

ALD #

# FOCUS

The Journal of the Association of Lighting Designers

*"More art, less tools..."*

***In the backlight this issue:***

• Yaron Abulafia talks at CSSD • PLASA Focus in Leeds • ALD@50: SBTLD into SBTLD will go! • Philip L. Edwards @50 • City Varieties Leeds .. and much more...

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June / July 2012

*Bruno Poet wins an Olivier Award for his lighting of Frankenstein.*

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**4:**  
**MJ**  
Mark Jonathan's regular roundup of things lighting things cycling and things professional



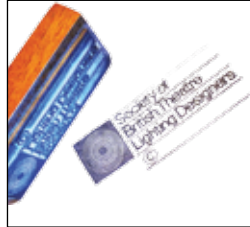
**14:**  
**Office Oracle**  
Ian Saunders with reminders about membership issues, diary dates and the AGM.



**26:**  
**City Varieties Leeds**  
Kelli Zezulka reports from the tour around this treasure.



**8:**  
**PLASA Focus**  
Nigel Lawson Dick, Kelli Zezulka and James Laws paint a picture of the event, and the seminar



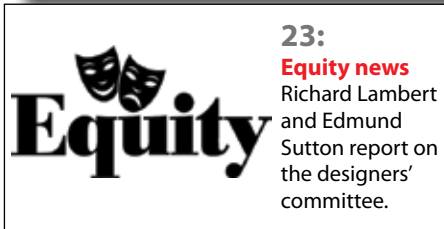
**19:**  
**ALD@50**  
James Laws explains how 'SBTLD into SBTD will go!'



**32:**  
**ABTT 2012 Preview**  
What to see and do for ALD members on 13-14 June.



**12:**  
**International LD and Academic**  
Nick Moran hosts a lecture at CSSD by Yaron Abulafia.



**23:**  
**Equity news**  
Richard Lambert and Edmund Sutton report on the designers' committee.



**34:**  
**Was it really 50 years ago?**  
Philip L. Edwards recalls his cues and memories.



**The well-travelled MacBook of Mark Jonathan started to play up when he was overseas in April, so while waiting for his bag to come through at London City Airport he booked into the 'Genius Bar'... where else?**

## A PROFESSIONAL LD'S VIEW

**W**ith only one night in London the pressure was on. Moments later, my appointment was booked on my iPhone and I was on my way to the Apple Store in Covent Garden. While a repair was possible I thought it was a warning sign and Jon from business sales had been dispatched to chat to me. I had a very enjoyable half hour spending money, under Jon's guidance, and came out of the store with a lovely new MacBookPro. It was in 2007 that I was first frog-marched into the Apple store in Glasgow by Arla Keen and Bob Dickson from Scottish Opera. They dragged me over from the dark-side, replacing my PC with Mac. What a happy day that was!

### A cousin in Dublin

A day later, I was back in Dublin for *My Cousin Rachel* with an atmospheric set by Francis O'Connor that blocked out all the lighting positions barring the three windows in the set on SL, two doorways on SR and FOH. It all went remarkably well so, maybe in future I'll stop bothering to fill bars overhead with lights.

My aspirations to keep fit were somewhat scuppered by the 'discovery' of this calorie laden black stuff called *Guinness*! First night-one pint, 2<sup>nd</sup> night 2 pints, 3<sup>rd</sup> night 3 pints, 4<sup>th</sup> night 4 pints! However, some of the effects of the Irish nectar were countered by '*Dublin Bikes*'. What a great idea they are; 2 euros for 3 days or 10 euros for a

year. You just touch in with your registration card and off you cycle for up to 30 minutes a time, for no additional charge.

How quickly I changed; terrorizing pedestrians who wander across roads without looking while they stare at their smartphones. Waiting at red lights or wondering about nipping through?

### Apples in Glasgow

From Dublin, I flew straight onto Glasgow for pre-production meetings of operas that are coming up later in the year. I popped back into the Glasgow Apple store where a slight glitch on the Mac was quickly solved. The only thing I'm heart-broken about is that Apple is dropping iWeb. So many of us, including me, made our websites using this product but once you start using *The Cloud* you'll lose the hosting for your website. Watch out.

**MAY**  
**1**

By some amazing chance, Peter Mumford, Rick Fisher, Ian Saunders and I were free to meet with the charming Cecilia Friederichs and Carl Mulert from the American stage designers' union *The United Scenic Artists*.

We were reminded how lucky Stage designers are to have a strong union with 'muscle' in the USA, that can negotiate good agreements with reasonable fee structures, please see my 'top tip'. It



# A PROFESSIONAL LD'S VIEW

Mark Jonathan

was great to hear that the *The United Scenic Artists* office enjoys our editions of *Focus* and Cecilia told us they were quite envious of it.

**MAY 3** I was lucky enough to be invited by Dame Monica Mason [right], the Director of The Royal Ballet, to the private view at the ROH of the exhibition celebrating her 54 years of loyal service working for the Royal Ballet. She started as a dancer, progressing to principal and then repetiteur. Later becoming assistant Director under the great choreographer, Kenneth McMillan. She followed Ross Stretton as Director in 2002. She has only not been in the Royal Ballet for the first 15 years of her life. Despite having an enormous company of dancers to manage she always had time to talk to me about the lighting of ballets. She always has a twinkle in her eye and I've always enjoyed the visual understanding that the eyes of a dancer bring to a production.

Least I should forget the odd occasion when ballet rehearsals *with light* might come to a standstill. Quickly, Monica's voice would be heard over the God mic. "What's the problem?" she would say to the principal dancer. "I can't dance in this light," came the curt reply from the famous principal dancer... Dame Monica in the stalls to me in the Grand tier, over the God mic, "Mark, darling, can you do something for Alina?"



Dame Monica Mason. Photo: Johan Persson

"Yes," I cry, shouting apologies as I start to grab groups to get more light on the floor and less light in the dancer's eyes. To be fair to me, on this occasion the rehearsal had begun 10 minutes before I'd finished focusing let alone starting lighting; such can be the pressure of time. You have to hold your nerve when the lighting isn't right, and so we lighting designers are often on a rather public journey to perfection. Through all those times, Dame Monica would be gentle and encouraging. I'm delighted her commitment to ballet was recognised in the recent Olivier awards at which she received a life-time achievement award; it was very much deserved. Try and catch the exhibition which is on until July at the Royal Opera House.

**MAY 4** The next day, I'm on my way to Geneva, Switzerland. I manage to meet Bernd Pukrabek for a few beers. He's lighting the opera *Macbeth* at the Grand Theatre. We compare notes, again see my comments in *top tips*. I travel onto the mountains for some 'relaxation' cycling up mountains – serious fat burning to deal with the Guinness and Apfelstrudel consumed on recent jobs.

So, I exchanged my 3-gear Dublin Bike for a 27-gear mountain bike [right]. Goaded up the mountain by skiing friends who got their own

back for some of the steep and deep off-piste I'd taken them on in the winter. It was quite challenging, one moment we were cycling past alpine flowers and the next pushing our bikes through thick snow that hadn't melted yet and climbing over pine trees that had come down across the track. At least, my thighs and leg muscles will be firm and ready for my next ballet job at the ROH along with the natural mental tranquiliser that I so enjoy after the pressure and darkness of the production desk. ❄️



June / July 2012

## Lightin' Tips 'n Tricks:

### Top Tip

*If you are negotiating a contract to work in the USA check if it's in a theatre that has a United Scenic Artists agreement. If in doubt consult with the USA office.*

*Meanwhile, I hear that German drama LDs are accepting fees to light operas that are **way below** the going rate. My German colleagues who light opera are not amused and neither am I. If you and your agent are unsure about the going rate for a production email the ALD office and we'll check our database.*

### Top Trick

Here's a great 'trick' from James Farncombe:

*"I have found the iPad increasingly useful, especially during focus. Open a pdf of your lighting plan in 'iAnnotate' or equivalent app and you have a backlit plan (no more torches and wrestling large sheets of A0 into submission) and the ability to mark off the lanterns you've focussed with the brush of a finger (as well as adding notes and corrections). No more searching for a pencil in the dark. I use this in tandem with the Eos iRFR app, and it's especially useful for checking through a focus quickly. You can also take a photo of each focus as you go, should you need to."*



Watch out for James Farncombe's lighting on *Ragtime* and *Midsummer Nights Dream* which play in rep until September 8<sup>th</sup> at Regents Park. *Love, Love, Love* is currently downstairs at the Royal Court. In September you can see *Three Sisters* at the Young Vic, and in the autumn James will light Alan Bennett's new play in the Lyttelton and from mid-November you can his lighting for the *Count of Monte Cristo* in the Olivier.

## Nigel Lawson Dick hits the road

This was the ALD's first trade show outing of the year, so I packed the bags and headed for Leeds; this year with some company in the car as my wife Sue joined me for the trip. Last year it was all spring and sunshine and it was hard to know that we were in the UK, but on this occasion we are back to normal – grey skies and what the meteorological fraternity so delicately describe as 'precipitation'. They do that, incidentally, so they don't get caught out because not only rain but also hail and snow can all be described as 'precipitation' so if it turns from one to the other... well, the forecast was right!

