



December 2009 / January 2010

*In the footlights this issue:*

TV LD Bernie Davis lights *Phèdre* at the NT • "Oh no, he is".. Jim Woodley's DIY panto • A poem for Torben • Matt Wolf looks back on lighting at the Donmar... and much more...

Price to non-members £5.00

*Mark Jonathan leaves his  
pointe shoes at the ROH  
and Sadler's Wells and  
journeys North to Panto-  
land (aka Watford) for  
'Cinderella' - more p7.  
Photo: Andy Grange.*

# ALD # FOCUS

The Journal of the Association of Lighting Designers

"More art, less awards..."

Christmas Panto Special

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# Rick's Response

Lighting Design has been hitting the headlines in the last few months largely thanks to an excellent meeting between the Critics Circle and members of the ALD. An idea for some more in depth explanation of what Lighting Designers do came from the dance, opera and theatre critics who helped in the judging process for the first Knights of Illumination awards in order to help them in their appreciation of our work for future awards, but when Michael Billington suggested a similar workshop for his colleagues in his recent *Focus* article, Hansjorg Schmidt offered to contact the Critics Circle's chairman Mark Shenton and things really started to happen.

The result was an excellent meeting at the Young Vic's Clare Studio where a wide ranging discussion between ten members of the circle (mostly from the theatre section) and four

LD's who were available on the day, Neil Austin, Mark Jonathan, Hansjorg and myself. The object of the workshop was to explain how we contribute to the atmosphere, emotion, and rhythm of the performance. We talked about how and what we do, there were many questions and demonstrated the effects of lighting with some photos and video of various projects of a wide variety of scale including showing the progression from white card model to the final production.

I think it is easy to forget that the critics are as passionately involved in the performing arts as all of us are, and they genuinely wished to understand more about the many disciplines that contribute to the final performance. We discussed how we interact with directors, designers, and performers, and there were many questions about the

growing use of projection and how this was changing our work and the nature of performance design. This is a topic that they were very interested in and could certainly be a separate meeting.

We certainly discussed whether lighting should be noticed. The space allotted to reviews is very limited which is just one of the pressures the critics cited as to why it appears that lighting is often ignored. The dialogue at the workshop was hugely enjoyable and a welcome by product of the day were the pieces in the *Daily Telegraph* and *The Guardian* about Lighting Design, which is surely a first. I am truly grateful to Hansjorg and Mark Shenton for making this happen and to the Critic's Circle for sponsoring a very enlightening afternoon.

The ALD was also delighted to be represented at the presentation of the

second TMA award for Lighting Design which went to Daniella Beattie for her work on *The Wicked Lady*, at the New Victoria, Newcastle Under Lyme. We welcome this celebration of the excellent work going on in the regional theatre and welcome her as a new member of the ALD!

All this attention has not been welcomed by everyone. "Flyman" the weekly anonymous column in *The Stage* while complementing the work of the ALD to promote the cause of Lighting Designers through awards and networking, was a little more unsure if we were not in danger of sounding like lighting "luvvies". Could we learn to live with the high status and fees paid to the performers we light? Should *Focus* start to look more like a lighting version of *Hello!*? It might be a tough one but we could rise to the challenge, I'm sure!

regards, Rick#



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# “Twelve o’clock, and still no Dick!”

Faced with a paying lighting job but no director, plus a ‘manky script’, Jim Woodley opted for DIY.

Ahh, I hear you say, ‘tis Christmas – a time of good cheer and Panto... also a time of very long Technicals, ale, slapping of thighs and cries of “Ho!” But, not necessarily in that order...

