

RUDOLPH CARTIER

THE PRODUCER IN TELEVISION

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps the most rewarding and interesting aspect of television is in the field of drama. The television screen possesses an intimacy that neither the stage nor the cinema can achieve. The producer's influence, therefore, is more closely felt by his audience. His approach to this medium presents many problems and the solutions to some of these are dealt with in this article.

There is sometimes confusion about the function of the producer but we are using the term here as it is generally accepted in Great Britain, as the person who actually directs a show. His is essentially a personal art and his imprint will be stamped on each production. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the work of Rudolph Cartier



Rudolph Cartier searching for a cast with the help of a B.B.C booking clerk.

who has done many bold and enthralling productions for the B.B.C, notable amongst which are his spectacular versions of operas and large-scale dramas.

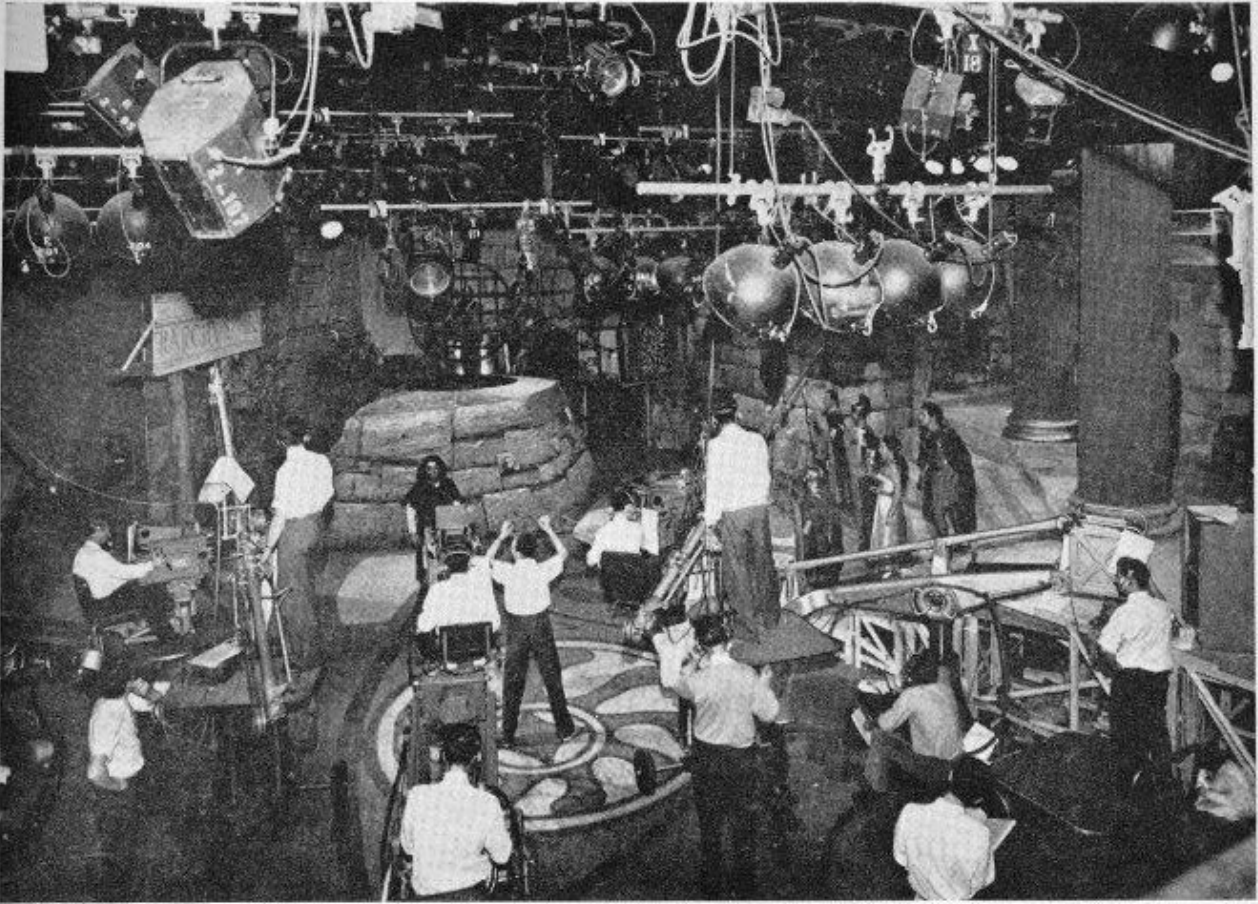
It is the intention of this journal to include articles on various aspects of production, and to initiate these we have asked Mr Cartier to give his personal views on a subject about which he is so well qualified to write.

