

# Lido



# de Paris

A new design team takes the famous cabaret show into the 21st century.

"When this particular audience walks in, they want to see the epitome of fantasy," says lighting designer Marilyn Lowey. "They're coming to see beautiful women. They're coming to see illusions. They're coming to see magic."

*C'est Magique*, which opened in December at the Lido de Paris, is a high-tech show designed to take the Lido into the 21st century. "It's a little bit of theatre, it's a little bit of vaudeville, it's a little bit of T&A. It's a combination of everything," says Lowey.

*C'est Magique* is the collaborative effort of an American and French design team. Lowey, based in Aspen, CO, and Los Angeles, designed the lighting for the entire show, while Yves Valente, the resident designer at the Lido, designed two of the four tableaux. (The Lido show format offers four tableaux separated by variety acts.) Bob Rang, who is based in Los Angeles but often works in Las Vegas, did the others. The direction and choreography is by the American/French team of Bob Turk and Pierre Rambert, with music by Jim Harbert, assisted by Dan Slider. Costumes are designed by two French designers, Folco and Edwin Piekny. The producer is Christian Clerico, the son of one of the original brothers who bought the Lido in 1946 and developed its famous format of revues and dinner shows.

The tableaux featured in a Lido revue grow out of months of conferences among the creative team. "To do one of these kinds of shows takes 18 months," says Rang, noting that for *C'est Magique*, we had to do it in 14. For months, I was commuting back and forth to Paris." At the first meeting, the theme was established. "In this case, they were using 'magic' as the thread: the magic of water, the magic of

Hollywood, the magic of winning," explains Rang. "It was weeks and months in Paris with Christian Clerico submitting ideas. We would sit for hours and days around a table, and kick around ideas."

Valente concurs on the collaborative nature of making the show. "Each of us brings our ideas," he says. "My contribution was the water sequence, the effect with a setting of water and water costumes, and this huge merry-go-round with five arms bringing the girls above the audience. I brought this as an idea for the set and then we tried to incorporate it into the show. Marilyn brought other ideas, like the fan at the beginning to make the first look of the show."

The first tableau, "C'est Magique," designed by Valente, starts with a bit of theatrical magic as the dance floor in the center of the dining room becomes the raised thrust stage. "This Enchantress comes out of the hat, and directs her magic towards the audience—along with Marilyn blinding the audience with the ProSpots—and the entire audience, the first level, sinks," says Rang. "The people just go crazy, because they don't know what's happening. It's a very funny sensation. That's how we create the stage."

The show abounds with mechanical effects. Later in the first tableau, a merry-go-round-like device, 12m in diameter with five arms, carries the female performers out from the stage and over the audience. "We tried to put the show more and more into the audience," explains Valente.

The second tableau, "Casino," is designed by Rang and includes its share of scenic effects. "It's a basic casino setting, with thousands of feet of neon and electric

BY KARL G. RULING

# Theatre Production Design

light," he says. "The idea behind it was they're doing a Vegas number—and then the unexpected happens. The casino becomes a nightmare. We have a craps table that divides mechanically and grows when this guy craps out. Inflatables come out of this craps table, and lasers and smoke. The craps table becomes this enormous joker with this inflatable tongue, which starts to descend on the elevator as it laughs." The following scene has what the designer describes as a "humanized slot machine" with an "enormous handle that the dancers slither up and bring down. The electronics go crazy, sparks fly, and people start sliding down this enormous slide, as coins."

