

# ADB: A STRATEGY FOR THE NINETIES

## John Offord in Brussels

My first and only previous visit to ADB's headquarters at Zaventem in Belgium (in 1987) was prompted by news of the company's recent move into membership of the massive Siemens empire, and the chance to meet the team who had put together an impressive TV production for that year's Eurovision Song Contest in Brussels, using ADB equipment, of course.

I had three good reasons for a repeat trip in December last. ADB had just announced a new initiative aimed at the UK market (see November L+SI), they had a newly-appointed group vice-president in Christian Léonard, and there was a complex simply called the Studio House they were itching to show me.

I'll start with the people. The chief executive officer of the ADB group of companies, which covers Siemens airport and stage lighting, is Manfred Bruns. And the fact that half the production of ADB at Zaventem is involved with aircraft landing light systems (ACL's in theatre parlance) reminds you of considerable extra strength in the Belgian operation.

In the field we are directly concerned with, the man in charge is Christian Léonard, the group vice-president, theatre and TV lighting systems division. Recently appointed to the position, he is French, and joined the ADB group four years ago as general manager of ADB-Sofair, its subsidiary in France. Whilst there he spearheaded a major re-design and productivity enhancement programme for the company's line of theatre and TV luminaires.

The next player is Russell Dunsire, busy jet-hopping from Siemens UK HQ at Chertsey to Zaventem. Luckily for him Brussels airport is actually at Zaventem and just down the road from ADB's offices. So provided the airport authority can actually manage to get the plane a



**Christian Léonard:** "We think of our customers as partners whose requirements we understand and want to satisfy. We need their experience to build it into our products: they need our technology to live a new experience."

gate or parking lot, he can be inside ADB's doors and out of the rain in 30 minutes from touch down. Dunsire is busy getting ADB's act together in the UK in a determined attempt to succeed this time where past efforts to ensure a presence in the British market have failed rather dismally.

Sitting strong at ADB's base are two more players. Sales manager Lucien Van Nieuwenhuysen has been in theatre lighting for 30 years and was, as always, calmly prepared for the next 'panic'. If it meant spending a long

over-Christmas period in Yugoslavia against the background of a threatening political crisis, then so be it if a major contract for ADB was the outcome.

Raph Janssens, sales supervisor for the theatre and TV lighting division, must be ADB's best poker player. Straight-faced to the limit, fast in manner and speech (in English as well), he's the sort of man who's read your notes upside down before you've even written them. His speciality for the day was the Studio House.

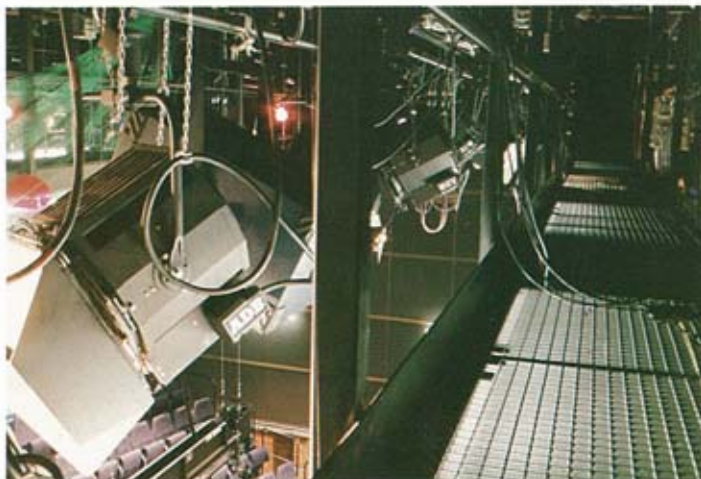
One of ADB's major strengths is its 'Total System Concept', and it has been winning numerous contracts as a result. The capability of custom designing and executing the most complex turnkey projects for both theatres and TV studios almost anywhere in the world is reflected in a list of references that include projects as far apart as the Teatro Colon in Buenos Aires to TV studios in Cairo and Madrid. The one I went to see was nearby in Brussels - the previously mentioned Studio House (well I couldn't do Cairo and Brussels in the same day, could I?).

The ability to complete the Studio House installation - it was started on 15 July 1989 and operational on 2 October 1989 - in such a short time revolved around a thorough understanding of several technologies such as heating, ventilation, structures, stage machinery, acoustics and sound proofing - not forgetting a bit of know-how about entertainment lighting systems.

The Studio House was conceived by its owners, a private company, as a totally commercial facility for the production of various TV shows, music, panel shows, and so on, and is a straightforward investment for profit project. It had to be built to time, come in on spec and



The Studio House (above) with view from the catwalk (below) and two different show sets (right). The complete installation including electrical and engineering, took just 10 weeks.



price, and then function in exactly the right way. The fact that the owners are now looking at building other studios on a similar basis is the best way of stating that the Studio House has proved to be a highly successful concept.

Raph Janssens saw the project through from beginning to end, working as one of a small team of specialists, and his role was to ensure that the various aspects of lighting technology were installed as part of an integrated construction project.

The Studio House is a purpose-built 1,000 sq.m. area equipped with a structural grid over the complete square floor area and with 360m of catwalk. There is 2,400 sq.m. of cyc cloth and curtain and a total of 112 x 120kg hoists. There are 320 special TV dimmers, 280 luminaires (1kW, 2kW and 5kW), and an S28 512 channel control system and numerous accessories. The complete electrical and engineering installation was carried out by ADB in 10 weeks. The area is totally flexible in that you can stage a show in any position within the four walls.

Raph Janssens explained the thinking behind the project. "The overall project specifications must meet the specific operating requirements of the user," he said, "and must be based on concrete and practical parameters rather than on theoretical values. The customer is more interested in the end result than in a bulky set of tender documents! Ideally he wants a guarantee on total performance of the studio in operating conditions. This is exactly where we scored with the Studio House project.