It was a late-ish arrival to the hotel which meant we were in for a 'crack of dawn' get-in at the Armouries. On finding our allotted space, and thinking that even the smallest of cats would be safe from any threat of being swung, it didn't take too long to fill the stand and make it all look like 'home'.

The Leeds show is growing in size steadily, and of course it is notable for the 'free lunch' for exhibitors and visitors alike. I must say, they do





*The Pulsar Stand*

look after us well and the food seemed to flow in a never ending stream; jolly good too.

On Tuesday morning I joined other ALD members for the chance to visit the City Varieties, they having just completed a major refurbishment of the building (see page 26). Our friends at the ABTT kindly held the fort for us back at the Armouries for an hour. It's always fun to look around another theatre and the City Varieties had lots of interesting history and anecdotes. But it was only a brief visit and we were back to the show.

*June / July 2012*



*ETC's Graham Parker (right) demonstrates the new Source 4 LED, as ETC's Marketing Events Coordinator, Sophie Pierronet (far left) looks on. Photos: James Laws*

As it happens business was a bit slack on the first day, so we hadn't missed anything – but it was good to see some of our members dropping by after the theatre visit, and gradually it built up to a trickle of enquiries.

On the second day things perked up a bit and business was a bit more brisk. I had quite a few names on my 'visitor register' but of course it's difficult to know how many of the membership enquiries really turn into firm action. We live in hope!

*See you at ABTT – it will be all new for all of us! 🍷*

## ALD Seminar

Kelli Zezulka reports on...

# The next 50 years of lighting design

As part of the Professional Development Programme at this year's PLASA Focus, the ALD hosted a seminar entitled "The Next 50 Years of Lighting Design". Chairing the event was Scott Palmer, co-education rep for the ALD and a lecturer in scenography at Leeds University. Panel members were freelance lighting designers Guy Hoare and Colin Grenfell, Richard Owen from the Royal Exchange in Manchester, and ALD members Theo Chadha and Kelli Zezulka.

The remit of the discussion was advertised as follows:

*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 stage lighting designer a passing fad and are we all destined to become video designers?*

Scott started by introducing the panel – Guy making a perfectly timed entrance thanks to a diverted train from London that morning – then opened the discussion by giving the audience a brief biography of Appia, the "father of modern lighting design", who "envisaged light taking an active role in the production, not just simply as illumination". While this may seem a rather fundamental role of lighting design to those of us practising it today, this idea of Appia's was rather revolutionary at the time. Appia also



### The panel

from left to right:

**Scott Palmer** (chair), ALD Exec member and lecturer in scenography at University of Leeds; **Richard Owen**, Chief Electrician, Royal Exchange Theatre; **Theo Chadha**, third-year lighting student at University of Leeds; **Kelli Zezulka**, ALD Exec member; **Guy Hoare**, freelance lighting designer **Colin Grenfell**, freelance lighting designer.



Photographs: James Laws

If you have an hour to spare, the seminar was recorded by PLASA and it's well worth watching on YouTube at [//plasa.me/cgk3n](https://plasa.me/cgk3n) or by searching for 'The Next 50 Years of Lighting Design'.

worked with projection, which he saw as the future of theatre lighting design, with its ability to add texture to the scenographic space. Colin advocated a return to the Appian ideal of using light to portray atmosphere rather than naturalism. Similarly, Richard and Kelli both touched upon light acting as signposting throughout the emotional journey of a production, beyond simply recreating 'reality'. Guy praised Appia's use of shadow and emphasised his own preference for darkness and for being more efficient with light on stage. Theo spoke of Appia's use of new technology and suggested that perhaps the 'great innovators' of

today are those that appropriate visual effects technology (such as pixel mapping and LEDs) into an artistic role for use in theatre.

Throughout the next 30 minutes, topics covered included the development of technology, the role of the lighting designer, working with video designers and the use of projection, and the importance of the collaborative process. There was about 20 minutes at the end for audience questions, which extended the topics already covered, but questions also arose concerning show budgets, creative uses of technology, audience expectations, and the process of lighting design. 🍷



# INTERNATIONAL LD AND ACADEMIC

Nick Moran hosts a lecture by Yaron Abulafia

How does lighting design work, in a “less tech more art” kind of way? How does it affect the audience, and the performers? Yaron Abulafia is researching exactly this for his PhD thesis, and in between times, he creates some of the most stunning lighting design around. He was a nominee in the dance category at the Knights of Illumination last year, and *SUB*, his latest work for Rombert, is part of their current season.

The title of his doctoral thesis is : *Light after Drama, The Semiotics and Poetics of Light in Contemporary Performance*. His supervisors include the eminent composer and director Heiner Goebbels, and among the panel who will judge the thesis is the famed scenographer Pamela Howard. How he finds time to make stunning new work and carry out research for a doctorate only he know – but yes, I am jealous. The night after premièring *SUB* at Sadler’s Wells, he talked about both his researches and his practice at a lecture I was very happy to host at Central.

Yaron grew up in Israel and was initially bewildered by the ‘post dramatic’, post modern theatre he found in Northern Europe. What was a lighting designer supposed to do, or expected to do, in the making of these pieces? This is not a theatre that prizes verisimilitude and its

a long way from the world of for example, the big-budget musical. This theatre comes from the tradition of Brecht and others that insists on making plain and obvious the theatricality of the event. The light on stage may represent the sun at mid-day but it should be clear to all the spectators where it is really coming from. At the same time this tradition expects a lot more of its light than illumination and representations of nature. Light should create atmosphere, architecture, metaphor as well as being the beams from the lanterns – but how does it do this?

The Greek philosopher Aristotle first wrote about Poetics around 350 BCE – about what made a ‘good’ poem and how ‘good’ poetry works to affect us. Most of us tend not to be so emphatic about defining ‘good’ these days, but these ancient ideas have helped shed light on fields of study way beyond poetry. Yaron talked about investigating a *Poetics of Lighting Design* – and his thesis when published promises to give us new ways of thinking and talking about light on stage.

When it came to talking about his practice, Yaron told us that in much of his work, light is an initiator rather than a response. In *SUB* for example; “*Triggers for lighting design came before choreography*”. For Yaron, the integration of the

lighting designer from the beginning of the process, both practically and artistically, gives the lighting a chance to be more dominant with more signification. “*The hierarchy of the traditional text-based theatre-making process is dissolved – the dominance of the text is replaced by other elements, which are allowed to retain their materiality.*” The spectators experience multiple layers of meaning and signification – without an automatic hierarchy of signifiers. “*The autonomy of light in the theatre ... makes light a narrator in its own right*”. As they say in the movies, with great power comes great responsibility!

Such deep research has fundamentally influenced Yaron’s practice. As he explained to one of the students after the lecture, its not a matter of choosing to start from theory or from ‘gut’, since the theories are now part of his ‘gut’. On the evidence of his lighting designs for *SUB*, that can only be a good thing for his lighting designs. I strongly recommend looking out for his work on stage, but meanwhile you can see and read more at Yaron’s web site [www.yaronab.com](http://www.yaronab.com) #

Right: *SUB*, lit by Yaron Abulafia. Photo: Chris Nash



# Office Oracle: News from Ian's production desk

## ABTT Theatre Show 2012

**Old Truman Brewery, Brick Lane, London E1  
Wed 13<sup>th</sup> & Thurs 14<sup>th</sup> June**

Just in case you haven't heard already(!) the ABTT Theatre Show is moving to the 'Old Truman Brewery' in East London for 2012.

The ALD will of course have its trade show stand there again. We are stand number 100 which is in an area with other associations and drama schools in the left hand rear area of the main exhibition space, close to the bar area, and no longer in the basement!!

Please come by the stand and say hello. You can check on your contact details, status of your membership, pay your subscriptions by cash or cheque or just drop by for a chat. You never know who else you may bump into! You can read more on page 30.

## Members Meetings at the ABTT Theatre Show

Two opportunities to meet up and take part in the ALD have been arranged at the ABTT 2012 Theatre Show.

Firstly, the Executive has decided that it is now time to re-visit the strategy document drawn up in 2007 which was the blueprint for the future development of the Association between 2008 – 2013. With Peter Mumford now settled into the position of Chair, it is time to re-assess and plan for the future.

The Executive is meeting for a day long discussion of the issues in mid-July and are looking to report back to the membership at the AGM in September with its conclusions and any actions that constitutionally require a vote to be held.

To aid this process, we will be holding an open meeting for all ALD members to attend at the 2012 ABTT Theatre Show on **Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> June from 2.30pm in Corbet Place\*** to canvas opinion and discuss issues that you, the Association's members, feel are important to address as we move forward into the next phase of our development. What do you want to see the ALD doing over the next five to seven years? What do we currently do that could be better. What don't we do that we should?

Since the last strategy was put in place there have been successes such as *Focus* moving to a full colour landscape layout, the setting up of the fees database, meetings with agents, the lobbying and support for the TMA and *Knight of Illumination Awards* for lighting design. Equally, some hopes have not yet got off the ground.