AS A PRODUCER, my work on a television production usually begins about two months before the scheduled date of transmission with the arrival on my desk of the script. I assess its probable transmission time on the basis of one minute to a page in a fast-moving production, or one and quarter minutes for a slower one, where a certain time is spent on 'mood' and 'reactions'.

CHOOSING A CAST

My first task is to draft a cast list and to try to visualise the possible actors for the two or three leading parts—these having to be approached and booked as far ahead as possible, as good actors, whose names mean something on the screen, are scarce and are usually making films or working in the theatre.

Every B.B.C television producer works with a booking clerk who negotiates with the players and agents, agrees on the fees, and draws up contracts. Sometimes an actor has to be booked six months ahead as was the case with Eli Wallach (the American star of *Baby Doll*) whom I wanted for my production of *Counsellor-at-Law*, or with Helga Pilarczyk of the Hamburg Opera, whom I had to book in April to appear in Richard Strauss's opera *Salome* in October. These, however, are exceptions which occur only if there is a special part which can, in the opinion of the producer, be filled only by one particular person and nobody else. For a straight acting part a replacement can



A general view of Studio 1 at Riverside during the production of *Salome*, showing crane-mounted cameras, microphone booms, lighting system etc. The sub-conductor is seen in the centre watching the monitor screen on the left on which he receives his cue from the conductor in Studio 2.

usually be found if the first choice is unavailable, but opera is far more difficult because there are few 'star' performers who have the voice, looks and acting ability to stand up to the critical intimacy of the television screen.

COUNTING THE COST

When I receive the script I am sent what is known as the 'Ration-Book' which gives me the budget allowance for the programme. It also names the Designer, Wardrobe and Make-Up Supervisor and the Camera-Crew allotted to the programme. The budget does not include services such as studios, technicians, electricians, staff, etc., but it does include those items which have to be paid for in cash, such as copyright, music and musicians, actors, Design and Supply ('props' and scenery), Wardrobe (hire and making

of costumes), and Make-Up. Also included is the cost of special film sequences, and miscellaneous items like entertainment and transport.

The cast, including crowd actors and walk-ons, is usually the main item in the budget, with Design and Supply coming next. Wardrobe is practically nil in some shows, where actors appear in their own clothes, but a heavy item in others. In *Salome* costumes, wigs and beards for twenty principals and forty crowd players cost £1,000 in hire charges alone. Copyright is normally a small item as it is paid per 'screen minute' in the case of published plays, to which a translator's or adapter's fee has to be added. Work specially written for television is, however, of a much higher value and is paid according to the standing of the author, who, apart from two or three repeats, retains the film and all other rights.

