

Anyone with real commitment could have arrived at Cologne's Photokina within about 2½ hours of leaving London's Lighting and Sound Show 86. However I decided against such indigestion, taking time out not only to write my thoughts on the PLASA Show but to stopover at Amsterdam's Theatre Museum. I needed an interlude to freshen my visual perception of the entertainment process, reminding myself that lighting and effects technology have been contributing images to centuries of performances. I find that museums provide strong stimulation for focusing an understanding of the present and future - and Amsterdam's Theatre Institute museum has splendid changing exhibitions drawn from its collection of images and sounds from every area of popular entertainment from mediaeval street fairs through to television soap. And they are increasingly developing audio visual techniques, simple but effective ones, to present history as something very alive.

Thus refreshed, I went on to Cologne. Very little smoke, and the sound mostly a subdued background to soothe the buyers - at least in the halls devoted to the film and TV/video aspects of Professional Media which occupied less than 20% of the 136,000 square metres of Photokina exhibition space. And that excludes the loudhailer hard sell for Polaroid outside the cathedral or the two balloons floating overhead. I think one was for Fuji, and I cannot remember the other one - which has to be bad news for their advertising agents.

**Photokina Weltmesse des Bildes** considers itself to be (and I would not disagree) the international fair for any product even peripherally concerned with the generation of images by technological means. If it has

anything to do with film or video, you will find it at Cologne. To get images with any kind of camera you need light, and a stroll up and down the long wide boulevards of the exhibition revealed lighting manufacturers popping up everywhere among the cameras and their editorial back-up technology.

By and large there was not much flashing and chasing about the lights at Photokina. Nor was there much contribution on lighting effects equipment. Some of the stuff was there, notably from Coemar, but it was swamped by straightforward illumination including a lot of jumbo luminaires for the largest studios and for operatic sized stages.

Nor was their much effort to demonstrate the product by light shows. **Strand Lighting** made a gallant attempt by importing Ross McKim's 'Moving Visions' dance company in some entertaining choreography to various musical idioms. Alas the high level of ambient light spilling on to the stand's unenclosed dancing area diluted the dramatic impact of the lighting design. And this was further eroded by the use of so many big studio fresnels which had to be in the rig for the main commercial purpose of Strand's appearance in Cologne. Add a creased cyclorama and some crudely focused gobos and you have a demo which did nothing to prove to me that I need either the remote positioning or colour scrolling of their **Showchangers** - which is a great pity because this is a product with a strong market potential if the price (when announced) is right. The potential for scroll changers in cyclorama floods is particularly promising since it reduces the minimum circuitry for a reasonable installation from four to two channels.

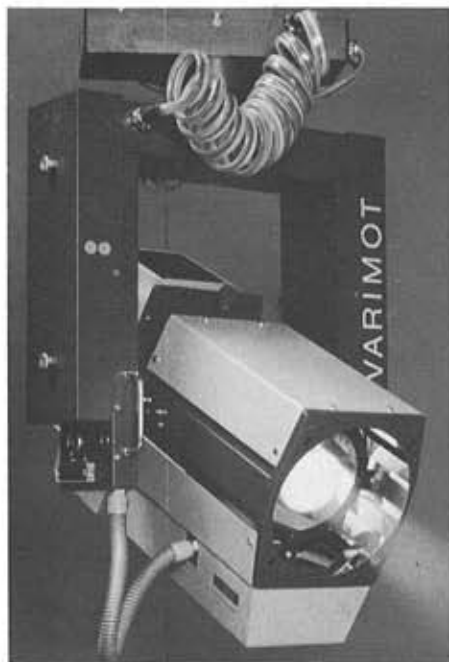
Strand's control systems for theatre and studios are the jewels in their crown: their range is complete in these fields and tough to compete against. The main challenge remains **AVAB**, but no one selling or buying control can afford to ignore the Imagination Technology series devised by Tim Burnham and launched under the **Arri** banner at Photokina. There is a basic **Image** (but, wow, what facilities you get in a basically priced model these days!) and a top range **Imagination** with a mid-facility system to follow.

First impressions of **Imagination** are good. Its twin VDUs present a friendly face to the operator. The knobs are strongly endowed with an anticipatory logic that reduces the number of finger jabs (or key strokes, according to personal temperament) to achieve each function. For editing complex sequences, precise instructions or options are presented clearly on the screens. And if you succumb to button confusion (and who does not in their early days on a new control desk), ask a button what it does, and the answer will flash on to the screen in an English that is reasonably plain rather than mere computaspeak. I have a hunch that **Imagination** might just possibly have succeeded in producing an operational philosophy that is acceptable to both European and North American thinking.