Even if you are not able to attend the meeting at the ABTT show we want to hear from you. Email your thoughts and ideas to [future@ald.org.uk](mailto:future@ald.org.uk)

The second meeting is to discuss the situation of **emerging lighting designers**, so if you are a recently graduated designer, or an old hand who can offer some advice to this active sub-group of

ALD members, please come along to the meeting in the **seminar room** on **Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> at 16:30**. Full details on page 37.

\* *Corbet Place is the meeting room/bar across the car park from the seminar room.*

## 2012 Olivier Awards Winner

Congratulations to **Bruno Poet** for winning the Best Lighting Design award for *Frankenstein* at the Olivier Theatre in the 2012 Olivier awards.

As well as supplying the lighting for the event, White Light also sponsored the Best Lighting Design award.

Other ALD Members nominated were **Howard Harrison** for *Anna Christie* at the Donmar Warehouse and **Hugh Vanstone** for *Ghost The Musical* at the Piccadilly Theatre and also for *Matilda The Musical* at the Cambridge Theatre

The 2012 ceremony was held at the Royal Opera House on Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> April and broadcast live on Radio 2 and the BBC Red Button service.

For a full list of the winners in all categories, please visit the Olivier Awards website: [www.olivierawards.com](http://www.olivierawards.com)

*Right: Alex Passmore at the production desk with full view of the stage, photography: Edward Armitage.*

*Far Right: Frankenstein at the National Theatre, London.  
Photo Catherine Ashmore.*

*Front cover photo courtesy Bruno Poet*





## Office Oracle: News from Ian's production desk

### 2012 Tony Award Nominations

Congratulations to ALD Member Hugh Vanstone who is nominated in the best lighting design of a Musical category for the Tony Awards for *Ghost the Musical*.

#### Best Lighting Design of a Play:

Jeff Croiter for *Peter and the Starcatcher*  
Peter Kaczorowski for *The Road to Mecca*  
Brian MacDevitt for Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*  
Kenneth Posner for *Other Desert Cities*

#### Best Lighting Design of a Musical:

Christopher Akerlind for *The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess*  
Natasha Katz for *Follies*  
Natasha Katz for *Once*  
Hugh Vanstone for *Ghost the Musical*

The Awards ceremony takes place on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> June in New York City. For a full list of the nominees in all categories please visit: [www.tonyawards.com/en\\_US/nominees/index.html](http://www.tonyawards.com/en_US/nominees/index.html)

### 2012 Critics' Awards for Theatre in Scotland

ALD members have also been nominated in the Best Design category of the CATS awards.

These annual awards are now in their tenth year and are open to any piece of professional theatre substantially produced in Scotland in the 12 months from May to April is eligible.

The CATS will be awarded on Sunday 10th June in a ceremony at the Tron Theatre, Glasgow.

*A Christmas Carol, National Theatre of Scotland*  
Graham McLaren (set), Gavin Glover (puppets), **Paul Claydon** (lighting)

*Betrayal, Citizens Theatre Company*  
Colin Richmond (set), **Chris Davey** (lighting)

*Pass the Spoon, Magnetic North Theatre Productions in collaboration with Red Note Ensemble.*  
David Shrigley, Nick Millar, Alice Wilson and Susie Hunter (production design) **Simon Wilkinson** (lighting)

*Further than the Furthest Thing, Dundee Rep*  
Neil Warmington (set), **Philip Gladwell** (lighting), Elizabeth Ogilvie (water)

### 2012 AGM

The 2012 Annual General Meeting of the Association will take place on **Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> September**.

The time and venue is yet to be confirmed, but the meeting will follow the same pattern as the last couple of years whereby the official business part of the meeting will take place late morning, a professional members' meeting in the afternoon. We will look at the possibility of having other break out meetings if they are required, so drop the office an email with ideas or thoughts.

So that we can organise a venue and catering that will cope with the numbers wishing to attend, please contact the office to register you interest, and we will send out further details asap.

We are aware that finding a mutually agreeable date to hold such an event is difficult to achieve but by placing it on the day after the proposed event at the V&A (see last issue) and the monthly social, we hope that members based away from London might be tempted to come to both events and stay overnight on the Friday.

### [www.ald.org.uk](http://www.ald.org.uk)

The Executive is also currently looking at a re-design or re-vamp of the ALD website. The growth in both the membership size and online communication has left the current site looking a little outdated and under specified in the age of social media.

We are also asking members to add their input to the discussion so that we can draw up



list of features for the new site before taking it to companies to tender for the work. We imagine that significant funds will be required for the work, and it may even need to be phased over a longer period of time, but the process has begun and we would like to receive feedback, again to [future@ald.org.uk](mailto:future@ald.org.uk)

### Subscription Fees

2012 / 13 subscription fees are now due. Many thanks to those members who have paid theirs already, whether by cheque, bank transfer, PayPal or standing order. We had £22,000 deposited into the bank account during April which is in the process of being worked through to reconcile the standing order payments to the member's database. To ease this process, please include your membership number as a payment reference to any payment you make.

Those members who do not pay by standing order and still owe money after the ABTT Theatre

Show will be contacted directly by either letter and / or email to chase payment. If for any reason you do not wish to continue your membership, please contact the office to let us know so that we do not chase you unnecessarily.

If you are in any doubt as to whether you owe any monies to the Association, please contact the Office with immediate effect, or drop by our stand at the ABTT show, where we will be able to receive payments by either cash or cheque.

### Showlight 2013 Bursaries



There is now less than a year until Showlight 2013 – the international conference organised by and for lighting professionals – is held in the fairytale Czech Republic town of Český Krumlov on 18-21 May 2013.

The ALD will be once again offering sponsorship of three places for Professional Designer & Professional Members of the ALD at the conference which will cover registration and contribute to other expenses related to

attendance, at this most fascinating symposium on lighting design.

This event only happens every four years and it is always interesting, enjoyable and, unlike the other trade shows, completely focused on the creative use of light in a wide variety of applications. Next year's conference looks set once again to bring together many world-class designers from the worlds of theatre, film and broadcast as well as leading people in the lighting industry. The hospitality of host cities in the past has always been exceptional, offering many opportunities to meet other delegates.

We will release details on how to apply for a bursary later in the year, but get those dates into your diary if you wish to attend and for more details about Showlight please visit the website [www.showlight.org](http://www.showlight.org)

### Interactive members

If anyone wondered what **Mike Robertson** has been doing for a living, then you catch up with one of his recent projects at [//tinyurl.com/LD-mike-robertson](http://tinyurl.com/LD-mike-robertson)

And the Exec's very own **Declan Randall** has given an interesting interview to Philips that you can read here: [://tinyurl.com/declan-interview](http://tinyurl.com/declan-interview)



# Diary Dates 2012

## 13th & 14th June

ABTT Theatre Show, London \*

## 13th June 14:30-16:30

Members' Open Meeting, ABTT Theatre Show

## 14th June 16:30-17:30

Emerging Designers' Meeting, ABTT Show

## 1st July

Deadline for subscription payments

## 15th July

Deadline for *Focus* August/September copy

## 9th – 12th September

PLASA 2012, Earls Court\*

## 9th September

Knights of the Illumination – London \*

## 28th September

Members V&A Event and Monthly Members' Social Evening: *sponsored by ALD*

## 29th September

**ALD Annual General Meeting**

*\*the ALD will have a presence at these shows*

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## Focus Magazine

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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](mailto: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!**

## Professional Designer

**Mike Brown\***, Salisbury

**Mohammed Ghanem\***, Egypt

**Colin Grenfell\***, Edinburgh

**Matt Veitch\***, London

## Professional Member

**Alexander Lyon†**, Guildford

**Dani Bish†**, Cardiff

## Associate Member

**Ian M Grey**, Leeds

**Johnathan Rainsforth**, South Shields

## Corporate Member

**Point Source Productions**

*\* re-joining the association*

*† from Associate Member*

# SBTLD INTO SBTLD WILL GO!

**James Laws** explores the early history of the ALD by looking at its predecessor, The Society of Theatre Lighting Designers (SBTLD).



In this issue we explore why the busy and rapidly expanding SBTLD decided to embrace all disciplines of design and become a non-independent part of the Society of British Theatre Designers (SBTD), apparently in a matter of 3 months in 1975.

There were no e-mails, mobiles, faxes or answering machines in 1975 but the very efficient postal service was well used by the Executive and a large number of meetings were convened.

Precipitous change is usually motivated by fear or by recognising and seizing the moment. Having read these extracts, you can draw your own conclusions.

First, a word about 1975. We had just come through an awful winter of coal strikes in the UK, where theatres, to remain open, had to pledge to reduce their power consumption by 40% across the whole theatre operation. No, we couldn't go round fitting LEDs or CFLs and say "job done"! Halogen was a novelty and inevitably there was much pressure on lighting designers and house electricians to reduce the lighting rigs on stage, for the duration. I remember lighting a full-up farce with 12kW at the Theatre Royal Windsor; a lovely exercise but one that the audience and actors didn't appreciate.

