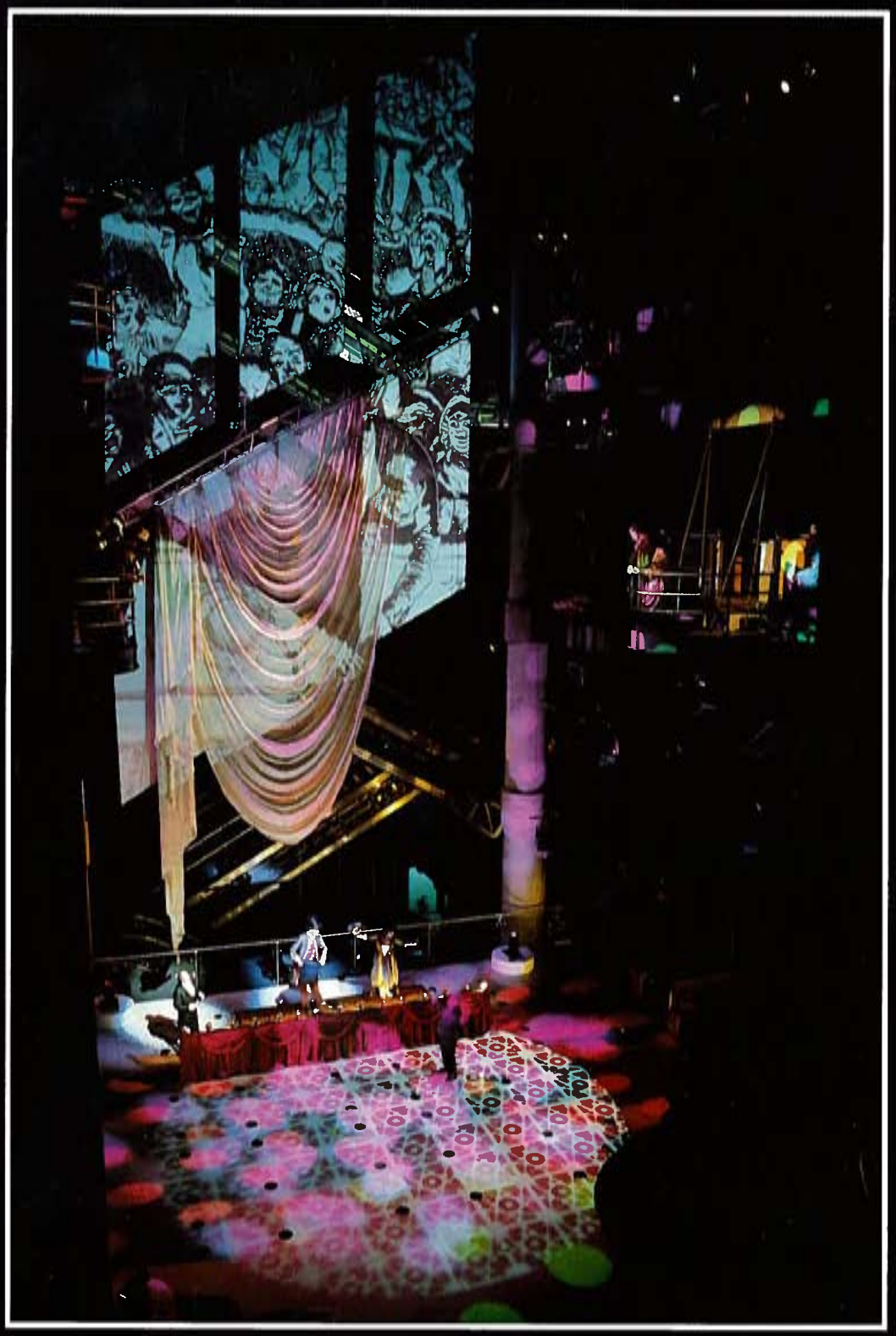
LIGHTING+SOUND International



Tercentenary Show in the Lloyd's of London building - see cover story page 5

PLASA

Published by the Professional Lighting and Sound Association

July 1988

Volume 3 No.7

£1.50

Video and Gobos put the 'Go' in Zhivago

International lighting designer Tony Gotellier, fresh from the London Empire re-vamp, heads North and looks at two recent innovations in situ.