Well, dear illuminate, I have a tale of wonder, a gauntlet thrown down and a nice white, strapped, jacket waiting in the wings. MY Panto last year, really was MY Panto – my lighting, my script, my direction and my choreography... **“Oh yes it sodding well was!”**

How often have we men (and women) of lighting sat in a read-through and thought *“Goodness me, this is a pile of ole tosh, and no mistake. I do hope my Agent has secured a goodly fee!”* As a veteran of nearly 40 years in the business (darlings) my first experience of working Panto (as a humble LX grunt) was at The London Palladium;

it starred Cilla Black, Alfred Marks, Terry Scott, Leslie Crowther and the original Basil Brush. Panto at The Palladium was lavish, and long – up to three hours long; it was also twice daily for nearly all of its run – *all of its 26 week run*. Those were the heady days when a 26 week Panto run led into an equally nice 20 week Summer Season – life was a lot simpler back then. One of the drawbacks of that 26 week run was that nearly all the jokes and business became ingrained in your brain – and years of THAT led to a brain chock full of routines, jokes, crossovers and the ilk

Some twenty-five years ago, in a hostelry, I had been offered a pantomime to light by some fool company, and they were bemoaning the fact that they had lost their director. Time was running out (and as I could see my fee

disappearing up the swanee, worse still, several whiskies had gone down my throat) I suddenly heard myself offering my services in that position! (I’m ashamed to say that it was given in a very grand manner, dear hearts) I mean, it seemed a simple task if you have a good cast, and competent people around you (M.D, choreographer etc) it wasn’t Pinter or Chekov – it was Panto! Needless to say, they took me at my word and gave me a copy of the script to read. That didn’t take long – it was really manky, and I told them so in no uncertain terms; you can guess what happened next – yes, I decided to re-write it myself.

Thankfully, good Panto does have a formula to it; there may be a prologue, but there’s always an Opening scene in which ALL the characters are introduced

after a nice, happy opening song and dance. That is invariable followed by a front cloth scene (to cover a major set change) with some comedy business.

Then there will be a contrivance where the hero and heroine meet and fall hopelessly in love (cue for sappy duet) and so it goes on. Good always wins through, the Boy gets his Girl (even if the “boy” is played by a girl) the Baddie gets his, or her, comeuppance; there is often a wedding near the end, and there’s always a song sheet followed by a stonking finale to send everyone home in a good mood! All Pantos have some ‘set’ joke scenes, Ghost gags and general audience (children) banter. As long as you get the balance right, add a couple of current ‘Pop’ songs and ‘in’ TV and/or local references – all should be well.

There are times when having the memory of an elephant for trivia, old comic’s routines and general badinage of a wholesome nature CAN be a blessing....

Again, working with good people over the decades, is an advantage – providing you give credit where it’s due. I was lucky enough to work with lots of well heeled ‘turns’ and comics, all of whom were most generous in the giving of tips and insights; this was, of course, how they had learned their craft. Despite what people might say, writing a Panto isn’t as easy as one would think – my first script went through many, many, re-writes! Dogged determination paid off, and said script was duly performed and worked very well...so well, that I went on to write five other scripts over the years. *Jack and the Beanstalk, Cinderella, Aladdin,*

*Mother Goose* and *Dick Whittington*. All of these were based on the original stories and all had the requisite mix of songs, comic scenes, plus disgracefully OLD jokes and, yes, often the same joke and one-liners appeared in every script!

This brings me to *Dick Whittington*, presented by Merlin Productions down in Essex. They had already used my script a few years ago, and I hadn't been over keen on the final product, so, when they asked me to look at the script and update it as needed I said I would, but only if they allowed ME to direct it... I had to buy my producer a few more whiskies, but he eventually saw sense.

The, oft quoted, line which is the title of this piece, is not in my script, although there is an equally risqué line in Act One; Alice Fitzwarren comes onto the stage, sad and gloomy... "Oh, boys and girls, I'm so sad – I've been looking for Dick everywhere! Do you know where I can find Dick?"





That line can only work if the girl playing Alice says it with complete sincerity – no smirk, laugh, or twinkle in the eye is needed. It's a true touch of the 'Max Miller's' – she's not saying anything rude – it's all in your mind....

I have to say that I don't direct that often, it is very exhausting, not to mention time consuming. I have to thank a couple of directors I'd work with in Repertory for the sage advice of "Get the casting right, and everything else should fit together smoothly..." It also must be said that wearing the director's hat (and all the others) does have both a good and bad side... you

only have yourself to argue with when things don't work, but, the buck stops fairly and squarely with you...

