

FROM A DISTANCE

Catriona Forcer and John Offord at Wembley Arena for Cliff Richard's latest sell-out tour

Photos: Nik Milner

Cliff Richard's current 'From A Distance' tour started last January in Australia as the 'Stronger Tour' where it was on the road for three months, and also took in New Zealand. After a four week break it then went to Europe for a month.

"Most of the summer was off, apart from the planning for this show," explained lighting designer Bob Hellyer. "Cliff wanted to do a special show for the British audience combining the 'Stronger Tour' with the Wembley Stadium gig we did in 1989, taking essences from both to produce a special show. Hence the 'From A Distance' tour. It was to be a large arena gig with a large rig incorporating lasers. It took a lot of planning, in fact 90 per cent of the summer period was spent at the drawing board.

The lasers were hard to work out and I went to Laserpoint with the ideas I had. I wanted to put everything on fibre optics so that the lasers could stay on the ground. We put the laser heads where we wanted them rather than where they had to go because of physical restrictions. To produce the desired effects we had to have the heads in certain places. Laserpoint came up with the ideas along with the positionings that I wanted.

"I then sat down at the drawing board, working out the angles because the scanners can only scan a maximum of 40% and the head

had to be in the right place for the effect. I did a series of drawings which was quite time consuming but worked out right in the end. Everything I wanted to do, we could do. Apparently the Health and Safety people came to see the set up and they said it was the most tidy and safe system they had ever seen in Wembley.

"Apart from the laser heads we've got about 300 Par lamps of varying types and 60 Vari*Lites, mostly VL4s with some VL2Bs. The Vari*Lites help fill out the extra size of the stage, in fact whilst trying to modify the 'Stronger' rig we ran out of physical space to put lamps. Because we needed a bit more light we've added a front truss which is not on any drawings. There are neons around the edge of the stage and also a couple of treble clefs in the stage set for the first half. There is quite a bit of Arcline in the trussing and stage set which adds a bit of sparkle. There are also strobe Lekos, which I won a small hire stock of, to allow us to strobe just the downstage area of the set for a dance sequence."

The first half of the show is entitled 'Oh Boy' where Cliff sings many songs from the fifties and sixties and the lighting is subdued and mainly white. The stage set is quite different during this half with the drum kit on the risen walk-way which skirts the stage. For the second half of the

show it flips over, together with the keyboards, so that the bottom becomes the top. The stage gear for the second half comes out of the stage and the drum kit slides up at an angle from upstage to fill in where the steps were earlier. The keyboards on stage left and stage right are housed under the stage set on rollers and pushed out. It isn't until the second half that Bob Hellyer's lighting talents come into full and obvious effect.

"Our original idea was to leave the stage set during the interval as it was and then begin the second half with a laser show," continued Bob Hellyer. "This would distract the audience whilst the stage change-over took place, all in two minutes. When finished the band would then all be in different places. But because of the spill from the lasers you could see everyone on stage and it wasn't quite as magical as it ought to have been! We still start the second half with a laser show, however.

"The main problem with the show is getting it up in time. The first time we had to put it up on a show day we were an hour behind sound check time which actually wasn't too bad. Also, all the memory in the desk corrupted the other week and I had to quickly patch up the 20 way matrix panels to 'busk' through the show. It wasn't as hard as it sounds because the Vari*Lites do most of the lighting and I just





'From a Distance': the 'Devil Woman' scene (above); a scene from the sixties (above right); the all-action laser display that starts the second half of the show (below).

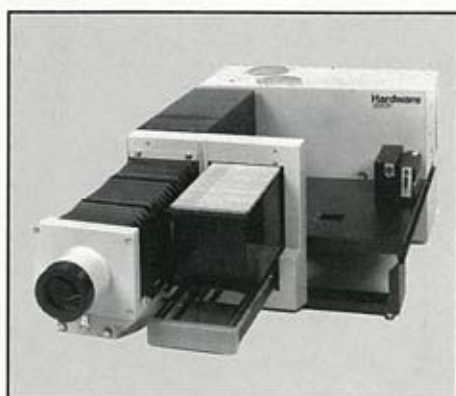
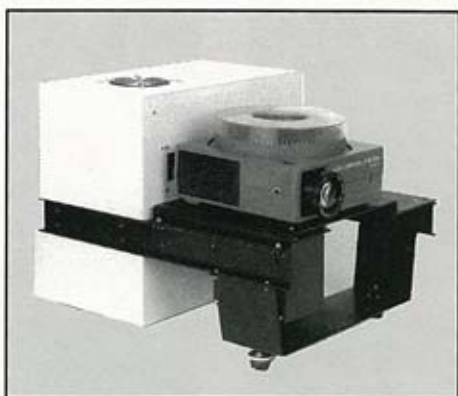
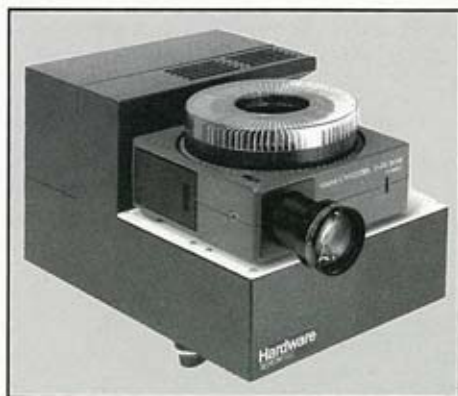