I suppose to most people Darlington is the end of the line between Kings Cross and York; the place where William Peese founded his Light Railway Company and around which industry the town grew. Today, however, hard pressed sound, lighting and video people are more likely to be found commuting on the 737's from Heathrow to Teesside, than the 125's from Kings Cross.

So why was Darlington chosen to first-edition two major new innovations which will, no doubt, impact themselves on the discotheque scene in the months to come? The answer lies in the ebullient character of Tom Finnegan, the larger than life financier behind a new night club called Zhivagos. As he says: "I don't do things by half measures and after several years in the industry I have learned that you have got to offer the public something exceptional if you want a project to have longevity." This attitude probably explains why Zhivagos could claim 12,000 members before the doors opened for the first time.

The video story goes back some three years or so when Tim Davies, son of Rupert and a provider of Rock-n-Roll support services, got together with software writers, video artists and substantial financial backing to form Robodevco. These people had a common purpose: to discover and invent the successor to video wall which was just then beginning to happen as a high-cost spin-off from video effect generators.

By about two years ago a working system was in place and I well remember visiting a converted warehouse in Kentish Town for an early demonstration. I can also remember being considerably impressed, though somewhat disconcerted by the disembodied welcome of a remote voice activated robot which persisted with asking leading questions throughout.

All such peripheral gimmickery has since gone out of the window and we are now dealing with the core of the system which could be described as son-of-video wall or videorama - a surround video system with the ability to move vision and sound around in the most disturbing and impelling fashion.

If I found my induction disconcerting, imagine the scene, if you will, with Tom Finnegan and wife Sylvia clambering over packing cases and negotiating a warren of scruffy corridors to discover Robodevco's offspring Davies Vision. For following a very public launch, some weeks after I had first met the system, Robodevco dissolved into its constituent parts with Tim and his creative team retaining the rights to sell and install the system, while the original company plans to concentrate on performance opportunities.

However, completely spellbound by what they saw at the end of the trek, Finnegan recognised that this was the USP he had been looking for to put the 'Go' in Zhivagos. Nevertheless the question needs to be asked as to why it took the market three years to recognise the potential of such a unique and innovative concept. In an industry supposedly dependent on its willingness to experiment with the cutting edge of technology, why was this system left in the wilderness for so long - and why was it left to a stranger to the business to recognise its potential? During all this time the closest they got to any real exposure was a proposed Jagger tour but even he, eventually, got cold feet.

The system as installed at Laura's Bar, the fun pub/video cafe below the nightclub proper, consists of 28 JVC monitors stacked in eight ascending columns, each one higher than the other and radiating away from two small video walls in the centre. The sources are an assortment of video players, laser disc and camera all of which can receive overlaid effects from a Fairlight compact. The Compact is the new budget unit designed especially for the discotheque market with economised facilites but capable of generating all the standard video effects and graphics plus over 4000 colour hues. All effects can be triggered from a music source. It costs half as much as the full Fairlight effect generator and is certainly a very attractive proposition at the price for any club with a video projector or wall.

The real secret, however, of the system is the software and custom-made equipment provided by Davies Vision. Hardware wise we are dealing with a fairly large processor and front-end software system routed through two seemingly standard disco touch panels which, heavily modified via a custom interface, allow the operator to recall and use a range of sequences from, one screen to one source, up to several thousand events at the same time. The idea here, apparently, was to provide the V.J. with a hands-on system which he would readily understand and thus allow video scratching with a minimum of training. So effectively they are used by Davies as dumb panels.

The ability of the system to call up, and change at the touch of a key, four video sources from a total of nine available and direct them to up to 32 independently controlled video outputs, is the recipe for its impact. Video images and animations, including complex chases and sequences can be chopped and changed at will. It is even possible to strobe the monitors, since a CRT is readily switchable at high speed.

At present, the output stage is achieved through Davies Visions' matrix system, which although adequate for its present application is to be expanded to a full framestore facility in the future to enable composite images throughout.

All these animations can be driven from an audio trigger, at which point it is relevant to examine the essential role of Mark Burgin's Shuttlesound in the feature, although this is the subject of a full article, by Ben Duncan elsewhere in this issue. However their involvement in the total video experience is too fundamental to ignore. Firstly they have installed a series of speakers throughout the room so that wherever you stand you always hear full range stereo and this opens the door for a whole range of audio effects.