Of course, I'm forgetting... forgetting to mention Lighting! Silly me... Panto lighting IS in a class of its own, it has to be said. Like most things regarding lighting, there are never any hard and fast RULES – but there are pointers best obeyed if you (a) want to work again (b) keep you sanity... Listen, and I will tell (with *rofuse papologies* to Francis Reid and Michael Northen, both of whom did it long before me, and probably did it better).

Much as you may want to, don't be too arty – except

with dance numbers and/or soppy songs; never rely too much on movers, unless you have dozens and dozens of the little buggers!; it may be terribly 'old hat' but you can't beat the old two colour wash over the stage ( or "pinks and blues, darlings" as Danny La Rue would say) 110 and 118 are the safest – they bring out the best in sets, costumes and people; follow spot the Baddie in a nice green, and use pink or 136 for the Good Fairy – it's not only tradition, but it's ingrained in the British psyche... scary, but oh so true.

Most of all, always make sure there is LOTS of light for the comedy bits – I made a mistake on this once, though it is better described through an anecdote from my late friend Peter Robbins (Peter and Nigel Ellacot notched up 30 years as Ugly Sisters, mostly for the Qdos stable). They had just made their entrance in the forest scene (in *Cinderella*) in the Technical – pause, loooooong pause... "..." *is this IT? Where are the follow spots? Can't see NAFF ALL.....bugger this, we'll be*

*In our Dressing Rooms when you've sorted it!" ...swift exit of Ugliers.. Now, neither of them will admit who said it, I know – but I ain't tellin! I did the same thing, only MY Ugliers were a tad more verbose....*

Interesting note for younger LDs – I find a good wheeze with movers is to also use them to put extra fill/wash onto the top end of cloths... you can also be arty with them – I've even had a small moon sneaking across a cloth once.

No, I didn't do the programming for that either, I don't have the patience.

Oh, I was also responsible for the makeup for King Rat. The theatre where the show was presented has an end stage, so the audience can be as close as three feet! The actor playing the baddie had thought about a full face rubber mask, but we'd both dismissed it as impractical for really close work. I then set too with my box of tricks, and came up with a simple (and generic) prosthetic piece over the forehead, eyes



King Rat, makeup courtesy of the LD.

and nose; a simple makeup cover of green and light grey, with black lips – and the Rat was born. The actor loved it (because he could put it in himself) and the kids in the audience loved it, because they couldn't work out HOW it was possible for someone to look so scary and unsettling so close....

I have to say, this year Merlin are presenting *Snow White* – not my script, or any other input save lighting... phew... well, that's the idea....

**"Oh yes it IS"**

And if there's anyone behind me – they can bugger off too.#

# Putting Our heads above the Parapet....

Mark Jonathan in panto with a 'heads up' for ALD Professional Designers



It's the end of the year and the end of the 'noughties'; you probably don't need me to tell you how things have changed in the lighting world but it has made me think about the past and what we might aspire to achieve in the future. For example, I'm not the only designer who's thought for some time that we need to help theatre critics understand what we bring to productions. Well, it happened – the ALD and the Critics Circle held a meeting. As the time approached for ALD designers Neil Austin, Rick Fisher, Hansjorg Schmidt and myself to put our 'heads above the parapet' and face the critics I worried about what we might have bitten off. Would we be able to pull it off? I know how difficult it is to talk about the 'art of lighting' outside of the live performance...

Critics usually only speak through their reviews and similarly LDs generally never appear other than through their work, so, it was a really interesting to find ourselves partnered in this group of Critics and LDs. It was an intense 3½ hour session – longer than most plays and our group stayed attentive to the end. It only really became apparent afterwards that we had pulled it off. There have been two articles in the national press, *The Guardian*\* and *The Daily Telegraph*\* along with a lot of positive feedback. Both critics mentioned the enthusiasm of the LDs and that they felt guilty that they often ignored our contributions. Michael Billington got the impression that we always got a flat fee of £3,000 a show and remarked on how poor that was! That made me chuckle as we were inundated with

LDs saying 'if only we always got that...' Of course, our point was that apart from large scale opera, ballet and musicals, the **top** drama fee was probably around £3K. I wondered if producers who read the article and paid less than that might think it was time they hiked their fees up. Ok, in my dreams...