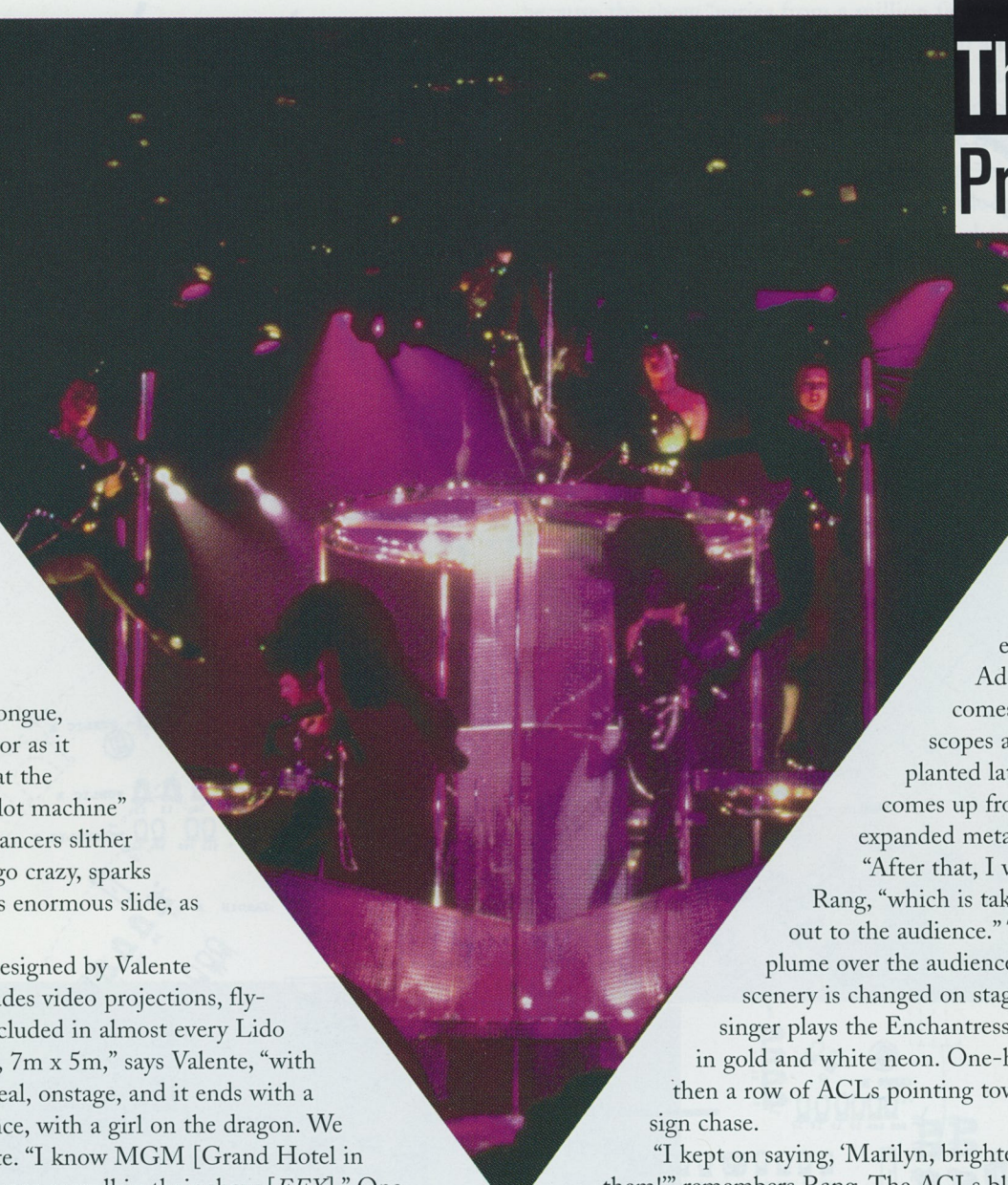
The third tableau, "Illusion," is designed by Valente around an Oriental theme, and includes video projections, flying, and the water number that is included in almost every Lido show. "We have a giant video screen, 7m x 5m," says Valente, "with people coming through the screen, real, onstage, and it ends with a giant dragon flying above the audience, with a girl on the dragon. We did this before MGM," notes Valente. "I know MGM [Grand Hotel in Las Vegas] is going to have two dragons as well in their show [EFX]." One flying effect has two female performers above the audience in UV light. The black light makes the costumes glow, but hides the wires. "It's above the public, and it makes them very excited," says Valente.

The third tableau features "sets made of water," says Valente. The thrust of the Lido stage can be lowered, and a swimming pool placed on it, and then raised into playing position. "I covered the swimming pool with a grid floor so the dancers can dance, and in between the grid I have hoses shooting water. It makes arches, and starts with a big column of water, on top of which the leading girl is standing. We end with a big staircase with water walls, and three of the girls—the lead and two principals—are dressed in water costumes, costumes made of water," he adds. Sprays of water radiate from the women like ostrich plumes as they pose on the staircase.

"The funny thing is that all this happens with a lot of water, but no one is wet," says Valente. The effect uses 23,000l of water per minute, and required considerable rehearsal and experimentation. "It took a long time to choose the right hose, and some of the effect I had to change because it was splashing too much," says Valente. However, the grid helps keep the water on stage. "The grid breaks the splashing of the water," Valente explains.

Rang designed an entirely white set for the fourth tableau, "The Magical World of Spectacle." "We've stripped the walls, gone to the steel studs of the Lido, torn down second levels, gotten rid of the structural steel that we could eliminate, and made this enormous Cinemascope screen, along with stepped-wall elements," explains Rang.

Lido de Paris lighting designer Marilyn Lowey blinds the audience with ACLs to hide the unfolding of a staircase against the upstage wall, then bathes the performers in the light, presenting a classic Lido scene: beautiful women on a staircase (facing page). Black lights make the costumes glow in the tableau "Illusion," and also conceal wires used for a flying effect (this page, above). Yves Valente, the Lido resident designer, says this about his lady-on-a-dragon (right): "We did this before MGM. I know they are going to have two dragons as well in their show."