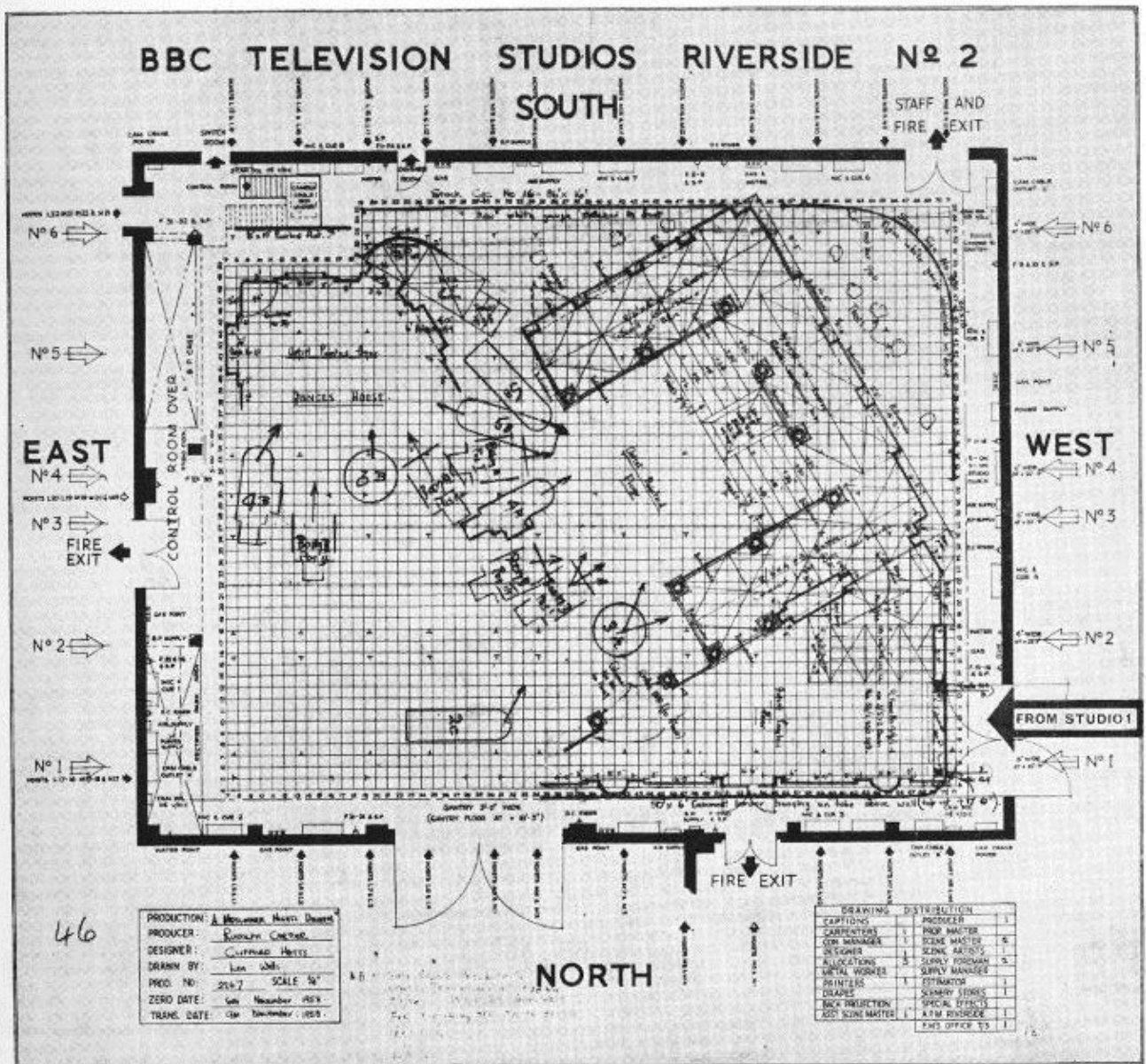
TECHNICAL CONSIDERATIONS

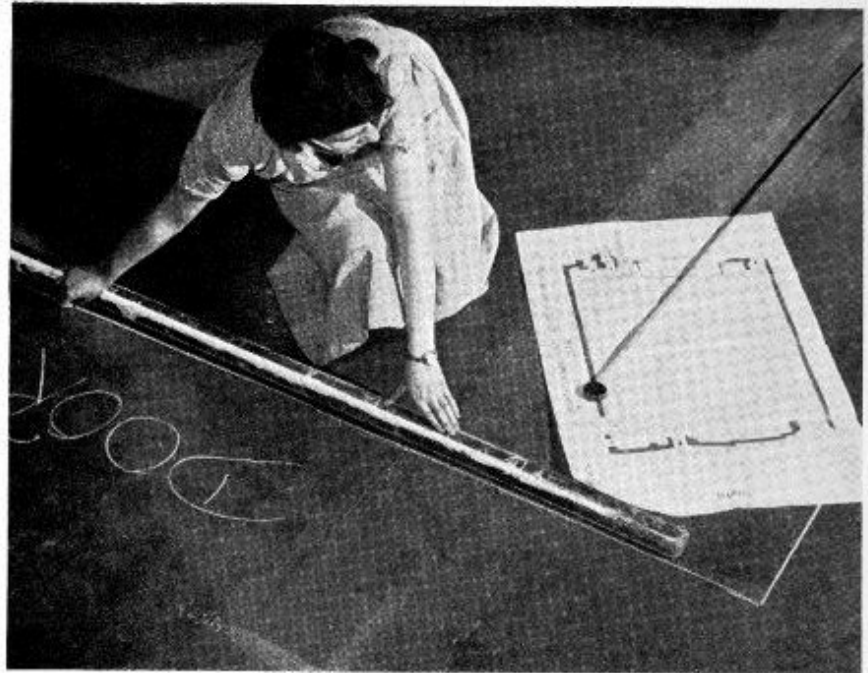
Before going into rehearsal, I try to book the studio which is most suited to my production. As I have become associated with big and spectacular productions, I do everything possible to get "Riverside One", the largest and most modern B.B.C stage available until the new Television Centre is opened. It has also the advantage that the smaller "Riverside Two" can be linked with it so that both studios can be used as one by the designer for long vistas or street

scenes. I took advantage of this in *A Tale of Two Cities*, Arthur Benjamin's opera based on Charles Dickens' novel, in which a very fine effect of the alleyway, where Madame Defarge's inn was situated, was achieved by shooting from one studio through the open door into the other. I repeated the same trick in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to look from a walled garden through a Grecian gate into the forest of Athens.

The main reason, however, why I prefer Riverside

Set layout for *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.





An assistant floor manager marks the floor of the rehearsal room with the actual size of the built set.

is its camera equipment. In my opinion, nothing can compare with the brilliance and sharpness of its Image Orthicon cameras, and this is also very apparent in telerecordings taken in that studio. Although some producers favour the softer, more 'artistic' picture achieved by other cameras, by the time the picture reaches the screen of the sometimes inferior domestic receiver it is no longer 'artistic' and has lost some of its intrinsic value. "Viewers Research" shows that there is a strong preference for a sharply defined, brilliantly contrasted picture, and experience shows that, with good lighting, pictures just as 'artistic' can be obtained on an Image Orthicon camera. It has also the advantage of a more sensitive tube enabling the camera-man to use a stop between $f/5.6$ and $f/8$ which helps in grouping the actors in depth without losing definition in the fore or background.

Both studios at Riverside are equipped with the 'lighting console', which allows the lighting engineer, sitting with the producer, to execute the lighting changes precisely on the producer's cues.