I believe it was an excellent and valuable exercise; many thanks to Hansjorg for making the original approach to the critics and to him, Neil and Rick for their great presentations. So, we were all taken aback by the anonymous Flyman's rather mean-spirited article in *The Stage* newspaper. I think you'll agree that if we are going to make progress we have to put our heads above the parapet. So, I for one am sticking two fingers up – that's for Victory, as well as to tell 'Flyman' where to go!

There's no denying that we have a long way to go and we need to be vigilant; to this end we have just issued the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of the **ALD – Agents newsletter**. All *professional designer members* will be emailed a copy – so you can discuss the various points we raise with your agents. One of the areas we all need to be watchful for is 'stagnating' fee levels or worse, lowering of fees. I hear from a stage designer that one UK Rep has offered her less than they paid her 9 years ago and that the offer is non-negotiable. I also hear that the LD is now provided 'in-house' where before it was open to freelance LDs. That could be good in that provides a career step for in-house staff but it's a door that closes for freelance LDs.

I'm also concerned about the way we are being treated over DVD/video/broadcast

rights. I have a number of productions that have been broadcast on BBC that are now out on DVD. They have also been shown at the cinema. Have we been stitched up in the new agreement – which seems to only pay out when a profit is achieved?

I also hear disturbing reports about *Digital Theatre* which purports to sell downloadable plays from the subsidized sector. There was an interesting article in *The Times*\*. Despite the positive spin in the article it is of concern to hear (privately) how very disgruntled the creative teams involved are. Meanwhile, a dance company that makes excellent 'archive' DVDs for itself and the company members has put their dvds on sale

## Mark Jonathan puts his 'head above the parapet'.

commercially. That's nice, but no agreement has been reached with the creative teams. The company's point is that making the DVD was very expensive so they make a big loss which they now want to reduce. My point is that everyone working for the TV production company gets paid, so why is it assumed that our contribution doesn't need to be paid for?

I'm concerned also by the number of managements who aren't really budgeting adequately to the point where you wonder why is the show being performed if they have no intention of paying the royalty (West End) or in another case of a show transferring from the Edinburgh Festival to New York where the US offer was lower than the original paltry Festival fee. I know we love what we do but we do it for a living.

I've had an interesting autumn working more in the UK on ballets and plays.

I'm now lighting Panto – the last time was in the early 80's. I've always reckoned that as an art form it is tricky to do well and any theatre crew that can manage a panto could usually do anything else that was thrown at them in the rest of the year. That's certainly the case for the excellent technical staff at Watford Palace Theatre.

Curiously, I lit my first musical there 30 years ago. I've dug out my Watford rig plan from 1979. There were 120 units on the plan with 6 colour wheels on the pros booms on a manual 3-preset desk with 60 dimmers. Now, we have the benefit of the memory lighting desk; I'm told my 202 numeric cues add up to over 400 part cues, along with moving lights, strobe, UV, gobo rotators, scrollers, smoke effects and a much bigger generic rig.

Examining the generic rig more closely, I realised that it was before the par can was readily available and the

colour used was Cinemoid apart from a couple of pieces of Roscolene. My favorite item is the fairy's wand which is a converted LED Christmas tree star. It shimmers and colour changes at the press of the button. Thank you to 'Poundstretcher' in Peckham (£9.99... now on special at £7.99). Pyro flashes are now professionally packaged and not reliant on the electricians to 'mix their own' as they were when I started out. We would mix a teaspoon of flash powder with green or red transformation powder set off by a piece of fuse wire. Lest I should forget the day I got a bit carried away and did an extra large flash – singeing a few eyebrows.

The other thing that has changed is 'merchandising'... When I last lit a Panto you were lucky if you could get a choc-ice in the interval so, what is all this horrendous, distracting LED stuff that the hyperactive kiddies have to wave about? Is this purely

a FOH income stream I see before me? "Baa-Humbug" as Scrooge would say.

