave it an other-worldly quality. For my money it was the most sensitive and interesting use of light on any of the installation style national stands.

Focus – The Journal of the Association of Lighting Designers – “More art, less tools...”





The **Taiwanese** took a more traditional approach with their stand made up of grey wave shaped exhibition boards that cascaded down on two levels to display the work of eight different scenographers, including three lighting designers. When working on *Wind Shadow*, a ballet for the Cloud Gate Theatre Company, one of the lighting designers, Tsan-Tao Chang, had found himself in

the unusual position of being told by the artistic director, 'You create a lighting pattern and I will choreograph to it.' There was descriptive text about each designer in Taiwanese and English, a flat screen showing their work and, where relevant, examples of a costume. It stylishly combined these different display elements in a much more lyrical way than your average flat exhibition board.





Rosy goes to Prague

The other stands that worked for me were those that demonstrated the craft of theatre. In general this time I felt there was too much insufficiently explained 'final product' displayed on 2D flat screens that dissociated you from the reality of the creative process.

The **Spanish** stand was a pleasing exception to this trend with a large, welcoming table where you could sit and listen to a talk or look at exhibits. Running along each side were beautifully illustrated books about the Odeon scenic workshop, Sarandaca theatrical sculptors, Ras set and costumes makers for carnival and other skilled craftspeople. These showed each stage of the development in the workshop and the set up on stage and then finished with the production on a flat screen above.



Focus – The Journal of the Association of Lighting Designers – “More art, less tools...”

Austria showed an interesting film about the challenges of creating David Fielding's massive set for *Andrea Chenier* at Bregenz. Sound engineers were seen drilling every hole for the loud speakers while dangling from the end of a rope high above the lake and then being collected by boat when they had finished. Try that on a windy day!

Canada's interesting and well presented stand had long benches of colourful, touchy-feely fabric samples produced by Francois Barbeau while researching materials for the Cirque du Soleil shows. The informative panels described the constant experimentation and boundary pushing to find and/or combine fabrics that are reasonably priced, light to wear, tough, look good and of which there will be an on-going supply. There were fascinating examples of experimenting with integrating LED light sources, or embroidery with electric wires, into fabrics and of adding fluorescent

colours to give more depth and vivacity.

Another way in which some countries created a greater sense of performing on stage was by animating their model sets. **Serbia** created a series of small performance stages like enlarged model boxes that they brought to life by using live holographic video streaming of performance art projects.

Step by step lighting...

...is becoming more discussed and better represented at PQ. This year for the first time Light and Sound had their own section for five days in the Nova Scena Theatre (formerly the Laterna Magika). Curated by the PQ general commissioner, scenographer Boris Kudlicka, and by UK sound designer Steve Brown it featured an exhibition, lectures, demonstrations, panel discussions and film screenings.

The exhibition entitled *Light Speaks* was on a flat screen and showcased the work of some fifteen lighting designers from

around the world including Willie Williams from the UK and Jennifer Tipton and Kenneth Posner from the US. As with many of the flat screen exhibits in the National section there was no explanatory panel about the exhibition or biographical information about the lighting designers which seemed to me a missed opportunity. Having said that there were some great images on the screen such as Enrico Bagnoli's for *Die Walküre* at La Scala.

One of the highlights of the **Light and Sound section** was the screening of a new documentary film about Josef Svoboda made by his grandson, Jakub Hejna. This was an entertaining, informative and touching portrait of a ground breaking Czech designer. Using fascinating archive footage the film ably demonstrated Svoboda constructing spaces with light, intensifying the drama with architectural shafts of light and working at the mechanisation of his scene changes until they



were musical in their fluidity of movement.

Next day the screening was followed by a panel discussion about the contemporary relevance of Svoboda's methods of working. It was agreed that he took the use of mirrors and semi-transparent materials to another level that still influences us today. There was also consensus that his use of light as a physical material both communicating with the actors and moving the story forward is ever present in current productions. If he were alive today he would undoubtedly

be experimenting with interaction between the live actor and the digital image.

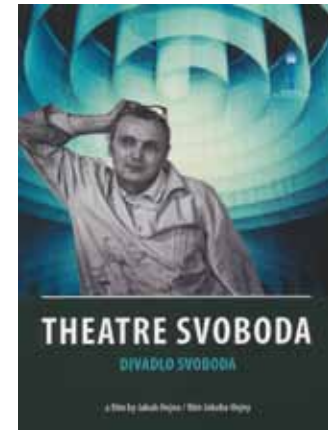




Photo: Peter Ruthven Hall

with video light advocating that it permits more control of colour, shade and movement. Certainly the way he made it flow seamlessly down a staircase reminded me of that impressive cascade at Chatsworth, but I am no expert in these matters!