Another Burnham product for Arri that has the potential to be a bread and butter winner is the modular **Connexion** system which patches dimmers to desks by the internationally accepted DMX 512 standard. User settings for analogue inputs and outputs from zero to plus or minus 12 volts DC give the capability of matching virtually anybody's controls to anyone else's dimmers. Very important in these days when dimmers can outlast several control desks. All this increases Arri's capability to supply complete studio packages. Their 65 series of 500/600 watt spotlights with condenser optics should get them better known in the theatre market; and some courageous investment in developing Burnham's pioneering work with low voltage could see them a major force in the theatre lighting industry.

Unless they decide to leave that to **Lee International**, who have considerable low voltage experience in other areas (although, not, I think, in electronic transformers). Indeed are there many areas that Lee are not active in? They seemed to be on every corner at Photokina. It made me feel that I had done the right thing in acquiring a tiny share of their action when they went public earlier this year! I have a lot of confidence in firms with a strong rental activity; there is no test-bed of customer feed-back quite like rental.

Some new diffusers in the **Lee Filter** range include a 'Hampshire Frost' which I thought might be the beginning of a colour war until I did a direct comparison with Rosco's 'Hamburg Frost' and found that they are complementary rather than competitive. However, we can look forward to a more competitive atmosphere in the filter market place. Strand are waving goodbye to **Cinemoid** (both masterline and professional)



Second-generation remote-control pan/tilt/focus spotlight by Neithammer. There are profile, zoom-profile and simple focus models, with 4-colour semaphore as an add-on option.



'Showchanger' - the Strand Parscan Par 64 unit with variable speed pan and tilt movement and integral scrolling colour change unit.

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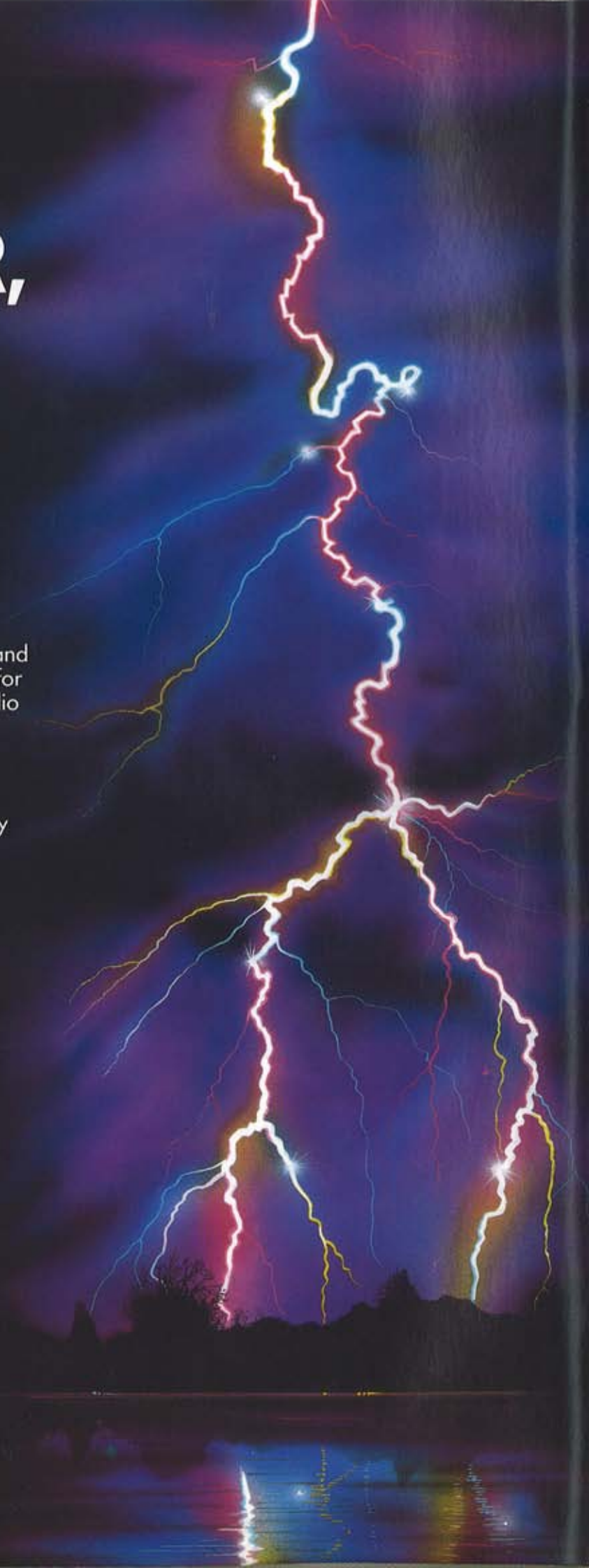
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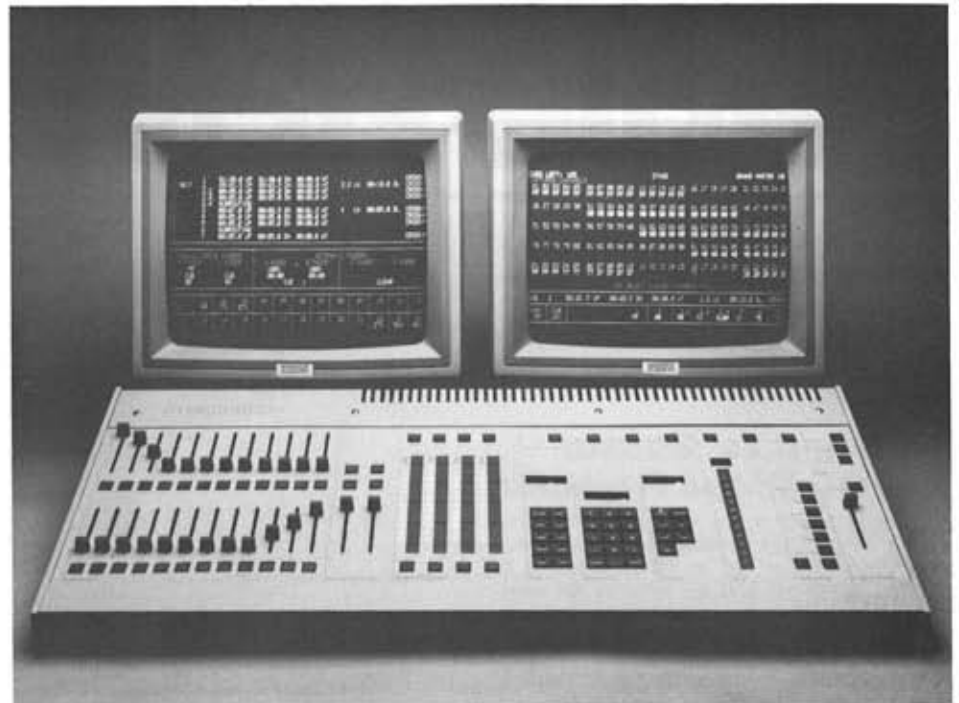