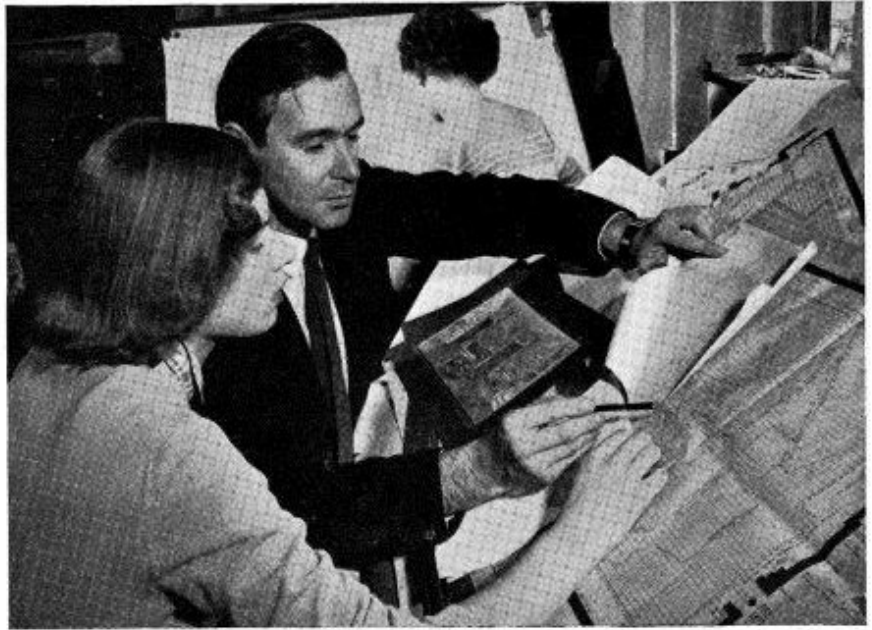
The choice of the camera-crew is as important as the selection of the studio. Personally, I have found that I get the best results if I can persuade the authorities to allocate the same camera-crew for all my productions. My television productions generally use

four cameras and only on productions involving two studios do I use five or six cameras, half of them in one studio and half in the other, with the possibility of joining forces by 'tracking' through the open connecting door.

For purposes of mobility the Number One camera is usually mounted on a large crane known as "Big Bill", or on a smaller one, both of which have to be operated by a number of skilled drivers and 'arm-swingers'. These cranes give great flexibility to the camera, allowing it to make high or low angle shots, wide side-to-side movements of the arm, as well as being able to track backwards and forwards on their motorised bases. The smaller motorised crane only needs one driver, but can only raise its arm up to 7 ft above ground and cannot move it from side-to-side. It can track at various speeds on its base but any side-ways movement of the picture must be achieved by the camera-man 'panning' his camera.

There is also a range of pedestals pushed by the camera-man himself, which allow the camera to be raised up to 6 ft in height, but at this level the camera-man has to stand on a rostrum and his freedom of movement is somewhat restricted. Also, in the case of a quick movement an assistant is necessary to move the cables.

The producer decides which camera mountings to



The Designer briefs a draughtswoman on the set layout.

use, as he alone knows the visual effects he wants. If the studio is cluttered with a large number of sets I try to avoid using the large crane as it takes up a lot of floor space, and I use the motorised crane for 'tracking' shots. If, however, there are no tracking shots I find it better to use the pedestals, provided that the maximum lens height is sufficient for my purposes, as sets are often built on different levels.

Low-angle shots are sometimes highly effective, but they need special attention from the designer and lighting engineer so that the camera does not 'shoot' into the lights above the set. In one of my productions (*The Winslow Boy*) I wanted a frightening close-up of one of the chief characters, a lawyer, towering over an intimidated boy, and to achieve this the height of the wall behind him had to be increased, so that the very low camera angle shooting upwards from the boy's eyeline had sufficient cover to form the background to the lawyer's face. This increase could be made only on a small area of the back wall, so that it was very important that both camera and actors were in the exact position at the right time.

Since each camera has a rotatable turret with at least four different lens mountings, it is the producer's job to choose the lenses he wants to use for his production. The lenses are classified either in inches of focal length or in degrees of angle of vision, and I

usually choose a 9°* lens for all my close-ups, a 14° lens for close-medium shots, a 25° lens for medium shots and a 35° lens for wide-angle long shots. In my production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* I found it necessary to choose a 5.5° lens, which is normally used only for outside broadcasts, as the Forest of Athens set was so enormous that it filled the entire Riverside One, and the camera mounted on the big crane was often so far away from the players that it needed an almost telescopic lens to bring them into close-up. A 'zoom' lens could have been used, but I personally do not like the result which 'zooms' give in studio work.

