



*A focusing trolley at the near end of the suspended track which forms part of the touring lighting rigs. The lighting technician lies on the trolley and can reach and set the lights beneath.*

*Photo: Techplan*

that area – and it’s absolutely terrible, no good at all, especially as the sets are never in the same place and you often have to move the masking; you have to change the environment to make the sets look good. You’ve got to focus to the set if you’re going to achieve anything like what the lighting designer was trying to create in the first place.

So we had to replace the Tallescope. We came up with a lightweight touring lighting bridge which allowed us to access the lights using rock’n’roll technology. Using lightweight ladders, we can have three people, one on each lighting bridge and they slide along on a trolley. This allows us to do a very, very fast focus. It immediately saved me the cost of four people, because

I’d had four people holding the Tallescope before and I didn’t need to employ them any longer. We were able to reinvest that saving into the product, because, as John says, there are no real cost savings – you can’t come up with an equation and say here’s this many thousands of pounds saved. Actually you’re never spending enough on the product in the first place, so you just move it from one budget into another.

We use a lot of chain hoists; that’s about as fancy as we get. There are problems for us with chain hoists nowadays; we’re having to do more and more structural surveying work because the theatres themselves don’t do it, and there’s tighter and tighter legislation. We couldn’t tour without chain hoists. There are too many times that we need to lift very large, heavy pieces of scenery to get them

an earlier session that they try not to use any show-specific technology, because they’ve got all the technology in the theatre. They know this is going to work, they don’t have time to take chances, so they keep everything else as simple as possible and use just the equipment that’s installed in the theatre. That’s their policy. But we don’t have the technology, so we have to bring it in with us.

So what are our objectives for technology? We want to reduce or eliminate dangerous manual handling tasks. All you really want to do when you are taking shows into touring venues is to fly scenery – you don’t want to be loading and unloading counterweights. You do want a very simple operation. You want a high degree of technology, but you want anybody to be able to operate any part of it very, very easily, without extended levels of training, without them having to deal with it. Somebody – Simon Harper – made the quote of the Conference, “Wear your finger out.” That’s what we want – wear-your-finger-out technology! We need it to speed up fit-ups and changeovers, we want to reduce labour costs, we want to improve the quality of life for staff.

I think it is vitally important that we don’t let the technology downgrade the jobs the staff have to do. I know that there are some organisations that feel that it doesn’t, but inevitably there’s a likelihood that you do downgrade. It’s essential, if we’re going to retain a reasonable stock of good-quality staff in this country, that we don’t downgrade them, that we make sure that their skills are commensurate with the technology that’s there, but also that the technology doesn’t drive them out. Reinvest to save.

What’s practical and what are the limitations? We’ve already talked about the footprint of the existing receiving theatres. I notice Richard Pulford made a mention in his introductory speech about putting a lot of Lottery money towards redeveloping most of the London theatres. I wouldn’t in any way want to criticise or disagree with that, but certainly in the provinces I think the amount of money that’s being invested in the majority of theatres – not the new builds or the major refurbishments – is relatively small. Although it will have an impact on those theatres, this will often only address core maintenance problems. So let’s not kid ourselves; it’s not going to turn those theatres into something wonderful, and

*The background to operations and staffing is described in two major theatres and the situation for touring companies and in receiving houses in the UK looked at in more detail, including the approach that is taken to technical equipment installations.*

Barcelona, which has technology, we took a show that had a large doorway a tonne and a half. On anywhere in the UK, to rig the motors and Barcelona it took just we’ve got to be aware of its limitations. The

limitations in Barcelona were the same, to a certain extent, as those at Sadler’s Wells, where the culture of the organisation doesn’t maximise the use of the technology.

We also use show-specific type hardware, and we use quite a lot of that. That’s quite interesting because Chris Harding-Roberts from the Royal Opera House was saying in