So, the power of the trade unions was very real and understood. In our own world, Equity was the union for stage management. The National Association of Theatre Kinematograph and Television Employees (NATTKE, later BECTU) claimed to represent all other ranks backstage. The design world felt vulnerable and unrepresented, as NATTKE did not understand the world of design and Equity was very actor orientated.

It is in that context that the SBTLD membership found the following letter rattling through their letter boxes in early May:

10 Long Acre,  
LONDON, WC2.

1st May, 1975.

Dear Member,

There will be two meetings at the end of May both of which are for their separate reasons of great importance to the Society.

The first is social. At 6.30 p.m. on Tuesday, 20th May at 29 King Street, London, W.C.2. there will be an investigation into "The History of Stage Lighting in Great Britain from the turn of the Century up to the second World War". This will take the form of a Brains Trust of extremely distinguished contributors to stage lighting which I will attempt to Chair.

The following day at one o'clock on Wednesday, 21st May there will be an Extraordinary General Meeting of the Society to discuss the situation with regard to our relationship with scene and costume designers. Your executive have met with representatives of the various informal groups of scene and costume designers who have been, in the last few years, discussing the formation of an association of their own. Various developments are taking place around the country with regard to Union Membership for Scenic Designers and as you know some designers have been in conversation with Equity about the possibility of a designers section of Equity being formed. Your committee has been associated with these discussions. Equity has so far been cautious in their response because of N.A.T.K.E's claim to represent all designers and backstage personnel in the theatrical industry. The designers now feel that regardless of what final decisions are made from a Union point of view their interests are best served by the formation of a designer's society so that, at the very least, they can speak as one body representing all scene and costume designers.

cont/

A meeting was recently held between representative designers and your executive, where the proposal was made that we should consider accepting the scene and costume designers into our membership and thus expanding the Society to include all designers working in the theatre. This would mean the change of name of our society to the "Society of British Theatre Designers". Obviously each "skill" within the society could pursue its own technical interest, but we would attempt to form a consensus opinion about matters to do with standards of the profession and conditions of employment. The development is a logical one although some of us will, I think, feel sentimentally attached to the small lighting club that we used to be. Your executive feel, however, that in a changing world we can no longer continue to ignore developments within the theatre Unions and believe it of the greatest importance that we and our fellow designers in the industry attempt to find a position from which we can pursue a common course.

This decision is obviously of the greatest importance and needs to be discussed very fully. We are not, therefore, at this time proposing a resolution on the subject and the meeting on the 21st of May will be a discussion of the 'pros and cons' of this proposed development. Should, however, the membership wish to proceed a special meeting will be called at which time a formal resolution will be placed before the society.

Please come to the next two meetings, the one vitally concerned with the past of the profession to which you belong and the second with the future.  
Come and raise your voice.

Every best wish.

Yours,



RICHARD PILBROW.

# THE SOCIETY OF BRITISH THEATRE LIGHTING DESIGNERS

PRESIDENT: Joe Davis, 44 Buckingham Road, Shoreham by Sea, Sussex  
CHAIRMAN: Richard Pilbrow, 10 Long Acre, London, W.C.2  
SECRETARY: Eric Baker, 5 Albert Palace Mansions, Lurline Gardens, S.W.11  
TREASURER: Charles Bristow, 25 Claremont Close, London, N.1

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By the 20th of May the argument had crystallised, fuelled by a letter from America. Jo Mielziner was an eminent American lighting designer at a time when the first British LDs were working in the USA, establishing reciprocal agreements and meeting union opposition.

I would like as an American member of the Society to make a comment on the subject of stage designers whether they be specialists in scenery, costume or lighting—they should all be in the same organization. As you well know, I have been a strong advocate of this here in America. Although lighting specialists are members of the same organization over here, there is a tendency for a lack of complete "togetherness" in the profession. The contacts between the designer who is not doing his own lighting and the man or woman who is working solely on that phase of job are far too often separated by time and space. I am particularly thinking of the early creative thinking. I would hate to see British designers joining a different organization. I would see it as a loss to them and a loss to you people.

Fifty-three years ago, we designers here in New York had a chance to form our own Society. Because no one had the gumption to do something about it, we were finally coerced and literally forced to join what is literally a labor union. We still suffer from being a small minority in a large group who neither read plays, attend the theatre nor give a damn about anything but shorter hours and longer pay.

Kindest regards to my fellow members.

Very cordially yours,

Jo Mielziner

JM:pm  
cc. Joe Davis

FILE:	
RECEIVED	
13 MAY 1974	
18	18
Eric	✓



By the 18th of June plans were sufficiently advanced for a name change to be suggested and the scene designers had an ad-hoc committee, on a stronger basis than they had been able to manage in the past.

I enclose a notice for the Special General Meeting to be held on the 10th July to consider the change of name of the Society and a new constitution. As you all know the idea of this is that the Society enlarge itself to include all professional designers working in the theatre. It is the recommendation of your executive that this move be made, after a series of very carefully considered meetings and after a meeting with representatives of the ad hoc committee of Scene Designers who included in addition to John Bury, Ralph Koltai, John Napier, Timothy O'Brien, Reece Pemberton, Patrick Robertson and Allen Tagg.

It is our hope that this new and greatly strengthened society would represent the interests of all designers throughout the Theatre, and attempt in these very difficult times to formulate a collective opinion as to what steps, if any, should now be taken with regard to the existing theatre unions or whether designers should remain an independent body.

It is our intention that the new society should have standing committees in lighting, scene and costume design and thus the social and /or technical part of the SBTLD will continue to the extent that you all might wish. (We might even get a few scene and costume designers coming to our meetings which might swell our occasionally somewhat sparse attendance)

There was also good news from the USA and hints of a 'relationship' with The Society of Television Lighting Designers (STLD), which never made any formal progress.

I'm pleased to be able to tell you that Lee Watson informs us that the proposal with regard to the reciprocal arrangements with the United Scenic Artists in the USA has been accepted by that body.

We have also been approached about the possibility of establishing a relationship with the Society of Television Lighting Designers, which your Executive will explore.

The next meeting of the SBTLD was on the 10th of July, when the name change was approved and the future was viewed with open minds. Would we become a union?

The Chairman read a letter from Edinburgh and Lothian Theatre Trust Limited which had been sent to John Bury. This letter asked for advice on Designers' Membership of the Union. It served to point out that it was very necessary for our Society to reorganise itself as soon as possible. The meeting's immediate reaction was to recommend Designers not to join N.A.T.K.E. without some thought.

The Chairman then put a proposal before the meeting. The proposal, which had been drafted by the Executive, was that the Society of British Theatre Lighting Designers should change its title to the Society of British Theatre Designers. Joe Davis proposed that the resolution be accepted and Richard Pilbrow seconded it. The proposal was put to the meeting and carried unanimously.

All members of the Society have been sent a copy of the Society's new constitution, which has been legally vetted, together with a proposal of a postal ballot. This was discussed at length. John Bury explained the need for a postal ballot to help the young designers working in the provinces who are unable to attend meetings and could not otherwise express their views. Joe Davis thought the Society should hold meetings in the provinces from time to time to enable young designers to attend. The questions of the changed constitution and the postal ballot were put to the meeting and the vote to accept them was unanimous.

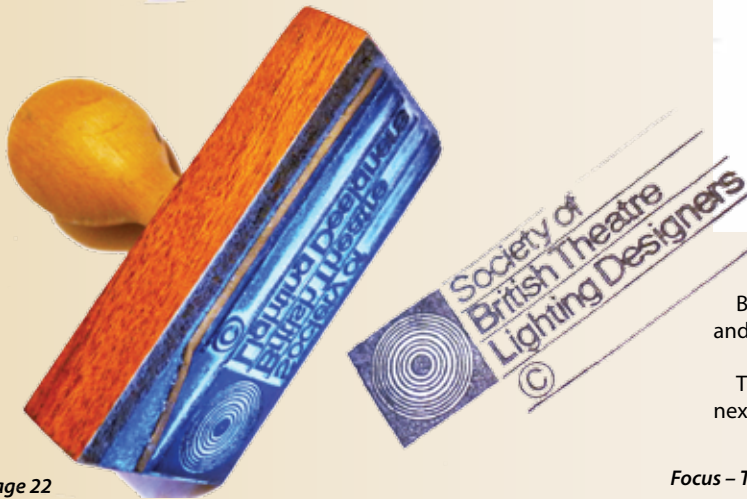
Nick Chelton asked the meeting if they thought the Society was going to become a Trade Union. The matter was discussed at some length around the table. Richard Pilbrow summed up and said he felt we should first recruit as many designers as possible and further development could be discussed in Committee. There was a general feeling that we would prefer to remain as a Society.