The lens most often used is the 25° because it has a considerable depth of focus, even when working at full aperture, enabling it to be used for close-ups and long shots alike. With the wide-angle lens (35°) it is possible to achieve a whole range from close-ups to long shots simply by moving the actors, thus avoiding the need for 'pulling focus'; this is a great help if space in the studio is too restricted to allow the cameras to be moved. Admittedly, this lens gives a distorted picture in very big close-ups, through the exaggerated perspective, which should be avoided unless a photographically distorted face is artistically desirable.

* 72/9° = focal length in inches.

DESIGNING THE SET

After reading the script and visualising it before my 'inner eye', I decide on the style for the production and send the script to the designer with whom I later have a meeting when he listens to my ideas as I describe to him what I would like to see on the screen, how I want to move the actors from set to set and how I want to achieve certain effects. He roughly sketches the approximate sizes and shapes of the ground plan for each set which are cut out, and placed on top of the studio plan, and by moving them around from one place to another we finally arrive at a solution where best to place each set to give maximum accessibility for actors, cameras, microphone booms, etc.

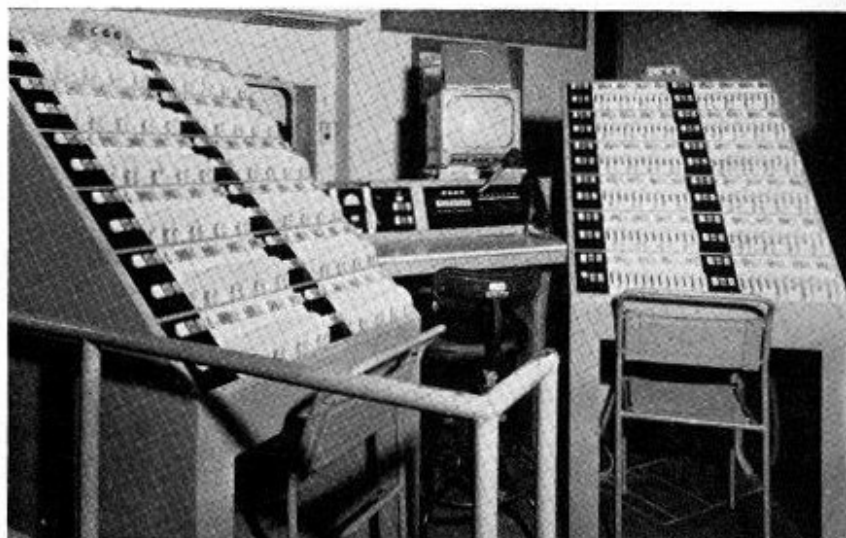
The cut-out shapes are affixed to the studio plan, from which the designer then works out the details and elevations for each set and prepares rough sketches of his ideas which we discuss at a further meeting. If it is necessary to replace one set by another during transmission, arrangements have to be made at this meeting so that this does not interfere with the smooth running of the performance. In some productions even the large Riverside studio has proved to be too small, and to allow sets and cameras to be reorganised during transmission a film sequence has had to be interjected in the middle of the production. The designer then gets on with building the sets, which I very often do not see until the final rehearsals several weeks later. Scenery is constructed either in the B.B.C's own workshops or by outside contractors. All 'props'

and furniture are listed and described in detail by my own assistant Floor Manager so that the Property Department may supply them either from their own stock or hire them from outside.

GETTING INTO SHAPE

The mechanics of rehearsals vary little from medium to medium, but it is important to the television producer to know how long his rehearsals are going to take. I usually estimate one week as being sufficient for a half-hour production, two weeks for one running an hour and three weeks for a play or opera running for 90 minutes or more.

However, before going into rehearsal the producer calls a Planning Meeting where he and the designer discuss with the technicians the best way to put their ideas into practice. In B.B.C practice, the most important technician is the Technical Operations Manager (T.O.M), who supervises the camera-crew, and the sound and lighting technicians. He will want to know how many cameras and what lenses are to be used, the disposition of microphone booms, and how they and the cameras are to be moved about the studio. He will also want to know if there will be any film inserts. The lighting engineer wants to know how the various sets are to be lit and whether any special effects have to be achieved. It is important that this briefing be thorough as the technicians do not appear at rehearsals until the final run through to see if any changes have been made which require a new technical approach.