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punch in the special effects and generic lighting. It was impossible to get another 180 channel desk to load my disc into as there wasn't one available. I could have had a 90 way but basically I could have done a better show just on the 20 way matrix and that's the way it stood in the end."

Some people might have noticed a few 'disco effects' in the Cliff Richard 'From A Distance' show — which is hardly surprising as Bob Hellyer has been making a name for himself as a disco lighting designer as well. Last year he designed the Vienna night club in Maidstone and also the Hard Rock Café entertainment area in London. It is work that Bob describes as hard, not that rewarding, but certainly a challenge!

Lighting, trussing, rigging equipment, smoke and cracked oil machines, etc, from Samuelson Concert Productions Ltd.

Lighting designer: Bob Hellyer
Lighting crew boss: Jerry Mott
Vari*Lites: Derek Jones

Laserpoint's special custom-designed touring package

When planning the Cliff Richard 'From A Distance' tour LD Bob Hellyer turned to Cambridge-based Laserpoint Communications for the show's spectacular laser effects. Having used them on Cliff's Silver Tour in 1980, he contacted Laserpoint's Ron Turpie and told him what he had in mind. In due course Turpie produced five different configurations for Hellyer who eventually opted for a combination of two of five suggested schemes.

Ron Turpie told L+SI: "What they wanted was to have the lasers flown as part of the lighting rig. The system is using seven individual lasers with an eighth as back-up. It simply wasn't possible to position all that weight and volume in the lighting rig, this meant taking the laser light from the power source to the truss mounted effects head by use of fibre optics."

The system had to be custom-flight cased, and the services, i.e. water and electricity, had to be able to be connected into the lasers and ready to within two hours at each venue.

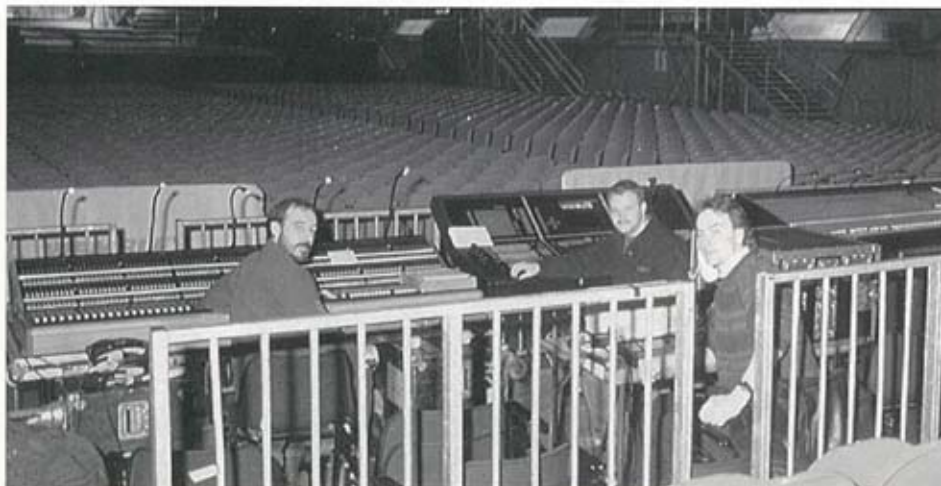
"Developing such a laser system meant combining a number of original and established design ideas to create a unique touring system," continued Ron Turpie. "At each stage of the development Laserpoint considered the logistics and safety aspects of the show in order to deliver on time and to specification."

The system's seven lasers (and additional back-up unit) are all 2011 Spectra Physics 5 Watt Argon with power supply unit and remote controls. Within each flight case are two lasers with their exciters, and the remote control and connections for power and water are at the back. To enable the services to be connected easily a mains distribution and water pump were specifically designed by Laserpoint's operations manager Paul Johnson.