Moving Visions Dance Theatre - a Photokina performance on Strand Lighting's stand.

and Chromoid. Now it's **Strand GL** and **Strand GLX** (to be pronounced Gel and Gelex). Sheet size is standardised on 20" x 24" with GLX also available in 50ft rolls of 24" width. GLX is a new name for Chromoid but, while GL retains cinemoid numbers although reducing them to 29 varieties, the material is new and cheaper yet still intrinsically coloured rather than just surface coated. There is a new leaflet listing these ranges plus a selection of correction filters and diffusers; but **Rosco** are the only filter merchants to produce serious helpful literature on solving colour choice problems. (Although Lee are trying hard here, and may catch up.) Will Strand now face up to market realities and show the same liberality as Rosco and Lee in distributing free colour swatches?

**Coemar** have introduced a range of halogen spotlights which look uncannily like Strand's Prelude and Harmony series. Is this a



Arri's 'Imagination' Control.

compliment to Strand, or is it just that extrusion construction techniques impose a common shape on lights? Anyone done a performance comparison yet?

**CCT** were showing pole operated variants of their classic Silhouette range using prototypes to gauge possible response by entering into a dialogue with potential users. Condenser optics are beginning to look a trend with CCT leading the way. And there was a motorised moving gobo that we are sure going to want.

Perhaps the most significant change in German stage lighting equipment is the virtual eclipse of Reiche and Vogel who not so long ago totally dominated the Central European opera house market. Strand now have a useful slice of that cake and Neithammer make the big stuff for lighting bridges where precise mechanical provision for continual easy refocusing is more important than compact size. The rise of this firm is linked to the

swing from simple focus spots to profile optics, a fashion which reached Germany much later than parts of the world more influenced by Anglo-American lighting design practice.

I have always been an admirer of **Pani**. This is the luxury end of the market with an optical and mechanical quality that is beyond the financial aspirations of all but the most generously endowed repertoire theatres in countries where cultural standards are a national priority. Remotely operated motorised venetian blind dimmers for discharge lamps, 4kW HMI Scenic projector with remotely controlled zoom lenses, a follow spot range for all situations including downlighting from bridges: these are just some of the quality goods from Vienna.

All in all an interesting show, and comforting to have so much confirmation that Britain's entertainment lighting technology is riding so high in world markets.

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