John Bury addressed the meeting with regard to our relationship with N.A.T.K.E. Richard Pilbrow asked if there were any N.A.T.K.E. members present. (There were two-one not paid up) Basil Dean addressed the meeting and stated that he felt the Society should stay with the artist and not the trades. Richard Pilbrow referred to the letters he had received from the American members, all of whom shared Mr. Dean's opinion. Richard Pilbrow once more summed up and said he felt that the Society would have to go one step at a time. The immediate need was, as he had previously stated, to recruit as many of the Scene Designers into the Society as possible.

The structure of the Society under its new heading was discussed. It was felt that two Scene Designers and two Costume Designers should be co-opted on to the Committee as soon as possible. A resolution that John Bury should become co-Chairman of the Society was discussed at length. Francis Reid offered to stand down as Vice-Chairman in favour of John Bury. This was not accepted and it was decided that John Bury would become Joint Chairman pro tem. until the next A.G.M., when the matter could be put to the vote. It was also resolved that two Scene Designers and two Costume Designers would join the Committee. John Harrison proposed that the resolution should be accepted. This was seconded by Tony Corbett and a vote taken. The resolution was passed unanimously.



The new SBT was in being. The six pioneer lighting designers of 1961 had ultimately enabled a Society to include all who designed in theatre.



Dear Member,


/ You will see from the enclosed minutes that the Society endorsed unanimously the proposal that our name should be changed to the Society of British Theatre Designers and that the new constitution should be adopted. We are therefore now a Society which all theatre designers may join.

The programme now is that after the summer holidays, in early September, a meeting will be held between your Committee and the ad hoc Committee of Scene and Costume Designers. Out of this will come the new enlarged ad hoc Committee authorised in the minutes. Subsequent to this meeting, when we know which of our colleagues in the scenic and costume branches of the business are going to join us, both a public announcement will be made and all designers across the country will be invited to join.

Needless to say, every present member of the Society will be doing a good job by spreading the word and encouraging his colleagues to join us. Only by establishing a wide membership will we be effective or indeed able to afford to be effective.

More anon.

Yours,

  
RICHARD PILBROW

But where would the new membership look for a union to represent them and would lighting designers lose their distinctive voice?

This is scarcely a cliff-hanger but it is a convenient place to pause until the next issue of *Focus*. ✳



## The Equity Theatre Designers' Committee

Richard Lambert and Edmund Sutton

### Pay

There is an offer on the table at Equity regarding a pay increase of 2.5% on ITC minimum rates on all creative team agreements. Voting and outcome will follow in the next *Focus*.

### Committee Structure

There's been a proposal from the Equity Financial Services Working Party to change Equity's structure in regard to their Committees. One of the driving forces for this has been to cut costs.

This has been met with considerable disapproval as the proposed changes could have replaced specialist committees with regional sub-groups, the fear being a diluted voice from designers.

Richard Lambert attended at Guild House and Edmund Sutton

conference-called into a special meeting called to discuss this very topic. Following this and other committee meetings, the Council reviewed nearly 100 pages of feedback from the previous two months of discussion, much of which supported the need for change, but with questions on the detail and a view that members needed more time to consider the new structures.

The Council has decided on *"a further period of consultation, including a discussion at this year's Annual Representative Conference, before making any final decision of the future structure of Equity's democracy."*

There is now a push from Equity to establish an online branch of the Union.

### Payment defaults

Following contact from several ALD members about unpaid invoices, Richard has raised these issues with Equity. One of these cases was of no surprise to Equity as there are already claims against one particular Producer. This member has now joined Equity and is receiving legal assistance alongside the other Equity members.

### Richard's personal comment

Equity will use resources to support their members – another reason why the more designers we have join Equity the stronger our position when something goes wrong. It can take just one unscrupulous producer to unbalance our ability to survive in these difficult financial times!

### No pay/Low pay

Discussions continue over the No

*Pay/Low Pay* 'opportunities' offered by Producers. A few Equity members have brought to the attention of Equity some producers who appear to be taking advantage. The minimum wage regulation has been compared to pay offers. This is an ongoing issue invoking many strong opinions from both sides!!!

### Annual Representative Conference

Edmund Sutton went to Birmingham for Equity's Annual Representative Conference (ARC), as one of the representatives of the Theatre Designers' Committee. Some important things happened.

### New Structure

The proposed changes to the structure of Equity have been mentioned at the start. Our motion to ensure that it would be Equity's policy that



all professional specialisms and minority groups within the Union were represented effectively within the governing body passed with a two-thirds' majority, which makes it binding on the Council.

The Directors' Committee's motion also passed, to say that members of the 'Creative Team' should retain direct election to Council. The proposals for change and the actual structure that will emerge are not concrete, but the motions mean that designers' voices will continue to be heard in the union.

#### **New Media**

A motion passed called for Council to look at the benefits and dangers of digital media for all members. Originally covering just variety performers, it was extended to all, particularly

relevant in the days of attempted copyright buy-outs by large and supposedly prestigious publicly-funded arts organisations.

#### **Other Matters**

Is anyone feeling bullied, and not just by producers? A motion was passed to hold a symposium on bullying in the arts. Please let us know if this is of relevance to you, or if you have any examples.

It is now Equity policy to lobby the various drama schools to include business training in their courses.

Equity will also be lobbying the Arts Councils to keep artistic directors running theatres, rather than chief executives.

We offered a small prize for anyone who could come up with a better term than 'Creative Team'

for the non-performing people responsible for the created aspects of a production that did not involve the word 'production'. Answers on a post-card to Designers' Committee organiser Paul Fleming at Guild House by the end of September or to [pflaming@equity.org.uk](mailto:pflaming@equity.org.uk). (This is only open to Equity members! To join, visit [www.equity.org.uk](http://www.equity.org.uk) and click 'Join'.)

Anyone who wants to know more about the ARC or the proposed changes within Equity, please get in touch.

For more information about what Equity does and can do for you, please see the leaflet enclosed with this issue of *Focus*. 📄

# MEETINGS

Will Evans and Kelli Zezulka



## ALD Members Meeting

**13 June 2012 14:30**

**ABTT Theatre Show, London**

All ALD members are invited to attend because we want to canvas opinion and discuss issues that the Exec can take forward to our development planning meeting in July. This will be an important opportunity for all members to take part in discussing ideas that are under reviewed now, and adding some new ideas, hopefully. Even if you are content with what the ALD is and does now, please come along to this important meeting to hear the views of others as we all know that the ALD, like its members, has to move with the times to keep up to date. One immediate issue to progress is an updated website, and we're sure that everybody has a view on that subject!

## Emerging lighting designers'

**meeting 14 June 2012 16:30**

**ABTT Theatre Show, London**

We're pleased to announce that we'll be holding another *Emerging Lighting Designers* meeting at the ABTT 2012 Theatre Show in the **Seminar Room**. Building on feedback and comments from the first one held earlier this year, we're hoping to create a series of informal meetings to help those of us starting out and getting established in lighting design.

There will be a financial element to the meeting and we have a specialist theatre accountant (Andy Pollard from PL Accountants) on hand to talk through the tax minefield that self employment can sometimes include. We hope to also have an agent to answer questions about getting work and how to negotiate a good fee. Plus, we'll have some more established LDs, including James Farncombe, on hand to chat to us about how

they made their way up the ladder and found the jobs that got them established. Hopefully we'll be able to exchange advice, tips and tricks in this meeting to help those already on the first 'rung of the ladder' move a further step up.

*The meeting will be open to associate, professional or professional designer members only.*

If you are planning to attend please email [meetings@ald.org.uk](mailto:meetings@ald.org.uk) to let us know so we have an idea of numbers.

## Die Walküre, Opera North

**Friday 15 June, Leeds**

Peter Mumford has designed not only the lighting but also the concert staging for Opera North's touring *Die Walküre*, which is playing at Leeds Town Hall on 16th and 20th June. Peter is hosting an ALD member's visit. Details soon.

## September Social & V&A meeting

**Friday 28th September, London**

We are currently investigating whether the ALD would be able to hold a Members' Meeting at the *Transformation & Revelation Exhibition* towards the end of its time at the V&A. This would entail an opportunity for members to visit the show and also a talk by ALD Chair Peter Mumford who has his exhibit for the Birmingham Royal Ballet production of  $E=mc^2$  from the 2011 Cardiff leg on display once again.

This event is planned for Friday 28th September, which is also the day of the Monthly Members' Social evening for September. The ALD will act as drinks sponsor for this meeting, although we might re-locate from the usual venue in the West End to one closer to the V&A. More details will follow as we confirm them. 🍷

# ALD Visit to The City Varieties Music Hall in Leeds

words by **Kelli Zezulka**

photos by **James Laws**



On 18 April a group of ALD and ABTT members gathered in the foyer of the recently refurbished City Varieties Music Hall in Leeds. The venue reopened last year after a £9.9 million refurbishment which saw this historically significant venue restored to its former Victorian splendour and now benefits from improved facilities for both performers and customers.





The City Varieties started as a music room above the White Swan Inn and opened in 1766. In 1865, Charles Thornton bought the White Swan, rebuilt the pub and music room and rebranded the venue as “Thornton’s New Music Hall and Fashionable Lounge”. Music halls were much less formal than theatres. Performers were often heckled and were even occasionally the target of food, drink or other items thrown by unsatisfied audience members. As the popularity of music halls declined, the management began staging lower quality variety performances and nude acts, which were popular at the time.