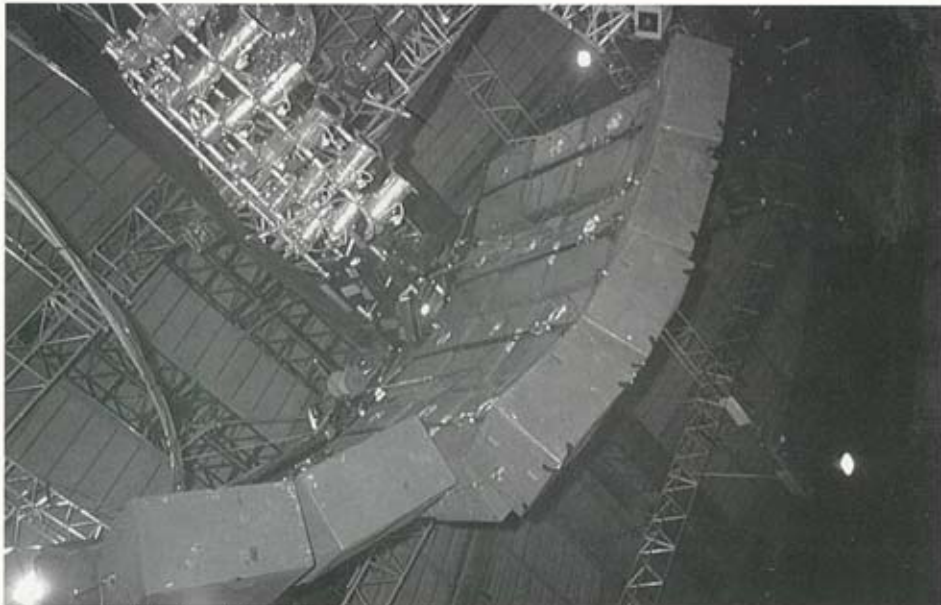
The fibre optic and coupler fed from the front of each laser to the remote effects head measures 50 metres in length and the seven remote effects heads are complete with Z blanking and five effects servos. They have a TV style spigot and hook clamp, and the head also contains the optics and drive electronics, making a very compact and easy-to-rig unit. The whole laser display rig is operated by a Laserpoint Aquarius controller in eight channel mode, located in the lighting control area in the centre of the auditorium, which is completely MIDI/SMPTE compatible.

For Laserpoint:

Ron Turpie (system sales)
Paul Johnson (laser operations)
Brent Watson and Ian Twerl (laser operators)



Lighting/Laser trio of Bob Hellyer, Derek Jones and Ian Twerl.



Turbosound units viewed from stage.

Bob Hellyer: Lighting Designer

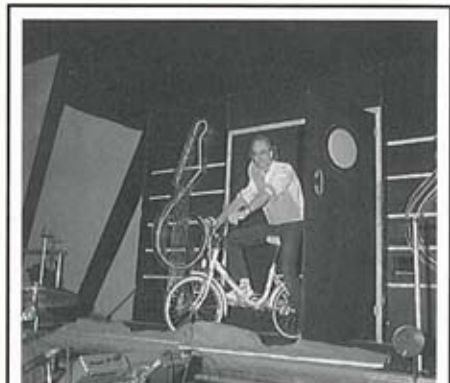
In the early seventies computer engineer Bob Hellyer started a mobile disco with a couple of friends and hired his lighting effects from Entec. One summer Entec turned and asked him to look after followspots at the Reading Festival and, originally just for fun, Bob agreed. What had started off as a two-week break from the heady world of computer engineering ended up as a full time career in the unstable world of lighting design.

Bob Hellyer worked for Entec for two years during which time he did his first major tour, with Black Sabbath. "I was actually doing the PA work at the time," explained Bob. "But that's just heavy boxes and loud noises so I asked for a lighting gig. It was quite a large rig for those days with 60 lamps. They were all beam lamps and 743s with T11 bulbs that all fell apart. I started the tour with 20 or so spare lamps and it ended with 20 lamps down!"

In 1976 Bob met Peter Clarke and consequently went to work for him at Supermick where he had the opportunity to design for many bands including The Buzzcocks, The Pretenders, The Three Degrees, Elvis Costello, and Ian Dury. It was in early 1976 that Supermick first got hold of a Cliff Richard gig in the form of a gospel tour. It was a 2 x 12 lamp genie tower rig which Peter Clarke designed and started on the road and which Bob took over later in the tour. Since then Bob Hellyer has worked on every Cliff tour except one which clashed with a Pretenders tour he

was doing at the time.

