

So that was my first gripe, and first plea to our friends who are architects, if it's at all possible. Another problem that we have – and it sounds odd – is plans. We rely totally on a company called Modelbox for touring in the UK, because we simply do not have any other access to plans, unless the theatre's been built in the last three or four years, and even then it's pretty difficult. For a start, invariably there's no section (through the stage and auditorium), and if there is a section it's always inaccurate. It seems that owners or producers have no interest in putting information about any changes to their building back to the main source of drawings, which is, in this country, Modelbox. As a production manager I find my life made very difficult by this.

Because of it you're relying on doing a thorough survey of every building you go into before you can even make the decision as to whether or not you can take the show there. We really ought to be provided with a package of accurate information to be able to plan a tour and then to do a survey when the actual date is coming up to make sure – when you're just ironing out small points. I believe it's actually worse on Broadway. It seems to me that Broadway theatres don't even have basic CAD drawings. The best you can do is to look at the Broadway handbook, where you can just manage to get a 1:1000 drawing of the sketch of the set. I think this an issue that needs to be addressed by the theatre owners. And likewise, when any theatre has been modified, somebody must invest in taking the architect's plans and turning them into what we call real working theatrical plans. I think that there should be a big penalty clause put on anyone who changes a theatre and doesn't actually notify everybody who needs to know, so that the plans are kept up to date.

Power is another issue. Our lovely lighting designers have something to answer for on this, because they seem to use every item and trick going – if it's on the market, it's on the show. It's not just them, though; vast requirements for power are now coming from automation and stage engineering as well. And nowadays even the sound boys are often asking for 120 amps, three-phase – and it's of course got to be clean. Even though in the West End it all goes back to the London electrical power grid at some point, they seem to think it's got to go back a lot further than is realistic! But power is a problem. When we did the get-in

at the Lyceum for *The Lion King*, that theatre was only four years old and yet power was a real sweat. We had three 400-amp feeds and we needed four. We actually have to monitor the air-conditioning in the Lyceum buildings, because there are certain points in the show when the stage loading is such that we have to turn it off, because if the air conditioning kicks in we've lost all our power! So when it's decided you need four 400-amp feeds, provide five; whatever you provide, people will take more. When I was at the Grand Theatre in Leeds, that is Opera North's home, we even had to have a generator for *Superstar*, which is not a huge touring show. But the moment we start to tour automation, that's when we're in trouble with power.

I would plead with any architect and consultant to give us new high-specification grids. We invariably end up having to survey every grid in every touring house we go into because most are simply not up to carrying the loads – and not only do we survey them, we have to beef up most of them. Nowadays it's not unreasonable to ask for 30 bars each carrying 500 kilos (1200 lbs) as a touring-house standard. And having got those, we expect to be able to use them all at the same time! People laugh, but you often have the 30 sets, but you've got a choice of 12 which are going to work!

*The difficulty of rigging modern touring shows in many older theatres (and even some new ones) and what should and can be done is described by two experienced production managers and an architect and then discussed with the delegates.*

*The stage of the Regent Theatre in Hanley, a receiving theatre with 64 single-purchase counterweight flying sets of 500 kg capacity (theatre consultants: Techplan).*

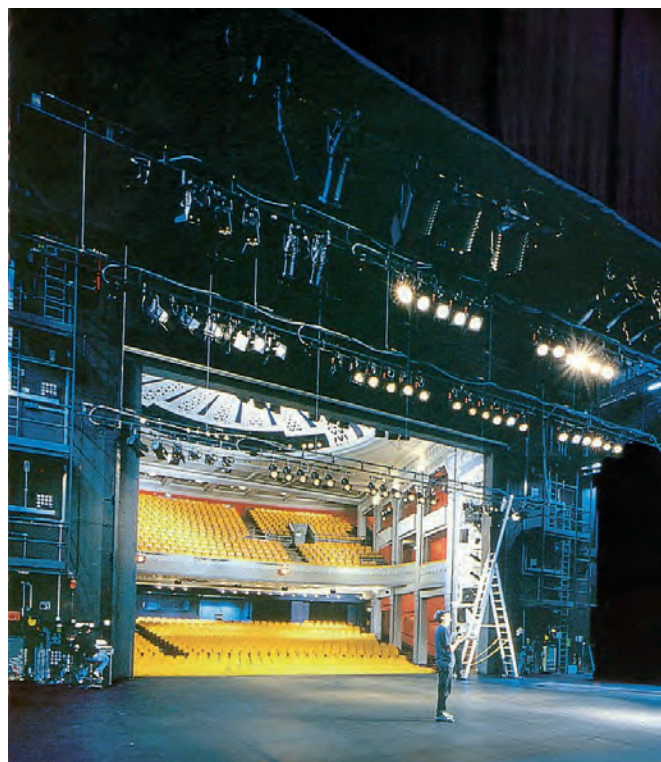


Photo: Northern Light