The City Varieties became famous worldwide in 1953, when Barney Colehan hosted the first episode of a BBC show inspired by old-time music halls. *The Good Old Days* ran for 30 years and eventually became the longest-running variety show on the BBC.



At one time, there were more than 300 such music halls nationwide but few now remain in working existence. The City Varieties is now one of only four music halls remaining in the UK and the only one to have operated continuously as a music hall. Recently, the venue has hosted Phil Jupitus (in the Red Ladder production *Big Society*) and comedians Michael McIntyre, Dara O’Brian and Ed Byrne.

We were fortunate to have Tom, a technician at City Varieties, available to show us around the stage and technical facilities. The proscenium stage is raked and measures 22 ft wide and 17 ft high, with a stage depth of nearly 14 ft. Overhead, there are twelve motorised flying bars and one hemp bar, plus three lighting bars with a fixed rig. The tabs are operated manually from downstage left (we were treated to a rather impressive demonstration of the tabs from the stage side).

Lighting-wise, there are 147 (an odd number, but no one quite knew why!) 3kW dimmers controlled by an ETC Ion lighting desk. The fixed rig includes LED pars and floods as well as an assortment of pars, fresnels and profiles.

Front of house, there are six rigging positions each with six circuits; UV cannons form part of the fixed rig out front, in addition to the standard profiles and the occasional PC. The rig is flexible enough to accommodate most performers and productions here, as the turnaround time between events is often quite quick.

The auditorium lighting consists of LEDs disguised as standard tungsten lamps. On prompt side, a preset panel changes the colour temperature from a cool blue, used for general daytime working light, to a warm, cosy amber for performances.



We could have stayed for much longer discussing the unique history and other details of this interesting and historic venue, but PLASA and the Royal Armouries awaited! ✳

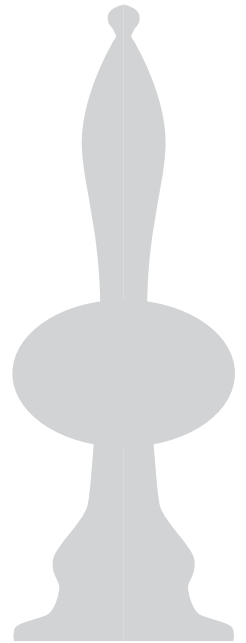


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# ABTT 2012




























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13th & 14th JUNE

At The Old **TRUMAN** Brewery Brick Lane London E1 6QR



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<p><b>Barco High End Systems Europe</b>  07919 007960 www.highend.com</p> 	<p><b>ETC</b>  Electronic Theatre Controls 020 8896 1000 www.etcconnect.com</p> 	<p><b>Martin Professional UK</b>  01622 755442 www.martinpro.co.uk</p> 	<p><b>Pulsar Light of Cambridge</b>  01223 403500 www.pulsarlight.com</p> 	<p><b>Storm Lighting Ltd</b> 01483 757211 www.stormlighting.co.uk</p> 	

# ABTT 2012 Theatre Show: plan your visit now!

A preview of things lighting at the **ABTT 2012 Theatre Show 13-14th June**

The annual ABTT Theatre Show is almost with us, and this time there are changes, and an even greater reason to congregate in London for the day (or two!). There can't be many people in the business who don't know that the venue has moved. No more will we search around for friends hidden away underground in the Royal Horticultural Halls, whilst we enjoy a coffee in the Lawrence Hall. No longer will we scour the surrounding streets for an after-show public house...

The **Old Truman Brewery** is within easy reach from the centre of London and close to several underground stations, a short walk from Liverpool Street mainline station, and being in the midst of the Brick Lane and Smithfields developments means that there are plenty of places to hang out with friends. That is, if you can drag yourself away from the show floor, or most specifically, the ALD's stand, which this year is even more conveniently close to the bar!

Many of our Corporate Members will be there, so please make yourself known and thank them for their continued support. The ALD wouldn't be where it is without their generous financial help and enthusiasm (see page 29 for stand numbers).

Another benefit of the new venue is the adjacent seminar room, which is at one end of the exhibition space. All seminars are free to attend on a first-come first served basis. In addition to the seminars, there are TWO meetings planned for ALD members.

## ALD meetings at ABTT 2012 Theatre Show

As Ian explained on page 14, there is an **open Members Meeting on Wednesday 13th June at 2.30pm** in **Corbet Place**. All ALD members are invited to attend because we want to canvas opinion and discuss issues that the Exec can take forward to our development planning meeting in July. This will be an important opportunity for all members to take part in discussing ideas that are under reviewed now, and adding some new ideas, hopefully. Even if you are content with what the ALD is and does now, please come along to this important meeting to hear the views of others as we all know that the ALD, like its members, has to move with the times to keep up to date. One immediate issue to progress is an updated website, and we're sure that everybody has a view on that subject!

The second meeting is to discuss issues faced

by **Emerging Designers** and will be held on **Thursday 14th June at 16:30** in the **Seminar Room**. 'Emerging designers' is the name we give to the group of recent graduates who are starting out on their professional career and the meeting is open to Associate, Professional and Professional Designer members only. If you are planning to attend please email [meetings@ald.org.uk](mailto:meetings@ald.org.uk) to let us know so we have an idea of numbers.

## What's to see?

In addition to new product ranges and manufacturers on show this year, several companies are choosing the ABTT 2012 Theatre Show as the event at which to launch their new products.

**White Light** is previewing LED spotlights from Robert Juliat that are to be launched later in the year, and **ETC** is preparing to follow successes at Prolight Europe and PLASA Focus with a showing of their new Source Four LED range. **Ambersphere** will feature the recently launched, elegant, time-saving battery powered LED GlowUp fixture. The development of LED products for theatre lighting has been progressing very quickly over the last 12 months, and we are



# ABTT 2012

## THEATRE SHOW

13 & 14 JUNE

At The Old TRUMAN Brewery Brick Lane London E1 6QL

promised several 'conventional-style' theatre profiles and fresnels with white light sources, along with newly-developed colour filters from the main suppliers, so look out for those too.

**Le Mark** is using LED sources for it's latest product, TriLine. This is a new safety product specifically designed for use on the front of performance stages and provides a discreet visual and physical barrier to the front line of the stage for both performers and stage crew.

For those of you interested in things historical, the ABTT Historical Research Committee will be welcoming Graeme Cruikshank for the launch of a revised edition of his booklet on the Victorian theatre engineer and inventor Walter Dando.

And don't miss the opportunity to catch up with Richard and Molly Pilbrow who will be at the Theatre Show on both days. Richard will be signing copies of his book *A Theatre Project* on the ABTT stand and introducing a new interactive multimedia version for the iPad.

### Seminars

In addition to the two seminars on sound (see the show website for details), **Vectorworks Training** is giving a seminar on *Making Light of Lighting*,

June / July 2012

*Set & Event Design with Vectorworks Spotlight* to demonstrate how Vectorworks can enable designers to quickly and easily create designs in 2D and 3D complete with plans, construction drawings, visuals and paperwork.

**Bill Dudley** is giving the keynote seminar on Wednesday morning (11am, 13th June) on the subject of *Virtual Scenery* comparing projected scenery then and now. To coincide with an international OISTAT gathering at the Theatre Show, Bill will also be introducing an 'international time line initiative' which aims to foster a better general understanding of older theatre technologies. **Lawrence Waterman**, Head of Health and Safety for the Olympic Delivery Authority, will deliver this year's John Watts Memorial Lecture lecture, entitled *Delivering Olympian Standards of Health and Safety*. All seminars are free to visitors on a first come, first served basis. See you there! 🍷

### The Old Truman Brewery

Hanbury Street, London, E1 6QR

Wednesday 13th June 10:30-18:00

Thursday 14th June 10:30-17:00

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ABTT 2011 Theatre Show photo: Chris Taylor



# WAS IT REALLY FIFTY YEARS AGO?

**Philip L. Edwards** looks back over his 50 years of stage lighting

A little more in fact. I would have been about thirteen when my younger brother persuaded me to attend a meeting of the school dramatics society to discuss the next production. This was *A Night of Plays*; three one act plays to be presented at the local Parish Hall. I was too late (fortunately) to be cast for anything and so found myself responsible for scenery, lighting and stage management. Unlike other schools' dramatic productions the only staff involvement was a form of benign oversight so we had to do it all ourselves.

I was soon hooked. I borrowed the only book about stage lighting in the public library – Bentham's *Stage Lighting* – and read it from cover to cover. I sought assistance from students in the local university and from the visual aids department of the LEA.

I found out about scenery from the local painter and decorator who had been a scene painter at the Lyric, Hammersmith and somehow produced a standing box set using the school's much repainted stock of flats and some sort of lighting using the kit belonging to the LEA. I vividly remember the control which was a locally made version of what I later knew as a Strand Electric Teak board; a wooden flight case containing slider dimmers (two 2kW and three 1kW) and switches and sockets. Power input was via a 13amp plug painted red. Once, this came out on a rehearsal, the lights all went out and fumbling in the tripe on the floor to find it I realised why power on a male connector isn't a good idea.