Architecture was much better represented at PQ this time with a dedicated space in St Ann's Church. Each of the exhibits had to be the same dimensions – basically the size of a rectangular dining table for six. **Britain** contributed a very neat model [shown left] and high quality supporting booklet, *The Guthrie Thrust Stage - A Living Legacy*, tracing the history of the thrust stage first designed by Tyrone Guthrie from the Assembly Hall, Edinburgh in 1948 through to the new RSC Theatre at Stratford. **Spanish** made the most of a compact space by displaying photographs of each of their new architectural projects on a revolving postcard stand.

Throughout PQ there was an increased emphasis on



being environmentally aware by recycling costumes and using recyclable materials – cardboard was much in evidence! As one would expect the student section

was the most inventive in this respect [above] using old style television and computer monitors with the screen and innards removed as model boxes and the base

was the most inventive in this respect [above] using old style television and computer monitors with the screen and innards removed as model boxes and the base

On the national stands there were a number of talks about lighting. The **Finnish** stand discussed, 'When does Lighting Design Become Art?' Little surprise that there was

no conclusive outcome to this topic which could be debated endlessly! PhD student Robert Faguy demonstrated a miniature mobile stage on the Canadian stand that he lit



of wooden wine boxes to display sections of models. In the dimly lit depths of the Veletrzní Palace was an entirely new section called Extreme Costume where costumes made of unusual materials or traditional materials pushed to the limit, were on display. **Mexican** costume designer Ivan Sanchez' dress made of individually lit recycled plastic bottles [above] certainly drew the eye, but I suspect like Salvador Dalí's infamous costumes for *Salome* would be a challenge to wear.

August / September 2011



Brazil's golden triga winning national stand contributed to this theme too with a dress designed by Luciana Buarque [above] made of a combination of materials including sweet wrappers.

All in all PQ 2011 was as stimulating, challenging and thought provoking as ever and I came away with a very beautiful Svoboda quote, '*Light is like the bow of a violin that plays the scene.*' 🌸

All photos by Rosy, except for Svoboda discussion and British architecture exhibit.

Prague Quadrennial 2011 Awards

Golden Triga: Brazilian National Stand for their exhibition *Characters and Frontiers: Brazilian Scenographic Territory*

Best Stage Design: Croatia for their compelling scenography created in collaborative theatre projects

Best Theatre Costume:
New Zealand for Emma Ransley's *InHABITing Dress*

Best Realization of a Production: Brazil for Teatro da Vertigem's production of *BR-3* on the Tiete River, Sao Paulo

Best Work in Theatre Architecture and Performance Space: Mexico for Teatro Ojo's *Within a Failing State*, Greece for the Machine Theatre and the New Stage for its National Theatre

Best Use of Theatre Technology:
Croatia for their *Numen/For Use* project

Best Exhibition in the Student Section: Latvia – Students in the Department of Scenography at the Art Academy

Most Promising Talents in the Student Section: Annick Lavallée-Benny (Canada), Jakob Oredsson (Sweden), The Norwegian Theatre Academy for their conceptual installation *Erase to Play*

Best Curatorial Concept of an Exhibition: Hungary

Special Prize for Excellent Sound Design: Great Britain - Dan Jones for his sound design for *Kursk* at the Young Vic and Kathrine Sandys for her sound design for *Harsh House* for Aldeburgh Music/Faster than Sound.



Notes from a Flying Visit to PQ 2011: Nick Moran

P ¹² Q

011 PRAGUE QUADRENNIAL OF PERFORMANCE DESIGN AND SPACE
PRAŽSKÉ QUADRIENNALE SCÉNOGRAFIE A DIVADELNÍHO PROSTORU

Before I became a university tutor I'd never heard of PQ. For those in a similar position, it is an international celebration of all theatre design – both design for performance and the architectural design of performance spaces – and it happens in Prague (hence the P) every four years (the Q stands for Quadrennial). PQ dates back to the days of the post WW II cold war – and was at least in part a rouse designed to allow theatre practitioners on different sides of the Iron Curtain to meet and swap ideas. The great Josef Svoboda was playing with large scale projection and walls of light at the Lanterna Magika in Prague around this time, so there was plenty for Western theatre makers to come and see. These days, the role of lighting is less prominent – but I'll come back to that. As I understand it, the international theatre organisation OISTAT dates from around the same time. PQ is run from a small office in Prague, but depends heavily on the support of OISTAT.