"It allows us to give the feel that people are coming out of the two-dimensional slides, they're coming in and out of the environment." Rang augmented the Cinemascope screen with a very angular high-tech look for the additional scenery. "It's all done out of chrome expanded-metal that I found in Paris." Additional scenery includes a city that comes up from the basement and then telescopes across stage, enveloping it. This is supplanted later with a Hollywood sign that also comes up from the floor, and is also made of the expanded metal mesh.

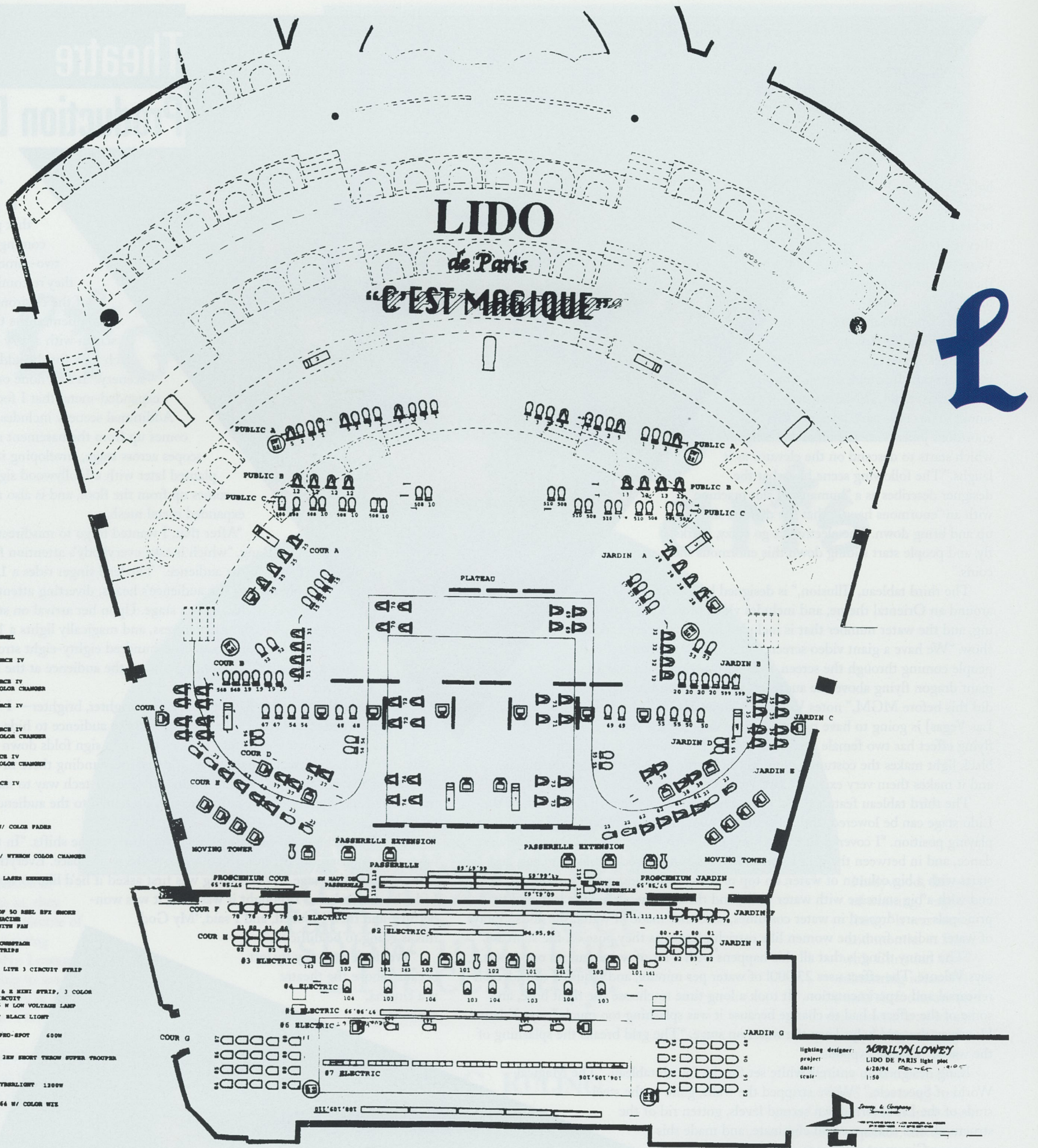
"After that, I wanted to go to misdirection," says Rang, "which is take everybody's attention from the stage out to the audience." The lead singer rides a 12' tall gold plume over the audience's heads, diverting attention while the scenery is changed on stage. Upon her arrival on stage, the lead singer plays the Enchantress, and magically lights a 12' Lido sign in gold and white neon. One-hundred eighty-eight strobes flash, and then a row of ACLs pointing toward the audience at the bottom of the sign chase.