"The project specification called for a TV studio of the size mentioned with a seating capacity of 300," he continued. "There had to be full and direct access to all luminaires irrespective of their position, and the venue had to be capable of being fully operational around the clock with a staff maximum of just three people. To achieve this the architects and major contractors were involved in the design from the very beginning, so that everyone's know-how was actually 'built-in' to the project.

"I am convinced that the Studio House is one of the best TV studios in Europe, and features comprehensive equipment, optimal design and investment, and very low operating costs."

And a key point of interest here is that none of the luminaires is in itself automated. The key to a fast set up is in the location and control of hoists and their positioning across the complete studio area. The capital cost is therefore low, and the man-hours still kept to a minimum.

Back to the office, and discussion centred around the latest product offerings from ADB. They are rubbing their hands and smiling at Zaventem over the instant success of their new 120 or 240 channel Tenor memory lighting control system. Since its early summer launch it has been very quickly accepted, has already



ADB S28 Series II control system at the Studio House.



Raph Janssens (left) with Lucian Van Nieuwenhuysen in ADB's demonstration studio.

been shipped to more than 20 countries, and Lucian Van Nieuwenhuysen describes it as being as simple to operate as a manual desk but with the performance of a big integrated system. "It's the best system in the mid-range of the market today," he suggested. "It's not expensive enough for what it can do," said Christian Léonard.

The other major new introduction is ADB's Eurodim digital dimming system. These are fully digital dimmers working on the basis of plug-in drawers equipped with control electronics, a circuit breaker block and a microprocessor functioning ventilation system. The control electronics accepts two multiplex signals to USITT DMX 512 standard. There are nine



Eurodim digital dimmers at RTBF in Brussels.



The new Tenor lighting control console.



Christian Léonard (left) with Russell Dunsire (centre) general manager of ADB-UK, and Michel Musso, marketing consultant to Léonard.

drawers per chassis and three types of dimmer cabinet: 2, 4 or 5 chassis, with each chassis protected by a four-pole 100A circuit breaker. LED's provide a complete control diagnostic.

ADB has equipment currently installed in over 50 countries, and a few recent and on-going schemes are typical of many of these. During 1990 they replaced one of their first-ever memory systems (originally installed 20 years ago) with the latest S28 system at the Bratislava Opera House in Czechoslovakia. At the National Theatre in Belgrade they have installed a complete system of dimmers, spotlights and control for the main and studio

theatres. Control systems were an S28 and S25 and over 800 luminaires were involved. In the same city at the Atelje 212 Theatre another S28 and luminaires were installed. Due to re-open this summer, the Opera de Sevilla will have a complete S28 double system and dimmers, motorised spots, and Europe luminaires.

ADB's list of references is huge, and although the European venues itemised seem like blanket coverage, there are many far-flung places where systems have been installed, from New Zealand to Korea and Colombia.

However, the UK's where I flew in from, and where we will conclude this story.

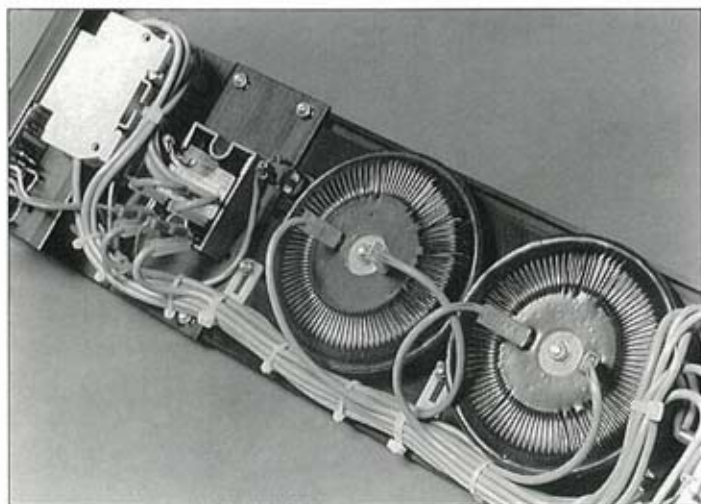
ADB's determined new attempt to gain a chunk of the British market has been placed in the experienced hands of Russell Dunsire, general manager of ADB-UK. "We see the need for an alternative major manufacturer and supplier in the UK who could provide a comprehensive range of products for both stage and studio applications," he told me. "There are many manufacturers operating in niche parts of the market but very, very few offering a full range for both applications. There are even fewer with the strength of Siemens behind them, and confirming a high level of on-going product development."

How would ADB approach the UK market? "Customer service is as important as the products themselves," he continued. "It is essential to ensure excellent after-sales service as well as easy access to ADB products, and the best way to achieve this is to create a national network of distributors. We will do this by using a number of the many established companies already considered to be providing good knowledgeable customer service."

He continued: "Discussions are already taking place with various companies who had a desire to represent ADB within the UK, some who are looking for an exclusive range of products and others who were dissatisfied with their existing manufacturer/distributor arrangements. In addition to a distributor network ADB-UK will over a period of time build a team of their own, whose role will be to provide support for their distributors and their distributors' customers. 1991 will certainly be a busy and exciting time for ADB," he said.

Back in Brussels ADB has set out five major objectives as part of its immediate strategic planning. One of these is simply titled 'Penetrate the UK Market'.

This time the assault will be serious, with full reserve backing.



Eurodim: a plug-in dimmer drawer.



Europe DN101 1000/1200W Z profile (12-20°).



Europe C103 (1000/1200W) pebble convex (6-60°).

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JANUARY 1991