At the heart of a contemporary PQ are the professional exhibitions – of stage design and theatre architecture. Each contributing country curates an exhibit that shows the world something of what has been going on in their country's performing arts over the previous four years. [The national OISTAT centres take responsibility for putting together their national exhibits. The roles of the UK OISTAT centre are split between SBTD and ABTT.] There are lots of different approaches, as Rosy has described in the preceding pages. As I wandered around, my reactions to the various exhibits ranged from deep gloom (Germany and others yet again showed beautiful images from large scale productions, and failed to credit a single lighting designer) through to a kind of bliss in the exhibit of Latvia – which was like being inside a large animated musical instrument – and Norway, which was a mechanised Heath-Robinson style creation, with

added video. Both these used light, and dark (and sound) to great effect. I was pleased to learn the Golden Triga (a model of a three horse chariot – and top prize) for a national exhibit went to Brazil. Their exhibit was full of beautifully presented evocations of a huge range of performance styles, and made me want to learn Portuguese and emigrate.

The architecture exhibition was in the spectacular de-consecrated and radically renovated St Anne's church. The UK exhibit was a beautiful perspex box illustrating the history of "the Guthrie Thrust" – which I believe will live at the offices of The Theatre's Trust on Shaftbury Avenue. The Italian exhibit was an animated table – it bucked and growled at me as I walked past, though perhaps I shouldn't have taken that so personally. Apparently the various people involved in selecting an exhibit from Italy could not agree on a single project...



Nick in heaven:
Brazil [left] and Latvia



Alongside the professional work is another international celebration – for students – called Scenofest. As well as more national exhibits, there were workshops and performances, and lots of excitement. The idea of Scenofest is to get the next generation of theatre designers from as many countries as possible working together and learning from each other. The students from Central returned full of inspiration and plans for international collaborations in the future – so that seemed to work.

There was lots to enjoy and to celebrate in Prague this year, but in the home of Svoboda, I am sad to note that lighting design seemed to be poorly served. The advertised professional lighting and sound workshops turned out to be Steve Brown's excellent Sound Kitchen, and a series of projection master-classes. The lighting design exhibit was 10 plasma TVs showing stills, mostly of over-saturated images of hi-tec rigs – as

if lighting design is all about the equipment in the air and not the art on stage. This is especially depressing since there is a nascent Institute of Lighting Design in Prague, lead by Jan Beneš, but neither he nor the OISTAT Lighting Design Working Group were asked for input. (I hope to write something about Jan's work in a future *Focus*). I think the ALD needs to find some people to help promote lighting design at the next PQ – in 2015. If you have been to a PQ as a student – you could be that person. Contact me and I'll put you in touch with the right people...

Alongside all the exhibits and excitement, for me there were also some academic meetings. Meeting design teachers from all over the world is at least as important to me as seeing the exhibition, though I'd be the first to admit its not how many *Focus* readers would choose to spend time in Prague. These meetings are organised through OISTAT. One I missed, but

heard good reports from was the meeting of the aforementioned Lighting Design Working Group. Headed by Henk van der Geest, this group is planning some interesting projects and meeting over the coming year – including workshops on the low-tec art of lighting in Cyprus, or maybe Egypt. These workshops would be open to practitioners as well as teachers, and I'll try and keep *Focus* readers informed as things progress.

My final meeting in Prague was a forum on Sustainability – I've been to three in the last six weeks, and missed another two, and I'll be putting together a digest of the best ideas towards the end of the year. Of course I travelled by air – and increased my carbon footprint significantly in the process – but I did learn from two sources that – providing our audiences switch off their lights at home before they visit our shows, we all produce less CO2 by doing the show than by not doing it! And with that I flew back to London. 🍁

Knight of Illumination Award 2010 Nominations Theatre Category: Dance

Yaron Abulafia for *The Awakening*, Rambert Dance/UK tour
Using warm side-light it wasn't just beautifully lit, the lighting was part of, and aided, the content.

Charles Atlas for *Tate Project*, Tate Modern Turbine Hall.
Michael Clark Co./Tate Modern
As daylight gave way to darkness, Charles Atlas's lighting told one where to look as light cut the zebra-striped floor – no mean feat with audiences on all four sides. The overall effect was devastating, the lighting utterly essential for not just its illumination but its dramatising and transforming effect.
Photo [top]: Hugo Glendinning.

Felipe Ramos for *Dunas*, Sadler's Wells
Felipe Ramos' lighting allowed for the creation of extraordinary shadows that meant the dancer appeared to dance with himself.
Photo [bottom]: David Ruano.