In order to implement this, Shuttlesound took an Akai AX73 Synth and Image Sampler and replaced the original notes with a series of sound effects. For example a helicopter flies through the room and lands; a shell is fired and explodes; a train speeds through; and wherever you stand you get the benefit of this 3D audio imagery achieved by the strategically placed speakers.

All of this is certainly exciting stuff but it did leave me wondering why it was that audio

Wrap-round video at Zhivago's, Darlington.

and videe are not actually synced for these special effects. After all both systems are Midi driven, which does seem a bit over the top for a simple sound activation as in the case of the video, so presumably Davies must have something more up their sleeves for the future.

Now, in the hope that I have not lost those with a lighting interest, on to the other new special effect to make its debut at Zhivagos - this time over the dance floor.

As readers of this journal will know I have followed the development of so-called intelligent lights with close interest and forecast a few years ago the emergence of a series of Vari-Lite budget look-alikes for the disco arena. Therefore I consider myself fortunate to have had the opportunity to have been instrumental in specifying the latest of these developments into this scheme and to be able to say from first hand experience that these instruments have finally come of age.

At Zhivagos the dance floor system installed by Hi-Tec contains eight Clay Paky 'Golden Scans' as well as many other effects such as 32 heavily modified Minilights. These Golden Scans are the first in the U.K., resulting from an original prototype which I was privileged to inspect several months ago. I am bound to say that as a prototype it was one of the best engineered luminaires I had ever seen, complete with cast aluminium ratchet-operated remote controlled iris. All that was missing at that stage was the on-board processor, to be designed for Clay Paky by Pulsar, to provide the essential control element.

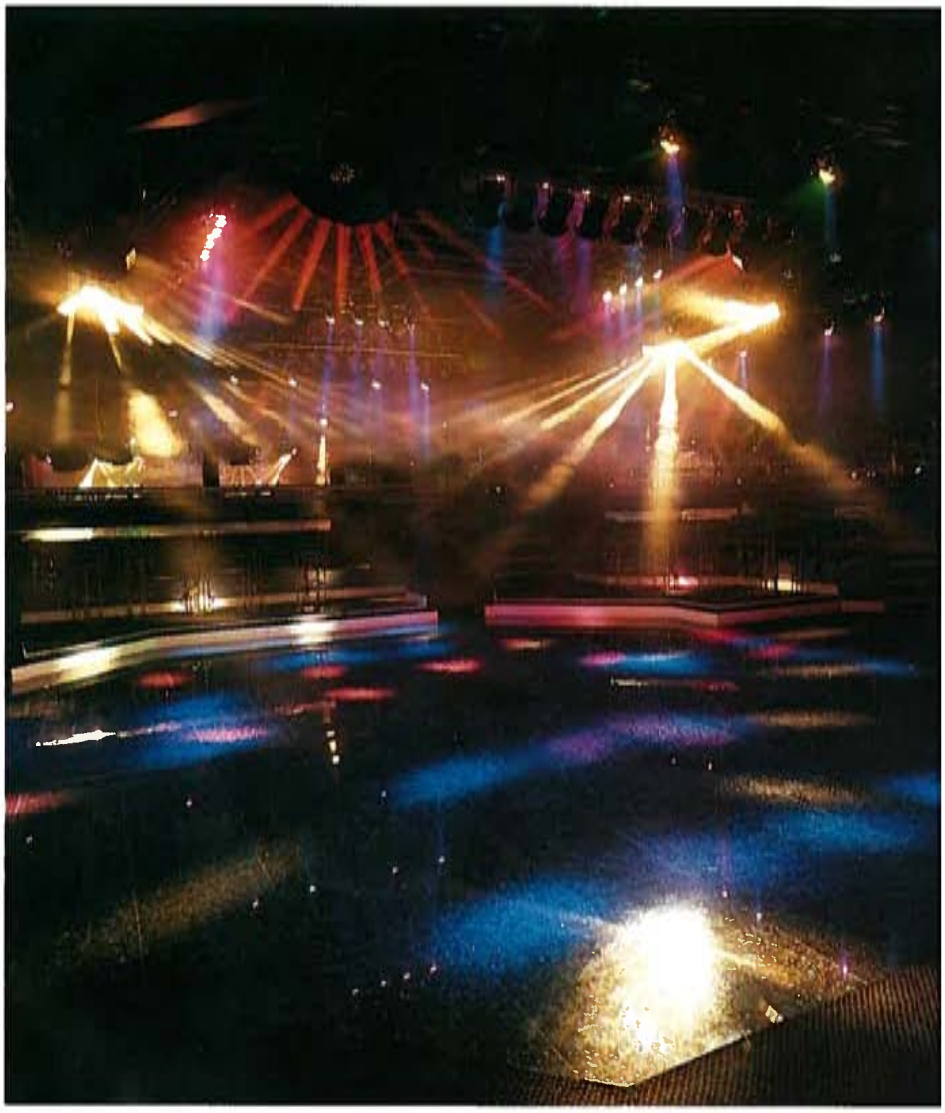
Sensibly they set about developing the electronics with the proviso that the ultimate machine should be controllable either digitally or from 0-10 Volt analog source. In this way the Golden Scans can be hooked up to any industry standard control desk or, as in this case, to Oska - Pulsar's on-screen touch control system.