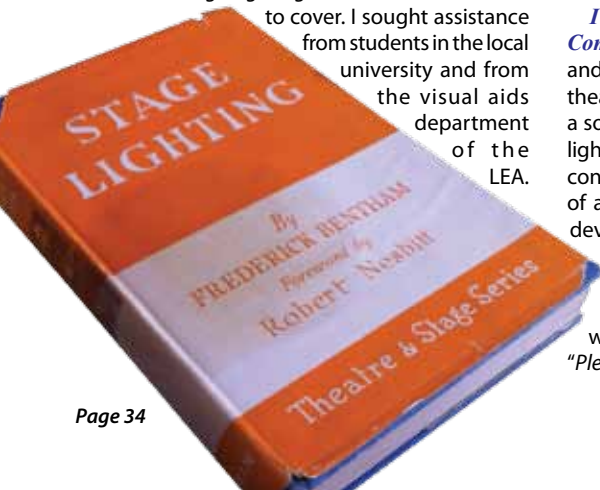
*I discovered the Strand Electric and Engineering Company*, their catalogues, their advice booklets and in particular *Tabs*. *Tabs* was the most brilliant theatre lighting magazine ever. Of course it was a soft sell for Strand but it was never only about lighting or Strand. It reviewed theatres; it reviewed concepts of lighting and stretched the horizons of a teenager. Now we have magazines largely devoted to the industry and its sales success with little acknowledgement of the production process.

*I helped at the Little Theatre*, the local weekly rep; more box sets from stock flats. "Please don't slam the door, the panel above it is

*made of brown paper*". Battens and floats, a couple of aged focus lanterns and more slider dimmers. Yet this company played to good houses every week. Granted, television didn't reach us until rather late which probably helped.

Then there was the local multi-purpose hall; everything from opera to all-in wrestling, via drama, school eisteddfodau, the Remembrance Service, Sunday concerts and summer shows. It may not have been either high tech or sophisticated but it didn't half teach me about getting shows on. *Memories from there?* Getting in flattage through the front of house doors because we couldn't open the upstage slot leading to the street (and fifteen feet above it), not easy in a gale. The poppy drop for the remembrance concert: the stage manager on an extending ladder resting on the back tab track with a bucket of paper poppy petals.

*There was one NUS Drama Festival* when I went in one morning to meet the stage manager carrying a fire extinguisher. "Hello Gareth, are we going to have a fire?" to which he replied, "Go and look at the bloody tabs". I did, the house tabs opened sideways and had been opened and wrapped round a temporarily rigged perch boom. A Patt 23N had been faded up and the inevitable happened; half the house tabs were destroyed, several floor planks burnt. We still





Imperial College, London c1964. Overhead rig for a play and Strand Electric SR control (right).

opened at 7.30 with temporary grey house tabs and a rebuilt floor.

***Moving the tallescope hazardous?*** We focused the number one bar – a mixture of Pattern 60Ms and 23s - by standing backwards on an extending ladder leaning on the bottom of the roller iron. Upstage stuff which needed focussing most of it didn't) was focussed either by leaning a ladder on the bar and allowing for its swing or by the smallest member of staff climbing a ladder held vertical by the rest of the crew. No, we never had an accident.

In 1962 I moved to London to go to college and discovered a wider world both student amateur and professional. ***Imperial College*** might be one

June / July 2012



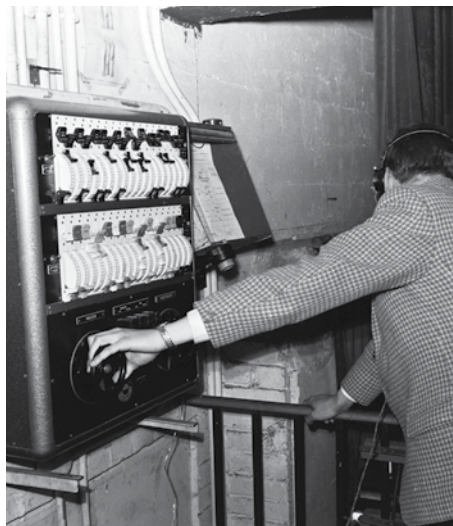
of the leading science and engineering colleges in the world but its Dramsoc seems to have put a disproportionate number of lighting people into the theatre and its supply industry.

Does anybody else remember the ***lectures at Strand's 29 King Street headquarters?*** They were a marvellous way to learn about their equipment and lighting. In fairness to Strand the people involved seemed to be as interested in lighting as in selling their equipment. We must remember that at that time Strand was effectively the only manufacturer. It's interesting to see the way in which ETC, the biggest lighting manufacturer

has, to some extent, taken over the education torch from Strand.

***After college, BBC TV.*** I had expected to finish up on a transmitter somewhere but the BBC decided that, with my interest in lighting, studio technical operations was a better idea. Seven years in London studios with free lance theatre work on the side. Mixed memories of venues from my college and BBC periods: Fulham Town Hall with two enormous glazed paintings at the back of the hall. ***Why did the stage always look better reflected than it did direct?*** The West End, the Jeanetta Cochrane Theatre, Acton Town Hall, City Temple Hall, Toynbee Theatre, the annual pantomime at Ealing Town Hall and walking home after the get out with my tool case. To my surprise ***I convinced the policeman that I really was going home*** after work in spite of the crowbar in my case. You don't meet policemen walking round at 1am any more.

***Basilica Opera tours.*** In those days touring opera was effectively Sadlers Wells and the D'Oyle Carte and they only went to BIG places. However, Basilica Opera went to all sorts of places using professional principals, staff and orchestra and the cream of the local amateurs as chorus – and damn good shows they were. We played Bradford, Torquay, Sunderland, Worthing, Stoke on Trent – weekly in that order with two shows



# WAS IT REALLY FIFTY YEARS AGO? Philip L. Edwards

in rep. Lighting using the house rig with minimal augmentation. Every kind of lighting control, 120 way CD at Sunderland, PR at Torquay, SP in Stoke and grand master at Bradford.

*Memories of those controls that nobody remembers* - although if they did they might have a better idea of why we're where we are now. Working the SP at the Queen's Hall in Burslem, Stoke on Trent with a newly imported replacement soprano who didn't know the moves and using the heavily frosted Sunspot alongside the board to try and keep her at least in some light.



Worthing Pavilion c.1968. Permanent bracket handle dimmers in the background with temporary 12-way interlock (centre) and fuses for the permanent installation on the left.

*Standing on the grand master at Bradford with Fred Wade* the resident chief and 'character'. Tabs out and he locks on handles, for cue one about ten minutes into the show and a face appears at the top of the ladder "There's a problem at La Ronde" (the night club over the road), Fred points to the grand master wheel says, "It turns that way, drop off ten and eighteen at three quarters if I'm not back." Fortunately he was. Another Bradford memory was Fred's supposed liking for number 13 Magenta, "You should use it in every show, it's the best colour there is."

*Dress rehearsal for 'Carmen'* and the tabs go up on the square outside the cigarette factory and the entire scene is bathed in pink. Every FOH lantern was coloured in No.13. After a couple of seconds the crew, strategically placed, leaned over and pulled the colours to leave those I'd originally chosen.

Worthing Pavilion was interesting, *a bracket handle board on the perch* with a twelve-way interlock temporary board. The house board was cued by rapping under the perch floor with a broom handle. One knock for standby, two for go. Another Worthing memory is the overnight changeover when the wardrobe supervisor entertained us with several hours of boogie and rag time piano.



*In 1973 I moved to the Royal Northern College of Music* in Manchester. Television had become more of a factory, I wanted to get into full time theatre - preferably opera; Christine and I were engaged and wanted to get out of London.

*The next thirty seven years passed very quickly.* The College believed that the most important aspect of music was performance and the facilities represented the idea that students should take part in professionally staged and staffed operas and concerts. The Opera Theatre was pretty well state of the art - 120 way Lightset three preset board, good stock of lanterns plenty of space (pros too wide and main stage too shallow but otherwise OK). The Concert Hall was pretty good although woefully underlit. Platform lighting consisting of ceiling mounted track too high to reach from any available access equipment and a row of Pattern 249 TV softlights ceiling mounted in front of the organ.

Royal Northern College of Music, Opera Theatre, Manchester.  
Galaxy Nova in the auditorium c2004  
alongside the production desk.

My first challenge was *to improve the Concert Hall lighting at minimal expense* – someone had noticed that the softlights as well as lighting the players' music also shone into the eyes of the audience, when I pointed out also that they were specifically designed to pass heat out through the back (onto the organ pipes) funds were found and two hand winch mounted spot bars were installed with Pattern 223s (later converted to 743s) from the Opera Theatre and a Mini-2 control in a cupboard in the artiste's entrance to the platform.