Knight of Illumination Award 2010 Nominations Theatre Category: Drama

Paule Constable for *Luise Miller*, Donmar Warehouse

From steeply angled light pouring down through haze from high balconies to sidelight that seemed to edge and wrap bodies in velvet, Paule Constable's sculptural handling of light made you feel the Donmar was an enormous space. An outstanding piece of work in an immensely impressive year.

Photo: [below] Johan Persson.



**Paul Keoghan for *Novecento*
Donmar at Trafalgar Studios 2**

Tremendous, counter-intuitive design: a piece set entirely on a boat using absolutely no nautical elements. Literal representation was banished in favour of presenting the emotional and dramatic content. Instead of predictable flashes of lightning for a storm sequence, Paul Keoghan used intense colour to convey the storm's emotional effect. A superbly indivisible piece of work from the entire production team.

Photo [above]: Marc Brenner.



**Bruno Poet for *Frankenstein*, Olivier,
National Theatre**

Boldly visible, vivid lighting that literally electrified the drama – in keeping with the central idea of the narrative. A fizzing, flashing ceiling of bulbs suspended over the stage changed the entire dynamic of the Oliver stage. The lighting help turn the production into a major event.

Photo [above]: Catherine Ashmore.

Knight of Illumination Award 2010 Nominations Theatre Category: Musicals



Neil Austin for *Passion*, Donmar Warehouse

On a simple, barely changing set, Neil Austin created multiple locations and temperature, using light to evoke emotional heat, chilly pain and dramatic claustrophobia.

Photo [left]: Johan Persson



Jon Clark for *Into the Woods*, Regent's Park Open Air

As both the natural light waned and the musical's tone darkened, Jon Clark's lighting became increasingly powerful and sinister, a crucial element in an extraordinary reconception of Sondheim's show.

Photo [above]: Regent's Park Open Air Theatre

Hugh Vanstone for *The Wizard of Oz*, The London Palladium

Exceptional lighting enhanced the sets' bold use of colour to seriously vivid effect. No-one in the business is better at building a series of cues up to a "button, thereby nailing the final moment of a song to win instant applause. There's a very strong case for saying his lighting makes the show.

Knight of Illumination Award 2010 Nominations Theatre Category: Opera

Paule Constable for *Die Meistersingers von Nürnberg*, Glyndebourne
The distinctive lighting controlled the unshowy tone of the entire production. The second act's inexorable shift from hot sunshine into romantic darkness was richly sensuous. Sidelight streaming in had an intensity that Vermeer would have envied. Photo [right]: Alastair Muir.



Wolfgang Goebbel for *Tristan und Isolde*, Grange Park Opera
For the bright, salty reality of the sea setting in Act I, the imaginative depiction of ecstasy in Act II and the shadowy, painful intimacy of Act. 3 - you knew at every instant where to look, what to think, what to feel. Photo [above]: Alastair Muir.

Peter Mumford for *The Damnation of Faust*, ENO at The Coliseum
A production demanding a dazzling variety of contrasting worlds, all of which were held together by Peter Mumford's lighting. The range of moods and periods, from the opening scene that turned the stage into a haunting Caspar David Friedrich painting to a scene of fiercely bright Nazi calisthenics, felt like watching a succession of paintings come to life. Photo [bottom]: Tristram Kenton.



A Theatre Project, Richard Pilbrow

reviewed by James Laws

Richard Pilbrow, ALD Member #1 and our President, has always been an innovator and an inspirational communicator. In this book he takes his free thinking to the not-so-gentle art of auto biography. He has lived though and guided the

growth of our industry, so this is our story as well as his.

After an illustrious career of some 55 years, 54 of which have been taken up with running Theatre Projects, his brainchild, you would expect a march-past of the triumphs and you get lots of these. You would hope for the shoulder-rubbing with the famous; these are certainly on tap. Perhaps the most memorable encounter is with Elaine Stritch and her dog.

But there is a hint of much more below the sub-title: *A Backstage Adventure*. We are promised *Triumph, Disaster and Renewal that Changed Stage Lighting and the Shape of Theatre*. What's this? *Disaster*? The tradition in reporting lives well lived is to sweep the messy bits of any setbacks under a very accommodating stage carpet, the sort with a trapdoor for the debris beneath. This is not the Pilbrow method.

Effectively, this is the warts and all story of Richard Pilbrow's irresistible drive to create, to protect and to reinvent Theatre Projects (TP). Whether the going is easy, or it gets unfeasibly tough, he invites his colleagues to give their side of the story and they certainly do, with, I would guess, the absolute minimum of editing and the maximum of candour. These contributions don't appear contrived or intrusive; it's as if all the people concerned are in the same room.