On test in a real situation the Scans proved a brilliant success with the added advantage of micro-stepping which ensured a smooth passage from A to B. The 575 Watt HMI discharge source provided the anticipated white hot colour temperature and, for once, the manufacturer's selection of dichroic filters were really stunning. With pan, tilt, colour change, gobo change, remote iris and fast shutter control, the Golden Scan has a lot to offer. I found that the remote iris provided an additional range of subtle effects not achievable with comparable machines and that the high speed shutter could be used to generate almost stroboscopic movements.

All in all I found the units hard to fault, although there are a few initial calibration problems which will be overcome with current software, and access to the control board has not been made as easy as it might be. Otherwise a welcome new tool for the lighting designer's kit.

At the end of the day I am still left asking myself how it is that two such significant innovations in our industry have been left to a small independent nightclub owner in County Durham to premiere. Wake up night club majors - you have some responsibilities in this direction!

Client's lighting designer/Consultant:
Tony Gottelier, Wynne Willson Gottelier Ltd
Lighting contractor: Hi-Tec Electrical Services
Contractor's lighting designer: Lizard Lighting
Sound supplier: Shuttlesound Ltd
Sound installer: Level Acoustics



Zhivago's - the main dance floor.

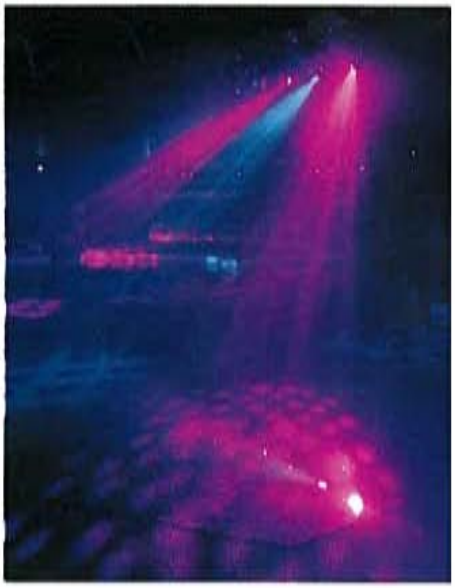
Video supplier/installer: Fairlight Vision
Video software: Davies Vision

Lighting Specification:
32 Minilights
2 smoke machines
16 Par 56
16 MiniMoons
8 Spartans
48 70W Halogen Bulletts
4 Megastar Strobes
24 Mode Arcline
1 Clay Paky Astroggi
18 Thomas Parcans
32 pcs. Neon
8 Clay Paky Golden Scans

Control Equipment:
Oska 256 channel control system with fader unit
2 Minilight controllers
1 Arcline controller

Video Equipment:
28 JVC FST 21" monitors
2 x 2x2 Cameron video walls
2 Panasonic MVG40 VHS player/recorders
1 Panasonic FIO CCD camera with pan, tilt and remote
1 Pioneer 60/100 laser disc
1 Polar Video R-TBC
1 Fairlight CBI compact
1 JVC colour preview monitor
2 Satellite dishes

Oska overlooks its domain.



Golden Scans get to work.

Reflections in the marble dance floor.

VJ's at play - note the Akai keyboard in background.

A close-up of the first UK installation of Clay Paky Golden Scans.