When the building opened a *'Beanstalk' had been provided for focusing* access to high level equipment. This was a fearsome device, electrically raised and lowered (but too heavy for one person to move round) with a cruciform footprint with arms 15' overall. Not very convenient especially if you were on your own as I frequently was. I persuaded the admin to buy a Tallescope and to sell off the Beanstalk. I'm not sure who bought it or why but it disappeared and we carried on with the 'scope, a much better idea. Given the heated discussions that have taken place over Tallescopes recently I'm pleased to say that in all the time I was there we only had two 'scope accidents; neither of them resulted in anything other than a need to sit down for a bit. With hindsight both were preventable and had we known better how to handle the beast both would have been avoided.



*When the RNCM Opera Theatre opened* in 1973 state of the art control was a Lightset. 120 channels on three presets with clever faders with microswitches, which allowed grouping to red, white or both groups in a preset and also, the good bit; transfer a channel from the white to the red group. It's probably difficult for today's technicians to understand the significance of these remarks but manual preset board operation needed totally different skills to running a show on a memory board.

*Although we didn't know it at the time, we programmed;* not by letting the board memorise what was needed but by working out how we could do what the designer wanted using a variety of different methods. *Preset changes for major cues*, a couple of faders moved by hand for small ones or a group added or subtracted with or without compensating hand moves of a few channels.

Plotting wasn't a question of choosing a number and pressing a button but of writing it



Royal Northern College of Music, Opera Theatre, Manchester. Galaxy Nova in the control room c2004. The desk was originally installed in the Edinburgh Festival Theatre, then used for touring before installation in the RNCM.

all down together with times, which faders and what to do after the cue.

Over the years we upgraded the equipment as and when we could screw some money out of the College. They quite reasonably *believed that a 'new' theatre shouldn't need upgrading* which was probably reasonable at the beginning but looked rather silly after a few years.

FOH went from Patt. 264s to 764s to Strand T84s and eventually Cantatas; 223s were upgraded to 743s and forty Pattern 60s for cyc floods became a dozen Iris 1s. Younger readers not familiar with the numbers and names I mention may find it interesting to look them up and see how things (in most cases) have progressed.

*In 1984, eleven years after the College opened,* I persuaded them to find the money to replace

the lighting control in the Opera Theatre. I reviewed what was available at the time and settled on a *Strand Galaxy* as most suitable for our needs. The Galaxy had the advantage that the desk layout could be configured to suit the control room and the operator's preferences. I sketched what I thought would be a suitable layout and then went to Brentford – Strand's London headquarters to see a desk mocked up as I wanted. The training session consisted of, *"Here is a plan of the demonstration theatre rig... and the operator's manual is there. Ring 52 on that 'phone if you need any help or when you've finished."* I played for a couple of hours and sold myself the desk.

*Board operation was transformed.* No longer did I need to set up presets half an hour before the show. No need to go through the plot to find

the first level for every channel on all three presets and set it to save a millisecond on each reset. *Walk in, sit down, select a number and go.* Not quite as simple as that but not far off. I found for opera that I still preferred (and still do) manual operation of my own cues; opera timing goes with music not with seconds and in any case if you're operating manually it doesn't matter if you press the go button on the standby!

*"Don't you miss the satisfaction of operating a difficult show on a manual board?"* This was a fairly frequent question and the answer was simply "No, I know how to do it, I've done it for years, the memory resets more accurately than me and I can concentrate entirely on timing".

The playback encoder wheels took a bit of getting used to but not too much. Now when I'm operating a desk with faders for playback I realise how clever the wheels were, if you want to alter the speed of a running cue you just tweak the wheel up or down, you don't press a button several times to get at the up fade and then wheel it back or forward. *Why do modern desks have so many controls which change their function depending on whether the operator takes sugar?*

Eight years after the Galaxy went in we replaced it with a second hand Galaxy Nova. Operationally much the same but operating on DMX rather than analogue which meant we could use DMX

# WAS IT REALLY FIFTY YEARS AGO?

Philip L. Edwards

equipment although the dimmers remained analogue. The new desk had much the same facilities as the old although one of the playbacks was more sophisticated.

*Nothing much changed for another fourteen years* or so. The Studio Theatre opened with a 300 series desk and sixty four dimmers and in it we did some of the most interesting shows the College had done. Opera doesn't have to be mega big with huge sets, a small scale production can be a pretty stunning experience and some of them were.

The Concert Hall grew more dimmers and another 300 series desk. Way over the top for most of the concerts but sub masters meant that non lighting experienced platform managers could simply push up the fader marked 'preset' and then 'small ensemble', 'large ensemble' or whatever.

About five years ago we upgraded the Opera Theatre with a 530i desk and increased the dimmer count to 300 with 28 non dims and yet more non dims for working lights, the whole lot being networked. Note, state of the art in 1973 was 120 channels, in 1984 it was 180, in 2006 it was about 400 with another 400 attribute channels and we upgraded the desk three years later. *Has lighting got too complex?* Are we too concerned with spectacle and too little with content or does it simply make life easier?

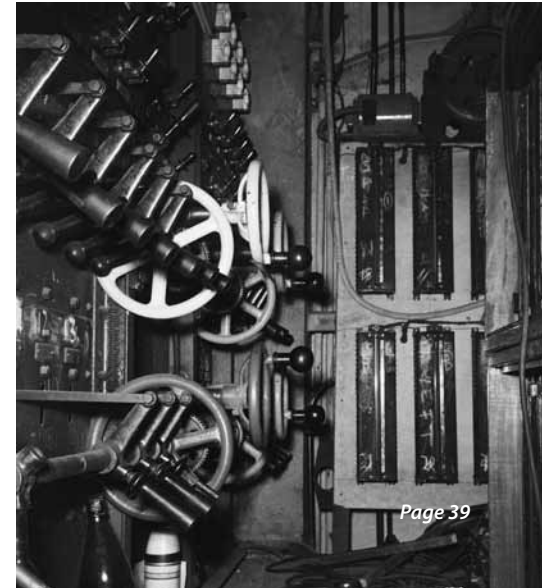
In retrospect I should have specified more

non dims. Moving lights and other gadgets have become more common, even in the last five years. I believe my successor at the College has obtained more non dim modules to allow circuits to be configured as non dim when required.

*Moving lights* came into the standard rigs in both the Opera Theatre and the Concert Hall. At first Source 4 Revolutions in both and then ADB Warps as well in the Opera Theatre. Note that these are both remote control profile spots with little concession to effects. Everyday running of the venues made the ability to remote focus of considerably greater use than the ability to do prism effects or such like. Both types of lantern relied on a scroller rather than 'infinitely' variable colour change systems. We didn't find this a great disadvantage for most of our stuff although I suspect that my assistant would have liked a greater choice of colours for some of the jazz concerts.

That was the last significant change in my time at the RNCM. It's interesting to note that the first job for which I was paid was a board operator on *a bracket handle board with six extra slider dimmers* for the local dance school in Aberystwyth's gala evening. My last job as a resident technician was board operator at the RNCM for a local dance school! I was paid 7/6d for the first one, rather more for the last.

Since leaving the College I've kept my hand in at Clonter Opera and various other venues (including the RNCM). My hire and sales business gets rather more time than it used to. It's an odd experience going to trade shows with nowhere specific to consider when looking at gear although I still look – you never know when you might need something. I have to say though that I am less and less interested in equipment. *What matters is the picture the audience sees* to help the performer. What you use to get there is secondary. #

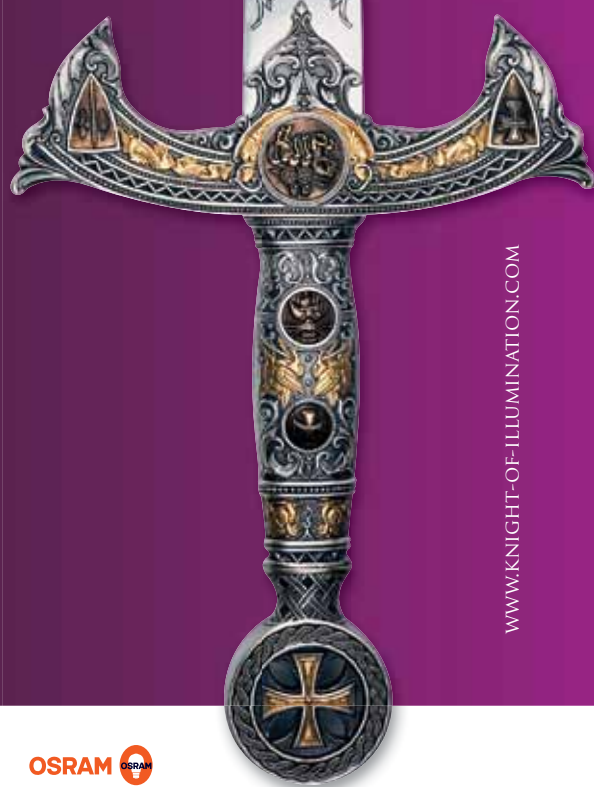


King's Hall, Aberystwyth c1966. Permanent bracket handle board (left) with slider dimmers for FOH at rear.

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