Life was genuinely tough for TP as it diversified and became international. Paradoxically, just at the time that TP was exporting the British way of theatre consulting, whilst earning worldwide theatre industry respect, it was fighting for its survival at home. The reader gets a ringside seat. As a classic case of Creatives being turned over by Big Business,

it is gripping, salutary, instructive but difficult reading.

However, this is at least as much the story of the author and his families as the saga of the empire that was built, crumpled and remodelled. The human story that runs in parallel is not sensationalised or laboured. Given the crushing events, there is absolutely no need for emphasis. But the wear and tear on the man and his dream make a distressing narrative, before the story of the emergence of the consulting firm that still runs today brings a degree of calm.

There was never a time, from his schooldays onwards, when Richard Pilbrow wasn't working towards a vision of backstage creativity. He says that *my greatest attribute and my good fortune was my innocence... I never knew what could not be done*. The



things that could be done, all industry firsts, include scaled lantern stencils for neat lighting plots, jumpers for ease of plugging up, use of fibre optics in 1979 and such small matters as creating the profession of Theatre Consultant. He brought together the people to start the ABTT, the SBTLD (Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers, whose golden anniversary we celebrate this year), the SBDT and, from out of these two organisations, the ALD. So, this book shows our roots.

I could elaborate on or add to this very incomplete list but it would be far better if you read the whole of





A THEATRE PROJECT

By Richard Pilbrow with David Collison

A BACKSTAGE ADVENTURE

PLASA Media Inc, 2011, £32.99

ISBN: 978-0-9834796-0-4

manner, to accommodate many of the portraits down the wide outer margins, leaving the landscapes and set pictures to edge neatly into the text.

David Collison, an early TP colleague, is credited as a major contributor to this book. He held the company together at a desperate time and he was the first sound designer in a British musical.

On the theatre consulting side, there is input from colleagues past and present, which means the cream of the UK consulting world and a number of project leaders from the US and beyond. Most of the UK projects are covered. Sometimes the simplest schemes have resonated far into the future. A case in point is Christ's Hospital School Theatre, Horsham, a very early courtyard design where the intimacy between audience and stage established

a theatre form that has influenced three theatres at Stratford, amongst others.

It is easy to forget that Theatre Projects had a division for producing theatre and films. Their initial impact on the West End was with *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum*. They were riding high with *Fiddler on the Roof* at Her Majesties; they went into films with *Swallows and Amazons* and into television with the epic series *All You Need Is Love*. Then came the years when the finance evaporated and the group went through a painful catharsis, from which only consulting survived.

You must discover the private side of Richard Pilbrow for yourself; his world unfolds before you as you read. But I will comment that an island in the Hebrides must be the perfect place for a man, a family and the dog to unwind when the rest of



the world is so full-on.

There are 460 imperial octavo pages in *A Theatre Project*; they all (including the Hebridean excursions) have their reasons for being there and most have lovely or at least apposite illustrations.

The visual records appear to be complete. The first hand-cut stencils? Page 25. Richard Negri's initial concept for the Manchester Royal Exchange? Page 235. The sumptuous index and the timeline by year bring it home. This is the record of the most complete non-acting theatre life I know of.

Richard would be content

with some words from Judi Dench, as his epitaph. They appeared in *Radio Times* when she was starring as Sally Bowles in the TP production of *Cabaret*:

"The prime thing about Richard is that he's a marvellous encourager-I have rarely seen him with a low expression or a very depressed look- he's a giver, and he's marvellous at making one feel that things are all right, even perhaps when they're not".

This is a book from a giver. His particular gift to us is the ALD and right now *A Theatre Project* is a gift at £32.99 – and I don't say that lightly. 🍀



ABTT Theatre Show 2011 Fifty/50 seminar

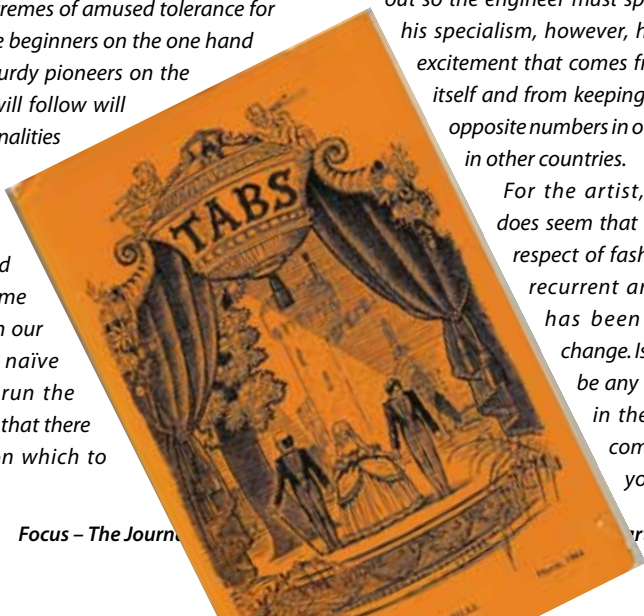
Richard Pilbrow, Ali Grant, Vince Herbert and Mike Robertson were in discussion on the past, present and future of lighting ...
...we asked **Mike Robertson** to replay his thoughts to *Focus*.