"I kept on saying, 'Marilyn, brighter, brighter, brighter—I want to blind them!'" remembers Rang. The ACLs blind the audience to hide the unfolding of a staircase against the upstage wall, as the Lido sign folds down out of the way. The ACLs eventually "bathe the girls that are standing there in white light on an elevator that's 180cm up," explains Rang. It's a high-tech way to magically get to the classic Lido show scene: beautiful women presented to the audience on a beautiful staircase.

"It's very mechanical," says Rang, referring to the scene shifts. "In the Lido, you have to be mechanical, because you don't have the work space. Everything has to telescope into the stage." When Rang was first asked if he'd like to work at the Lido, he remembers, "I thought it was chic, it was wonderful—and then I looked, and I said, 'My God, this is going to be difficult.'"

"We don't have any fly loft because above the theatre is a cinema," explains





"I've put in a flexible system," says Lowey of her lighting plot for the Lido de Paris' *C'est Magique*. She finds automated fixtures and moving lights invaluable because the amount of performers onstage varies so much.

Valente. In 1977, the Lido was renamed the Lido de Paris and moved into the Normandy Building. The 1,100-seat showroom was built beneath the existing structure, which restricted the height available over the stage and house. "It's not like in Vegas, where you have a desert and you can build what you want," says Valente.

"It's actually very challenging," says Lowey. "It's a low-ceiling room, and they'd been using very old European lighting fixtures from 1976. We've put in all of the moving lights and updated the technology to bring the look of it to the 21st century, give it some more life, give it some more production quality."

The new lighting system was installed in two weeks. Only one month could be spared between the close of the old show and the start of the new, in which to complete the installation of the new show and do all the technical and dress rehearsals. The new wiring was installed in cable trays above the old wiring; the old wiring will be removed at leisure over the next year.

"They had to rip out all the old dimmers and install new dimmers in just a couple of days," says Steve Terry, vice president at Production Arts Lighting. PA was a major supplier to the project, and coordinated the lighting system installation. "We did our usual design of the control network," says Terry. "We started out on this job supplying two followspots and a bunch of PAR cans, and we went over there at Marilyn Lowey's request just to talk to them. By the time we'd finished a four-hour meeting, we'd picked up the entire job."

The control system for the conventional luminaires uses Arri Smart Racks and an ETC Obsession, both supplied by Arri at PA's suggestion. ETC Sensor dimmers were originally specified, but Terry says that when you need a European 230V dimmer that complies with European norms, a European dimmer makes more sense. "We said, 'Look, you can have an ETC console, but why don't you go to the Arri Smart Racks through the local dimming provider, so you have some service after the

thing's installed.”

The lighting system includes nine High End Cyberlights, 42 Deluxe PanCommand ProSpots, 99 PanCommand Color Faders, and 62 Wybron Colorams, two Strong Super Troupers, 21 L&E Mini Strips, 100 ETC Source Fours, and 180 PAR-64 luminaires. A Cyberlight controller and a PanCommand LDS controller handle the automated luminaires. High-voltage versions of the HPL lamp used in the Source Fours have been announced by Ushio and Sylvania, but are not yet available, so the Source Fours are run on the French 230V system by the simple expedient of using series two-fers.

“I’ve put in a flexible system,” says Lowey. The moving lights are invaluable

because the show “varies from a million feathers to two feathers, or 50 people on stage with animals down to a *pas de deux* on an ice rink that comes up from the pit.” *C’est Magique* has a very different look from the previous show—not just because of the new scenic and costume designs, but also because of what Lowey has been able to do with the automated equipment. “The quality of light that we’ve gotten, and the accouterments that you put on all the light—the color faders, the color changers... I mean, it’s amazing! You can make it as subtle as you want or as blatant as you want.”

*C’est Magique* plays twice a night, with shows at 10pm and midnight. It is scheduled to play for the next four years.



The Lido’s first tableau, “C’est Magique” (this page, above), starts with a bit of theatrical magic as the dance floor in the center of the dining room becomes the raised thrust stage. Later, a merry-go-round device designed by Yves Valente carries the female performers off the stage and over the audience. Bob Rang designed the “Casino” tableau (this page, top right), which becomes a nightmare sequence. Lasers and smoke come out of the craps table, which turns into a joker with an inflatable tongue, who descends on an elevator, laughing at the hapless player. Every Lido de Paris show features a water tableau; in “Illusion” (this page, right), the sets and lead performers’ costumes are “made of water,” according to Valente. Sprays form walls and columns as well as radiate from the women like ostrich plumes as they pose on the staircase.