"Lately I've been working so much with Cliff that people tend to write me off thinking I'm with him full time," he complained mildly. "There are times when I need other work and I can turn my hands to quite a few things! Since working with Cliff I've been getting lots of middle-of-the-road bands like Shirley Bassey and Barbara Dickson. However, I don't like getting into the rut of being called a middle-of-the-road designer and I'd love to get my hooks into something like a heavy metal band. Whether the grief factor is worth it is another matter! You get stifled if you are in one vein too long and you become jaded in what you do. You need the excitement of something else to give you ideas and inspiration."



A special appearance for L+SI: Cliff Richard's production manager and set designer John Seymour.



Wembley Arena: a view from stage showing speaker positions.

Sound Equipment:

(Britannia Row Productions)

Desks:

- Ramsa 40-18 monitor
- Soundcraft Series 4 40-16-2 (FOH)
- Soundcraft 800B 24-8-2 (FOH)

FOH Effects rack:

- 2 x Yamaha SPX900
- 1 x Yamaha REV 5
- 1 x Roland SDE 3000
- 2 x Drawmer gates
- 4 x BSS compressor/limiters

Monitor Effects rack:

- 2 x SPX900
- 2 x SPX90
- 2 x BSS DPR402 compressor/limiters

Standard Drive rack:

- 1 x Klark Teknik DN60
- 2 x Klark Teknik DN27
- 1 x BSS MCS200 crossover cassette machine, CD player

Monitor Drive rack:

- 4 x BSS FDS320 crossovers
- 2 x BSS FDS340 crossovers
- 4 x Klark Teknik DN360

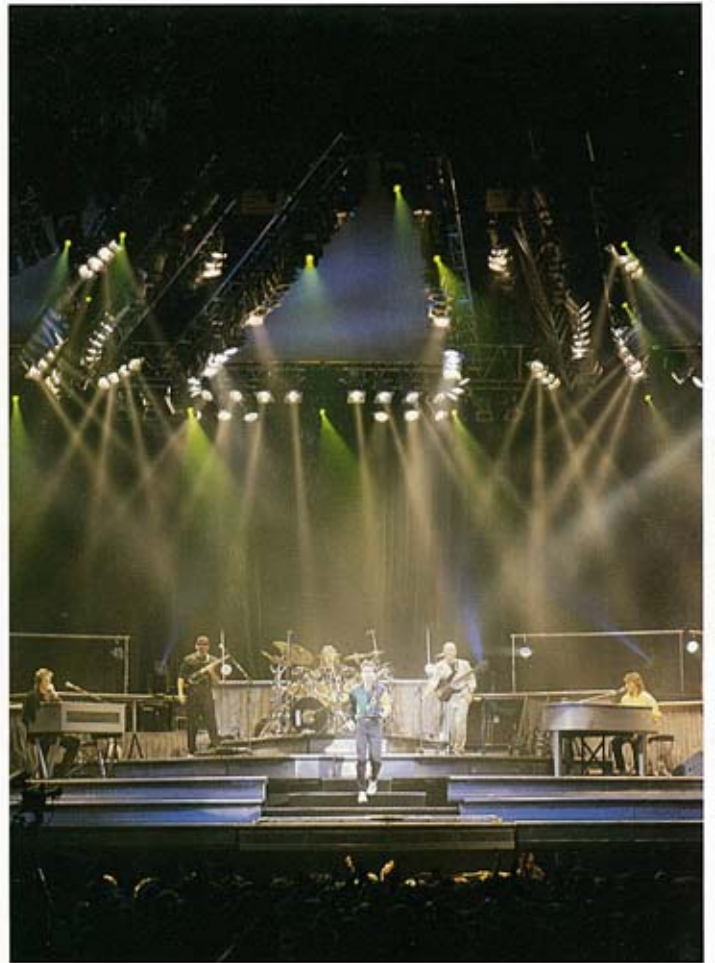
Speakers:

- 76 x Turbosound TMS-3
- 10 x Turbosound 215 lo-pro monitors
- 6 x Meyer UPA
- 8 x Turbosound 24

Amps: Carver, Crest, C-Audio

FOH Engineer: Colin Northfield

Monitor Engineer: John Johns



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CLIFF RICHARD AND LASERS 'FROM A DISTANCE'

- Wind in the Willows at the National
- Cliff Richard 'From A Distance'
- Tony Gottelier and Life Beyond DMX
- Ben Duncan Sounds Out the Eighties
- Venue reports from Melbourne, Malta and Windsor
- Company reports: Samuelson/ADB/Playlight

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