By sheer happenstance I found a book in the office last night that seems rather perfect for today's discussion – Strand Electric's *Tab's Magazine*, March 1964, Golden Jubilee Edition. So, nearly fifty years ago this was Fred Bentham's comment on the changes from 1914 to the then state of the business. This excerpt is entitled "They were no stupider".

In drawing conclusions from our brief history one has to avoid the extremes of amused tolerance for the fumbblings of the beginners on the one hand and envy for the sturdy pioneers on the other. Those who will follow will differ from the personalities in this book only in the amount of knowledge they have to build on. Incidentally some appear to approach our subject with such naïve enthusiasm as to run the danger of believing that there is no knowledge on which to build at all.

As to nostalgia for the fun of the early days, there is just as much room for initiative now as then and each should be able to pursue his enthusiasms wherever they may lead. It may, perhaps, no longer be possible to be an all-rounder generally informed in all the branches that go together to make up the art and technics of stage lighting. Today as the technical frontiers move further and further out so the engineer must specialise. With his specialism, however, he has all the excitement that comes from the work itself and from keeping ahead of his opposite numbers in other firms and in other countries.

For the artist, however, it does seem that other than in respect of fashion, which is recurrent anyway, there has been little or no change. Is there likely to be any great change in the future? It is common to hear young lighting



enthusiasts of today talk of lighting being in its infancy but so others said in the forties , and yet others in the twenties and even before that. The truth is that once the limelight and the arc-lamp were established most things became possible in stage lighting to the artist who had ideas and was prepared to take the trouble to carry them out.

Certainly in each of the fifty years or so since the beginning of Strand Electric he could have nearly all the instruments he needed and probably all he wanted. His dimmers and switchboards may have been crude and make us smile today but they worked for him if he had anything to express. If he had nothing to say then he was no worse off with what he had then than he would be today with all the latest equipment to hand.

Stage lighting is an art and one sees in this history the same old tricks and effects turning up again and again. Optical projection in the theatre, for example, is as old as the magic lantern, and Loie Fuller and her lighting men seem to have covered in the early 1900's almost everything in the way of moving and scenic effects that this technique had to offer. When it is realised that they also used spot lighting of silks

and muslins from above, from the sides of and from under the stage and to this they added ultra-violet effects, one wonders if there is anything new left to do at all. Even "Colour Music" can claim a pioneer as far back as Father Castel in 1734!

Is there anything new? Well, of course there is – the equipment itself, sometimes in the basic design but more often in the way it is made and in its greater efficiency from the engineer's standpoint. Even if we wanted them we could no longer afford the cost of hand-made lanterns. Again some spotlights are two or three (sometimes ten times) as bright as their predecessors of the twenties and thirties. In lighting control one man can, with our modern instruments, do the work of many. Just as well, in view of the shortage of labour. We can, if considered desirable, abolish all operators, except at rehearsal, without too much technical difficulty.

The back cover takes its call with a sign reading 'The End of Act One'.

So the excerpt there ends with control. That's much easier these days but then to be honest for the working part of my 37 years it always has been. With the possible personal exception of

replotting *Blood Brothers* for Mr Vince Herbert with each scroller on a submaster and if you cleared too early the resulting noise was guaranteed to put the producer a step further towards apoplectic.

As with channel control, so to did beam control of the units get addressed and refined throughout the decades. We would be hard pushed to see a bar of profiles without top hats these days. So it's interesting to me that when moving lights first came along without the refinement of today's ones we sort of went backwards initially in terms of cruder focus and the then unforgiving nature of the sources.

However, the possibilities of one automated unit far outstripped its conventional counterpart.

With tungsten movers and total beam shaping and control possibilities those blips in our aesthetic roughness are now a thing of the past. The options available now interest me most in terms of the transitions between lighting states; from the perennial crossfade comes live shape shifting, colour changes and animations using moiré patterns for example.

Recently I lit a production of *Oedipus* which opened with a single three-inch bar of light on the king's eyes that pulled out in vision to take in the eyes of the dozen chorus and then zoomed and shuttered to their heads then bodies, opening the story up like the widening shot of a camera.

