

This year's Lumière

Alex Musgrave reflects on the past six months

As I sit taking a break from drawing the lighting plans for the *Oor Wullie* tour, which I am relighting in a few days' time on its first move into the Theatre Royal, Glasgow, I am reflecting on my time being this year's Lumière.

Over six months ago, I handed in my notice at the Aldwych Theatre, where I was the chargehand electrician, to follow my dream of becoming a full-time lighting designer. It was in my final few weeks when I saw the advertisement for the Lumière scheme and applied. I was mid-show when I got the email offering me this year's Lumière placement. I couldn't imagine then how my life was about to change.

Only a couple weeks after receiving the email I was off, driving up to Manchester to meet David Howe on my first placement, *The Magic Goes Wrong* by the Mischief Company. Not really knowing what to expect, I met David at the Lowry and we sat down to work. My first task was getting up to speed with all the show documentation. David taught me how to use Lightwright and, soon after, I was updating all show paper as and when changes happened.

Working with the Mischief Company and the nature of their work, the material

can completely change within a matter of hours. It was very interesting observing how David worked with a constantly changing and evolving production and how he was able to adapt to complete sequences being changed.

The next production I worked on was *West Side Story* at the Birmingham Hippodrome, also assisting David Howe. This production was produced by the Hippodrome for its 125-year celebration. It was a particularly challenging production to work on as we had to mount a full-scale musical in three days. My role was to predominately call the followspot cues during the tech. It became fairly complicated as we were all on the same comms ring, so learning when was an appropriate time to go through upcoming cues with the operators and not disrupt the flow of programming was critical.

Going into my third production of the scheme, I worked with Johanna Town on the Bridge Theatre's production of *Two Ladies*. I have never had the opportunity to work on a set with a ceiling before. Designed by Anna Fleischle, the stage consisted of one large conference room and a hallway to the main conference

building, encased all the way around by huge glass window and glass walls, making the lighting design even trickier.

Having no fixtures overhead except fluorescent tubes in the ceiling and a bar of GLP XBars tucked between the ceiling and the wall, Jo had only front light and side light positions to get light into the space, without creating glare off the glass.

It was fascinating to watch how Jo designed the lighting with slow and subtle changes to help enhance the narrative of the play, matching the drama of what was going on in the conference room to the outside world. It was a great experience to have the opportunity of working on a play that was so naturalistic.

While in the later stages of the working at the Bridge, I also started going into rehearsals for the English National Opera's production of *The Mask of Orpheus*, lit by Peter Mumford. It being my first opera, I didn't quite know what to expect. I met Peter at the rehearsal room and was introduced to the other members of the creative team and stage management team. Throughout rehearsal I worked on writing out all of the blocking and linking it to bar and figure numbers. While in the



discussed light and what it meant to the production – how we anchored ourselves to the world and used light and colour to provide links throughout the piece.

Working in opera was very eye opening, particularly how the creative hierarchy is completely different to any other form of live performance and how the different forms of onstage rehearsals – solely technical, piano and stage rehearsals, and stage and orchestra rehearsals – all run slightly differently. What was also incredible to watch was how the opera rep worked. Having stage and orchestra rehearsals, where the whole production would be built and focused for a rehearsal from 11am to 1pm, then the whole stage turned around for a different production

in the evening, was a totally different experience.

I had a few weeks off between *The Mask of Orpheus* and the start of my next project, which was *Oor Wullie* at the Dundee Rep, lit by Katharine Williams. For this project I took on the role of the associate and programmer. Katharine and I had

conversations very early on throughout the year about design concepts and that the production would be doing a Scottish tour at the start of 2020.

Oor Wullie being Scotland's beloved cheeky chappy, by publisher DC Thompson, I travelled up to Glasgow for a development weekend for the show in September which was an incredible experience. Being able to meet all of the creative team prior to starting rehearsals, as well as having a table read combined with a model box showing, was invaluable for getting a feel for the production as a whole.

The next couple of months were made up with plan drawing and paperwork creation, and in early November I travelled to Dundee for three weeks for the last week of rehearsals and into the production period. It was my first time programming for someone else, so I was fairly nervous in making sure I kept up with the pace of the tech, but after a few days, I managed to settle into a rhythm and thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience.

After my three weeks in Scotland came to an end, I was straight back home to Portsmouth and the next day, I started my own design for *Aladdin* at the King's

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Theatre, Southsea prior to my Christmas break. Before starting my final project of the scheme, which is *Far Away* at the Donmar Warehouse, lit by Peter Mumford, I am back off to Scotland to relight *Oor Wullie* for its first tour move.

Going into the final few weeks, I am very excited to be working at the Donmar Warehouse. Getting to work on a production that will inherently be intimate due to the nature of the building, it will be interesting watching how Peter works with the creative team and the space, which has its own challenges with steep lighting positions and having audience seated on three sides of the stage in a thrust position.

As the scheme is now coming to an end, I am looking forward to working on the final project. I know the knowledge and skills I have learned as a result of the Lumière scheme and the opportunities I have had throughout the last seven months will serve me well for my future career, and I am excited to see what that holds. 🍀



Relighting Oor Wullie in Glasgow