The story of *A Christmas Carol* has always enchanted me. The way we are treated varies from appropriate to miserly. I wondered if I should quiz you on some of the tight-fisted *management misers* I've encountered recently? While on one side there are some enlightened companies who provide a nice hotel or apartment, a daily allowance/per diem to cover meals and a decent fee. I thought about naming and shaming the misers but space won't allow it. I'll just mention a couple: The Rep that pays for *Continental* breakfast. When I asked the hotel how much to upgrade to *Full English* it was £2. Then there's the Rep who pays 'Bed but no breakfast' at all! I quizzed Rick Fisher on the subject of misers and he asked me to remind you that some producers, particularly in the West End, are failing to bill LDs. It really doesn't cost

management anything to bill you, so make sure it's agreed in your contract.

Well, my Cinders is on, that just leaves a transfer overseas, a revival at the ROH and production meetings in London and St. Petersburg in December. A Russian advised me that it can be cold: "Minus 20 is ok," she said, "minus 40 is hard." Thermals are standing-by!

Sending you best wishes for Christmas and a bright and cheerful 2010.#

### **\*The Times**

[http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts\\_and\\_entertainment/stage/theatre/article6884072.ece](http://entertainment.timesonline.co.uk/tol/arts_and_entertainment/stage/theatre/article6884072.ece)

### **\*The Guardian**

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2009/oct/21/critics-notebook-michael-billington>

### **\* The Daily Telegraph**

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/culturecritics/charlesspencer/6374451/Billy-Elliot-all-light-on-the-night.html>

*'Bed but no breakfast?!!!!' Mark Jonathan lights panto...  
'Cinderella' at the Watford Palace. Design and photo: Cleo Pettitt.*





## Farewell

### Mervyn Stockbridge Gould

14.12.1946 - 29.10.2009

Mervyn Gould had a busy life in theatre and in associated academia. This was all a far cry from his early family life in the remote Lincolnshire fens. He was ALD Member #170.

Having been fascinated by technical theatre from his early teens, Mervyn landed his first paid backstage job aged 17 in 1963 as A.S.M. (& Props) for a two week run of *Babes in the Wood* at Boston Regal, touring into Crewe, Buxton and Leek.

He remained a casual showman and No. 2 Lime Boy at Boston until he moved to London in 1965, to study

History at Marjon College in Chelsea. Having had the foresight to join NATTKE, he was able to get work in numerous West End theatres, although his double life impacted on his Degree. He just scraped through his finals.

He worked at Butlins, Skegness in the early 70's, where, in an early tribute to the grand days of Art Deco, he restored the three colour cove lighting in the 30's garrison theatre, The Gaiety. The management's indifference was palpable.

Mervyn then toured with several companies, including the legendary *Fol De Rols*, but more typically his chosen profession found him lighting with utterly obsolete equipment in tatty theatres that were about to close. Seeing the writing on the wall for the Number

3 Variety circuit that he loved to work in, he came in from the cold, spending three seasons at Sunderland Empire as CD Operator. This was followed by a year as Deputy Chief Engineer at The Palace Theatre, during the run of *Jesus Christ Superstar*.

He joined Loughborough University English & Drama Department in 1979 as technical tutor, which gave him the opportunity to gain an M.A. and still work occasional summer seasons or Pantos. His duties as a summer tour manager included walking Bernie Winter's lugubrious hound, Schnorbitz. He characteristically summarised this period as "The painful death throes of Variety"

Ever one for a tough challenge in an intriguing building, he was technical & lighting manager for the

summer rep seasons in the old Spilsby courtroom, now run by the Dandelion Trust as an occasional touring house. The lighting rig that he installed is still in use.

He remained at Loughborough for seventeen years before taking early retirement due to ill health. He was very active in the SMA whilst still working and in retirement he became a leading authority on early cinema history, channelling his energies into the Mercia Cinema Society. He edited their *Mercia Bioscope* magazine, making it an authoritative social history record, whilst giving it the sense of fun that pervaded his work. He will be a very hard act to follow.

Mervyn was a consummate researcher and avid collector of backstage ephemera; his doorbell was a house



telephone and his dining chairs were former Box seats.

As an author, he wrote four books on cinema history as well as numerous articles for the theatrical Press including *Tabs*, *The Stage*, *Cue*, *Cueline* and early editions of *ALD Focus*. Some of his books have been reviewed on these pages.