ABTT Theatre Show 2011 Fifty/50 seminar discussion on the past, present and future of lightingMike Robertson's thoughts.

It's hard to think how we could have achieved this in the past, save for a military-size battery of followspot operators.

Similarly when lighting the stage version of *On the Waterfront* we used hard shapes to delineate an area of hard geometry that morphed to the next shape of the next scene that was inspired to me by a Mondraïne painting. This could not have been realised at all if it weren't for the wonderfully accurate tools of today.

Such approaches are great but the need for visual cohesion, colour composition and the contrast of what we decide to hide or show and how that is revealed will never change when lighting is being designed.

I think in the old days we justified each unit and visualised it massively in advance. I personally find a reticence in using the armoury of moving technology; a deferment of major parts of the design process can be left until the lighting session and worked out on the shop floor.

When John Osborne launched an attack on Noël Coward and Terence Rattigan about being old fashioned and that he was the future of playwriting, Coward happily agreed with the sagely advice to Osborne that in order to break the rules he suggested he first understood them.

I think the same is true for lighting design and we mustn't be afraid to discuss the nature of art,

geometry, design, architecture and couple it to theatricality and storytelling before thinking carefully of the hardware that we are going to employ to realise the lighting in hand. It has concerned me that some students that I have encountered over the years know perfectly what each unit is capable of and yet don't spend a decent amount of time in the Wallace Collection or the National Gallery.

The cautionary tale now is the demise of the domestic light bulb and what that might signify to our industry. If the home is the first area to be tackled the theatre will not be unscathed. Of course sources are much better and continue to improve all the time in terms of efficiency and quality but we have to be careful not to be forced into a political future that may be more about the appearance of correctness than excellence.

In talking of the future I would also mention that fees seem blissfully unaffected by time. It is perhaps the natural intangibility of light that causes the failure to reflect its true weight in reward or the recognition of its value. Commonly a review will extol the virtue of the set. A well crafted 'Dear Editor' letter should extend the invitation to come and see it in the scene dock at lunchtime under fluorescent conditions as it looks more like ten tons of tat.

The fees alone are one part of the money

argument. Another is the demand that we make on the hire companies as we expect increasing quantities of kit and yet sometimes don't appreciate the individual worth of each unit.

Tungsten has many charms and I hope it will remain central to our palette in the years ahead. I also wonder if video might be the single future in fifty years time? After all, with multiple projection sources you could light anything with myriad colour, shape, quality and transitional properties.

















The future might be orange, let's hope it's also bright. #



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L-R: Dominic, Sam and Marc

STUDENTS SEE THE LIGHT

Dominic Houlison, Marc Gough and Sam Jeffs, three 2nd year students from the BA(Hons) Theatre Practice/Production Lighting course at Central School of Speech and Drama decided to light the south façade of their campus in Swiss Cottage as part of their outdoor lighting research project.

Dominic reports...

The event held on 16th June 2011 at CSSD was the conclusion to a research project into architectural lighting. The original idea was formed when we wanted to find out more about exterior lighting installations, and lighting for outdoor events.

The concept of the piece was to show how Central has developed both structurally and as an institution in the community. We also wanted to use the project as a platform in which to advertise the forthcoming public productions at the school.

We began by talking to professional industry practitioners who gave us guidance on how to approach lighting the façade of the building, and then spent some time looking into the different methods we could use in order to light the building. Looking at different colour palettes and lighting angles to make the work dynamic and bold, we held regular bauprobes to test out ideas and reach our final decisions. Through doing this we were able to analyse how light would take to each of the different and unique fabrications of

the building, allowing us to make decisions on the best locations for equipment, and what fixtures would be best for getting the visual impact we wanted.

Our inspiration was also derived from the work of Max Keller and James Turrell; both artists in their own right who use light, colour and space to create stimulating imagery with contrast, dynamic and focus. We felt this was something we wanted to be able to convey, and used this as a stimulus in producing their own work.

As part of our research we also worked alongside White Light to see the practical realisation of how to light buildings. This gave us the opportunity to experience how outdoor architectural lighting systems work. We were able to see current systems in operation on The Southbank Centre and The Old Vic.

The project was made a reality with the generous support from White Light and MA Lighting, who both supplied equipment to help support the project. It's so fantastic that these



companies have supported us in this event. Both teams at White Light and MA Lighting have been very helpful and cooperative in order to make the event a success, we would like to thank them very much for their continued support to the school.

In increasingly difficult financial situations for the University sector and cuts facing the Arts, we really believe it's important to show how much these courses are vital to guiding young people into gaining specialist skills in the arts and entertainment industry, leading them to become the next generation of leading practitioners who shape the entertainment industry.

