

# LIGHTING+SOUND

*International*



THE FANTASY WORLD OF SIEGFRIED AND ROY

- Siegfried and Roy, Magic and Mystery in Las Vegas
- Technical Changes at Le Palais
- Dukes of Chelmsford
- Lighting the Ballet Rambert
- Frankfurt Review
- Checking out Chess On Tour

**APRIL 1990**

# DUKES EXPERIENCE

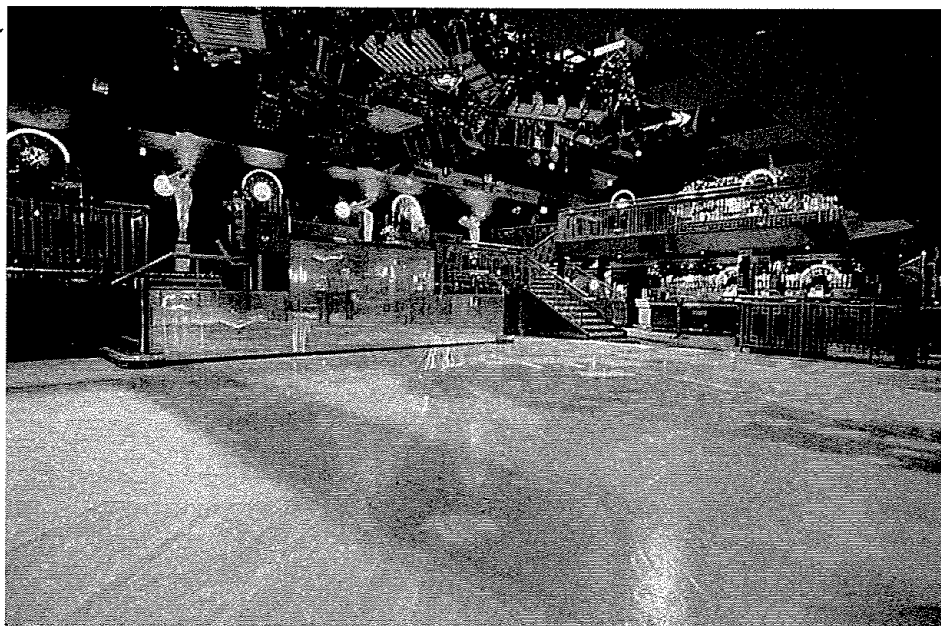
Vincent Rice samples some Chelmsford nightlife

What is it about Essex that drives the children of that fair county to lust after the products of the Ford Motor Company, especially Escorts of any vintage? In the process of finding a sneaky parking spot under the railway station in Chelmsford I came upon a huge gaggle of guys, girls and souped up XR3is — a nightly occurrence apparently, and entirely in keeping with the Essex Dave'n'Tracy image. Of course these days it's all Timberland boots and Acid House. The true inheritors of the 'bimbo' culture were to be found, metaphorically and actually, on the other side of the street queuing to get into the latest Essex fun palace — the 'Dukes Experience'.

The entertainment stakes are high in this neck of the woods and Dukes owners, Essex Entertainments, are relying on a massive investment in sound and lighting (over £250,000) to deliver local domination. The lighting, with a few minor quibbles, is undoubtedly a triumph for designer Graham Barron. The sound system, a joint effort between Essex Entertainments technical director Chris Adams and consultant John Frederick is a different box of speakers altogether. More of which later.

On entering the be-neoned portico entrance of the club one is met by what at first seems to be yet another re-run of the hackneyed 'art deco' nightclub theme. On closer inspection however, the interior design, by Ashley Rowland of Leonard Ashley Design, raises itself a cut above the rest by the quality of the custom fittings, the abstract carpet design and a tendency towards the 'art nouveau' style — a weird and much more interesting period of design (and my pick for the next wave of commercial retro discovery). In the club proper, several balcony levels have been added to good effect and the barn-like nature of the building has been successfully disguised.

Totally dominating the interior are two things — the massive lighting rig and the massive 6x6 Cameron videowall that is obscured by it. It came as no surprise that it was intended to raise the steels supporting the lighting rig by three metres prior to installation. The idea was unfortunately abandoned on grounds of cost which



Ready and waiting for the 'Dukes Experience'.

Photos: Chris Pearson

suggests a certain strangeness of priorities since there is now nowhere in the club that affords an uninterrupted view of the splendid videowall. Similarly, views from the balcony tend to be blocked by the complex workings of the lighting rig. Fortunately, the installation by H. A. Lee is neat and there is an interesting industrial moving landscape for the punters to watch.