Lighting Control position at Riverside 2 in the Vision Control Room for the Thyatron dimming equipment used in this studio.



Filming a crowd sequence in *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The T.O.M often has some very difficult problems to solve, especially in large productions involving many sets and complicated technical requirements. An example of this occurred during the preparation of *A Tale of Two Cities*. Although I had the use of both stages at Riverside the designer and I soon realized that we would need both of them for scenery, and that there would be no place for the orchestra of eighty musicians; so room had to be found for them elsewhere.

After trying several studios near at hand we were finally allocated the Camden Theatre, now used as a B.B.C sound studio, which is seven miles away from

Riverside, and the Post Office had to lay eleven vision and sound cables between the two.

An outside broadcast camera was permanently focused on the conductor in the Camden Theatre, with a standby in case of a breakdown, and our studio monitors at Riverside showed him conducting the orchestra and giving the beat and the cues to the sub-conductor who, in turn, conducted the singers at Riverside, who could themselves be seen by the principal conductor on his monitor screen. When I wanted to speak to the conductor during rehearsals I could easily do so on one of the sound lines and he could also hear on his earphones every word spoken by me in the control room. The sound from both studios was mixed and then sent via the Central Control Room to the B.B.C Transmitter at Crystal Palace.

USING FILM

Of course, everything appearing on the television screen is not produced "live"; quite a number of programmes are shot on film, or telerecorded on film, or "Video-taped". Film is also inserted into "live" programmes to provide establishing shots, outdoor backgrounds or other scenes which are difficult or impossible to stage in a studio, and the producer has either to arrange to have special films made or to select from existing material.

It is important that these film inserts should be matched in lighting density and texture to the "live" scenes, or they would appear greyish and ill-defined on the screen. When I use film inserts I invite the studio lighting engineer, whose job it will be to light the "live" scenes, to the film studio to discuss the lighting with the film camera-man so that there will be as little difference as possible between the two. Existing film material is not good for television purposes and I prefer to film my own backgrounds as I can tell the camera-man what light, length and general mood of the shot I want. For my production of *The Mayerling Affair* I wanted some shots of 'Imperial Austria' and I wrote to a camera-man in Vienna, who took some splendid shots of the Hofburg Castle and the former hunting lodge at Mayerling. These had to be covered with snow to establish the same atmosphere as in the last act of this tragedy. My camera-man was lucky in that it was snowing during that week, and he got some enchanting vistas.

Since film inserts are transmitted by telecine, the

starting cue needs to be given eight seconds before transmitting the first frame in order to attain the required projection speed, and considerable experience is needed on the part of the producer to ensure that the vision mixer will cut to the film insert at the right moment. A 'holding shot' is usually made to precede the film insert in case it is cued late.

As it would take about eight minutes to repair a break in the film, which would ruin any television production, I find it advisable to have two prints of any film sequence made, and run them simultaneously on two projectors, so that in the event of one breaking the other can take over.

The producer makes use of the 'looping' technique (commonly used to superimpose credit titles over a scene) to achieve certain special effects such as smoke, rain, fog or snow.

Looping calls for two telecine projectors to run two different films simultaneously which are 'mixed' to make one picture. A recent production of mine called for a scene of a burning city with the population in panic. The 'panic' was filmed beforehand but the smoke proved to be inadequate and I used a smoke loop, the effective density of which, by suitable handling, could be controlled at will.

Space has prevented me from including all aspects of my work as a producer, such as my approach to the actor and the conduct of rehearsals. When I was invited to write this article I realised that to cover the whole field would make it over-long, so I have included only such things as I felt would appeal to the reader. If I have left anything out that people would have expected me to say I am sure that it will be most adequately covered by other authors in future issues.