We battled the great British weather to get all of the kit set up, working and programmed within one day. With spirits remaining high the event went up nevertheless. The project finished with a 10 minute light to sound presentation. 🚩

The lighting and media was designed and programmed by Dominic Houlison and Marc Gough with the media programmed and constructed by Sam Jeffs.



Giving Shape to the Darkness

The 2011 Edward Gordon Craig Lecture, given by **Paule Constable**.

“I love technology, but lighting design is not about lights – its about story telling – about giving light some kind of meaning on stage. ... Technology should not play a role in conversations about light... talk to me as an artist ... about anything but light. ... talking about light is hard – like talking about water or the sea”. And so we joined Paule on a journey into inspirations and motivations, keen observation - and the joys of running.

The darkness Paule strives to give shape to is of course the darkness of the unlit performance space, but it is also the darkness of her subconscious - “where most of my ideas come from”. She told us of her love of running and the joy of being outside with a horizon – it “empties my head... it’s as if I have to sneak up on myself and ask questions when I least expect them.” She relies on “a vast library of images in my head” - and this is where the keen observation pays off: “what do we really mean by dawn?” Moments of change in the text of a play often coincide with moments of change in light, dawn or dusk for example. To realise the light of these key moments is often the most important job of the lighting designer. She asserts that “shifts in the quality of light make the audience change their feeling or experience without them being fully conscious of how that has happened.”

Paule loves pinning her work to real ideas – then pushing them to suite the style of the play. She gave the example of inspiration coming from the observation of a particular event – crossing the Thames on a push bike: “Just being somewhere and looking was all I needed”.

Paule seeks inspiration from other sources too. One she told us about was Olafur Eliasson’s *The Weather Project* in the Turbine Hall at Tate Modern in 2003; “was made of light and it communicated people’s memories of weather – we watched the setting sun that never set.” For Paule, this was “a real situation tweaked to communicate with us”. (If you were not lucky enough to see *The Weather Project*, there are lots of images on the web).

Paule treats any space she is working in as a landscape – “what brings light into this landscape?” Her aim is to find a clear language of qualities of light, that will work through the whole piece. She went on to illustrate this point with examples from her recent work: *Blasted* at the Lyric Hammersmith was set in a hotel room – the language for night time lighting started with the light from the practical fixtures in that room and in the off stage rooms - “start with the real thing ... only add what’s really necessary. Make the additions relate to the angle and colour of the real sources. Don’t cheat unless you really have to.” For the day-time scenes



she poured light in through the net-curtained windows, adding soft bounce-light as if from the missing fourth wall.

On a much larger scale, the designs for Wagner’s *Ring* in Strasbourg, with long term collaborator set and costume designer Rea Smith, and director David McVicar, includes a polished metal back wall, discreetly lit to provide an abstract take on a horizon, and an approaching storm. Paule and Rae “work-shopped” with materials and light in Strasbourg to come up with this much praised design.

Paule is keen to acknowledge the heritage her practice builds on. Some of the key practitioners she mentioned included: Harold Ridge’s early work developing the cyclorama in the 1920s; Jean Rosenthal’s pioneering work lighting dance and Josef Svoboda, whose work at the Lanterna Magika in Prague from the 1950s onwards is a major influence.

Paule concluded by sharing some more general thoughts on the practice of lighting design. For her, experience is about not panicking when things go wrong, and having an adult lifetime of store visual information to draw on from her subconscious. Whenever possible, escape the “tyranny of technology” - although lighting design depended on technology it is not about

Top: Paule's lighting for 'Blasted' at the Lyric Hammersmith, photo: Simon Kane.

Bottom: 'Gotterdammerung' at Strasbourg, photo: Alain Kaiser.

technology. She recommended asking performers how light on stage affects them, and told us that opera singer Sarah Connolly finds cross light makes her feel safe – providing a boundary between light and dark.

Her advice to the many students in the audience: *"focus on what you know, not what you don't know"; "planning makes you free to look"; "never turn your back on your creative self"*.

Co-sponsored by the Society for Theatre Research, the annual Edward Gordon Craig lecture offers the opportunity for theatre researchers and the wider public to hear from a leading contemporary "scenographer" - using the widest possible definition of that somewhat contested term. Paule was the first lighting designer to give a Craig Lecture, and she certainly rose to the occasion. She had recently returned from New York, where she received a Tony for the lighting design of *War Horse*. This short article can not do justice to the inspirational lecture Paule gave, which I hope will soon be available in full to a wider audience, via the web-site of the Central School of Speech and Drama. 🍷

Nick Moran



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