In 2007, he was interviewed for the Theatre Archive Project. His colourful memories reveal many facets of the man, his times and his outspoken outlook on life. They are online at [www.bl.uk/projects/theatrchive/gouldm.html](http://www.bl.uk/projects/theatrchive/gouldm.html)

He died peacefully at home in Loughborough, aged 62.#  
*Ian Groy and James Laws*

# Book Review: Light Rose by any other name?

## Light and Colour Filters. Michael Hall, Eddie Ruffell

Colour choice can be the most individual part of any lighting design. The palette of a lighting designer is often their signature and many of us carry our colours in our head. Whether we know it or not, we are on the artistic tip of a very scientific iceberg and this book goes a long way to revealing what lies beneath.

The authors have authoritative feet in both the Rosco Supergel and the Lee Filters camps. The opportunity for correlation of these two leading series of filters is well taken. With listings of historical ranges and numerical comparisons of all known brands, the information appendices take up over half the 247 pages. It is an eye-opener to discover that there are potentially 10 different ways of obtaining Light Amber and 6 different

index numbers with that name. What is more worrying is that there are probably 4 different interpretations of Light Amber and several near misses on attempts at the same hue. No wonder we tend to stick to familiar colours and ranges.

The authors are meticulous in their avoidance of commercial labelling or documentation, which can lead to some frustration for the reader. It would help to know, for instance, which (if any) ranges of filters give their transmission percentage for a source other than tungsten halogen. The current contact details for the brands named would be helpful too.

The chapter on historical background is fascinating and the world of stained glass and magic lanterns is fully introduced. The story of the Gel industry that started

and was run on a farm is a glimpse of a world long gone. However the 20th Century is largely dealt with in one paragraph plus a page about Samoiloff and the change over from gelatine to Cinemoid in the UK.

There were a number of factors that subsequently led to the way lighting designers explored the new heat resistant polyester brands and helped to expand the ranges. My personal memory is that, if Lee Filters had not just started up in Andover when we were opening the Redgrave Theatre Farnham, the cyc for Ring Round the Moon would have been a sorry washed out mess. Our new halogen AC1001 floods burnt Cinemoid in a way that the old Pattern 49s never could.

I learned a lot of science from this book and could

probably bore for Suffolk on the subject of Mired Shift, which my farming friends would interpret as a smelly job for a dirty tractor with a big scraper on a rainy day. However, thanks to Messrs Hall and Ruffell, I know better and can work out how to balance many disparate sources to tungsten. Their style is refreshingly straightforward, bringing logic to a complex set of variables.

The authors reveal the mysteries of Dichroic filters, which are used in many moving lights and in conventional architectural features. If you want to know how your eye works, or why transmission of Deep Blue is only 1.1% when its average transmission over the blue spectrum is 30% efficient, then this book is for you. It will be the standard reference



book for its chosen subject, especially as updates are promised and ET's short-run capability makes revision easy. It is up to us designers to choose if we express in print what colours do for our art. As I said above, the art is subjective, but rejoice! The tools have been nailed. #

*James Laws*

**Light and Colour Filters.**  
**Michael Hall, Eddie Ruffell.**  
**Entertainment Technology**  
**Press, Reference Series.**  
**ISBN 978 1 904031 59 8**  
**£23.95**

# Office Oracle

## Latest news from Ian's production desk



Following the decision at the AGM in September to create a new category of membership, we are currently working out the implications of the changes to the database. The description of the categories as follows:

### **Professional Designer:**

This category is open to lighting designers of all scale and type of project who are contracted and earn money from the discipline. This may include associate lighting designers or people who regularly undertake re-lighting duties on touring productions.

### **Professional Member:**

This category is for those actively working in the theatre, live entertainment and associated industries

professionally but not specifically as lighting designers. This may include programmers, production electricians, those working for lighting companies, freelance or resident electrics theatre staff.

### **Associate Member:**

Any individual who is interested in the design of lighting (for the theatre, live entertainment and associated industries) shall be qualified to be an associate of the Association.

It is currently our intention to move all current Professional members to the new professional Designer category as of 1st January 2010 unless a member feels that they are more suited to the new Professional member category.