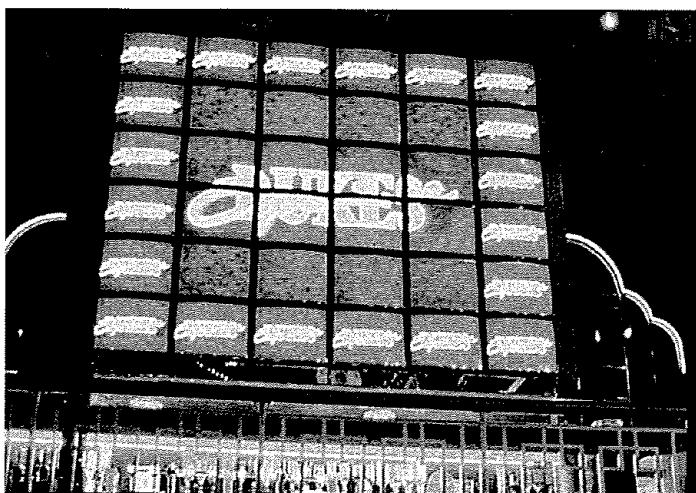
The lighting rig itself consists of a central tetrahedral aluminium mirror/neon feature surrounded by a larger steel frame triangle with steel frame squares off each face. Surrounding these central features are six 'delta' shaped steel frames. What makes the rig unique so far is the range of movements and controllability of that movement, with some 25 motors supplied by Lynx Lighting, all of them controllable proportionally with a standard 0-10v signal.

The central neon feature moves vertically; within the squares off the central triangle there are smaller square frames that move vertically and also slowly rotate and tumble to any position. The outer 'delta' sections move vertically and by the use of two motors can tilt inward or outward. Three of these outer frames also contain square

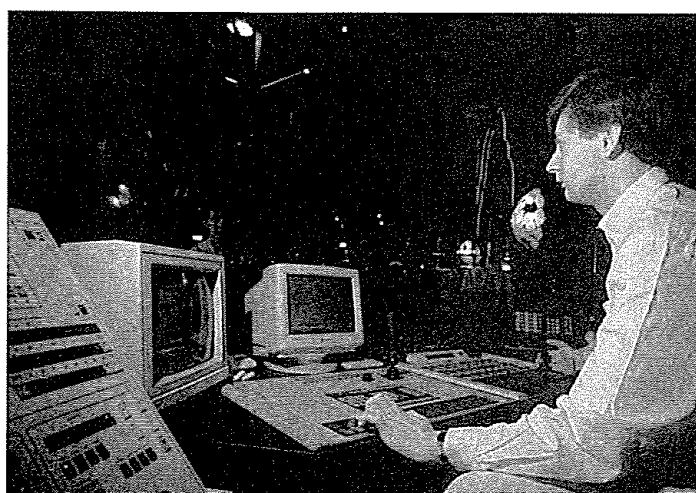
frames within them that can tumble. As you can imagine, the physical shapes possible are endless, and by making control of a motor system available to even the humblest controller (an idea prompted by our good friend T. Gottelier I believe) Lynx Lighting are likely to obtain more work than they can handle — possibly more from the presentation and rock'n'roll markets than disco.

In terms of actual light fittings Graham Barron has taken something of a rock'n'roll feel by eschewing the use of overtly discotheque units and using a range of static lanterns of different powers and beam sizes (Par 36s, F70s, Lynx SXs, Coemar Fortes and Par 64 Raylights), high power strobes and outlining neon, getting the movement of the rig to do the expressive work. The only exception on the rig being the regulation issue 12 Clay Paky Golden Scans, in three sets of four.

I take issue with this concept slightly. Modern discotheque, as opposed to live rock'n'roll which consists of a finite number of separate lighting scenes designed to enhance the mood of each song, tends to be a single dance groove that rises and



An unobscured view of the Cameron videowall.



Getting to grips with the Enigma system.



"The wonderful world of Dave 'n' Tracy."

in tempo and intensity to give peaks and troughs of excitement within a continuum of music. Certain tempos and musical feels can, in my opinion, only be expressed by the spinning of a 'helicopter' or the tumbling of a 'harvester', which is why their forms were thought up in the first place.

Everyone is aware of the danger of clutter and bad taste in discotheque lighting design, but I would love to have seen these simple effects given a new slant, literally, by the extensive angular movement opportunities of the rig.

The other problem with this approach is

that one has to rely a great deal on the quality of the lighting operator and the present incumbent simply ain't cutting it yet. He is obviously in the first nervous stages of getting to grips with the powerful Enigma controller and the hugely versatile rig, and there seems to be an attempt to use every single piece of the movement and lighting about every ten minutes or so. Having said that, a simple continuous movement can relate directly to a musical tempo, a complex mechanical choreography repeated endlessly simply becomes tedious. The rig movement should be used to create

unique physical shapes and the possibilities of each shape exploited for a period of time using the lighting. No doubt things will get better when he calms down a bit.

An interesting piece of lighting in the rig is the use of six Thomas Par 56 light curtains with M&M gel scrollers (used extensively in the musical 'Anything Goes'). An example of the possible crossover from theatre which I am sure we will see more of. A puzzling addition to the lighting armoury and not the choice of Graham Barron was the addition to the rig of 14 Laser Systems' Gyrolights,



Atmospherics from the designs of Graham Barron.



The lighting rig dominates the interior.