Current members who feel they should be in either the Professional Designer or Professional Member categories are asked to apply in writing to the office with the supporting information as required for the relevant category. Of course they might also be current Professional Members who wish to move to the Associate category if it better reflects their current status.

Student members who graduated in the summer of 2009 will automatically be transferred to Associate Members from 1st January 2010. In future years, this will happen on 1st October following graduation.

2010/11 subscription fees will be set according to the member category you are in on the 28th February 2010.

These are as follows:

- Professional Designer £75
- Professional Member £75
- Associate Member £40
- Student Member £25
- Corporate Member £400
- Non Profit Organisation £25

### **2010 Whatsonstage.com Awards – Vote Now!**

The Whatsonstage.com Awards, the “theatre-goers’ choice”, are the only major theatre awards in which the audience, are the judges across all 20+ awards categories. The awards shortlists - covering the best of London theatre (and a bit beyond) - are drawn up with the help of thousands of theatre-goers who log on to nominate their favourites. Nominations are announced at a star-studded launch event held in early December.

The annual Awards have firmly established their place in the theatrical calendar with a record-breaking 35,000 people voting last year alone.

From the 7th December theatre-goers can log on to on the nominated favourite performances and productions for Awards consideration across all 26 categories.

Amongst these are standards including Best Actor, Best Actress, Best New Play and Best New Musical as well as less conventional fields such as Best Ensemble Performance, Best Off-West End Production and Theatre Event of the Year. This year for the first time there's also a new category for Best West End Show, which applies to all current West End productions, including long-

running blockbusters.

ALD Corporate Member White Light is once again sponsoring the Award for Best Lighting Designer.

Voting runs until the end of January 2010. For more information about the awards please visit: <http://awards.whatsonstage.com/index.php?pg=396>

### ALD Members' Meeting Update

Following the success of the recent visits to the Wallace Collection in September and October where the places for the meetings were over subscribed, we are considering organising a third meeting for a guided tour for ALD Members in early March.

The Wallace Collection is a national museum which

displays the wonderful works of art collected in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by the first four Marquesses of Hertford and Sir Richard Wallace, the son of the 4th Marquess. It was bequeathed to the British nation by Sir Richard's widow, Lady Wallace, in 1897. Displayed at Hertford House, the main London townhouse of its former owners, the Wallace Collection presents its outstanding collections in a sumptuous but approachable manner which is an essential part of its charm.

It is probably best known for its paintings by artists such as Canaletto, Titian, Rembrandt, van der Neer, Hals (The Laughing Cavalier) and Velázquez and for its superb collections of



eighteenth-century French paintings, porcelain, furniture and gold boxes, probably the best to be found anywhere outside France.

If you would be interested in attending a tour, please contact [meetings@ald.org.uk](mailto:meetings@ald.org.uk) so that we can see if there is enough interest to set up another visit.

### Office Christmas Closure

The ALD office will be closed for the Christmas period from 5pm on Tuesday 22nd December and will re-open on Monday 4th January 2010. Season's greeting to you all.#

*Providing a fascinating insight into the understanding and application of natural light in their work by some of the world's the greatest artists, in a most exquisite and relaxed setting. ALD members at the Wallace Collection in September savour the detailed descriptions, intimate knowledge and illuminating anecdotes from our guide, Denise Stone of the Wallace Collection.*

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**Focus Magazine** ISSN: 1364-9299

Editor: **Andy Collier** editor@ald.org.uk

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Owing to space restrictions, we regret that we do not accept press releases for publication in *Focus*. However, Corporate members of the ALD may send press releases to the ALD office (office@ald.org.uk) so that they can be posted on the News section of the ALD website for immediate and wider coverage. Corporate members only may advertise in *Focus*, please contact the office for details. Editorial guidelines for authors are available on request from the editor.

*The opinions published within Focus are not necessarily those of the ALD. E&OE. #*

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welcome to...

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**Professional Lighting Designers'  
Association (PLDA)**

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### 25th December

Application deadline for Sponsored Student Scheme

### 2010

#### 10-11th February

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#### 27-28th April

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#### 13-15th June

Theatre Engineering and Architecture Conference, London

#### 16-17th June

ABTT Theatre Show\*

#### 12-15th September

PLASA 2010\*

*\*the ALD will have a presence at these events.*

# NT Live: *Phèdre* and *All's Well That Ends Well*

ALD Professional Member and TV Lighting Director Bernie Davis takes us behind the monitor stack as he lights a new venture for the National Theatre

The National Theatre has now been at its home on London's Southbank for over thirty years and in this time it has continued to push boundaries and set standards for theatrical productions. So it should be no surprise that the latest NT venture has been started with the highest of values at its heart.

*NT Live* has been formed to bring National Theatre productions to cinemas around the world, presented as live theatrical productions; the first of this ambitious series being *Phèdre*, a Greek tragedy by Racine, anglicised by Ted Hughes and directed by Nicholas Hytner, with Helen Mirren in the title role.

*Phèdre* opened in June and would be transmitted to cinema audiences on 25th June - live to the UK and with appropriate time delay to further afield, even as far as

Australia. I have a specialist corner to my lighting career looking after the television recording and transmission of stage productions and I was delighted to be asked to be involved with this project. I was even more delighted to hear that the lighting designer was Paule Constable; I have worked on Paule's shows many times now, always proving to be a good experience. We met up in the Lyttelton Theatre when the show was first being set, and Paule talked me through her intentions with the lighting design as well as introducing me to the lighting team.

Paule's lighting for *Phèdre* is intelligent and articulate. It looks good of course, you wouldn't expect anything else. But more than that it is part of the story telling right from the start, with

*Phèdre* appearing on stage with a shroud protecting her from the sun - from which she recoils. It was absolutely essential that the TV pictures recreated the lighting accurately for the power of the drama to be conveyed into the cinema. Bob Crowley's design involved a space apparently sculpted out of rock on the Greek coast and involved a sheer wall covering most of stage right, a cyc as part of a representation of the sea and sky stage left, and a massive rock ceiling piece filling up most of the space over the stage.

The strong sense of lighting direction was maintained by good use of the stage left downstage slots as well as the low side positions on house right. There was also a bank of par cans set over the cyc creating a strong sense of

sun together with the ceiling piece.

To the National Theatre's credit the *NT Live* project was given the resources to make the transmission a success. They set aside a performance where the audience would get very reduced-price seats knowing that they would have a camera-modified production, surrounded by the paraphernalia of a TV broadcast. Through Hi Definition cameras they would broadcast to seventy cinemas in the UK and a further 200 around the world. The average ticket price in the 'States was about \$20 a seat.

TV director Robin Lough was able to use camera mountings and camera positions usually denied when televising a stage production with a paying audience. With a paying audience the distraction of



*Bernie Davis joined BBC Outside Broadcasts in 1970 and was a vision engineer until 1986 when he became an Engineering Manager and Lighting Director. In 2001 he left the BBC to go freelance and has specialised in events and theatre-based productions. He is well known for his lighting of the BBC Proms, BBC Royal Variety Performance, Young Musician Competition, and many major awards ceremonies. His experience of lighting theatrical productions for TV includes operas and ballets from the Royal Opera House, ENO and Glyndebourne: most recently La Traviata, Ondine, Mayerling, Don Carlo, La Bayadere. RTS Awards for Masterworks from Gloucester Cathedral and Songs of Praise from Ely Cathedral. Bernie is also Past Chairman of The Society of Television Lighting and Design.*

camera operation has to be kept to a minimum, and there is a reluctance to stray far from the original lighting design for fear of short-changing the core audience even if TV lighting time is found, and increasingly it is not. But this would be completely different. Rostra were built over the stalls seats allowing tracking cameras to add the movement usually denied to cameras covering stage productions with paying audiences. Even a 30' camera jib was used to offer variations in height to the shots. And full lighting sessions were scheduled just for TV changes.

Not that these allowances made it all plain-sailing. Tucked onto the end of the circle rail on house right was a crucial VL 1000, and in its main focus it lit pretty well right through the tripod

mounting that the jib camera was on. The jib could hardly move without getting a shadow somewhere, and if the operator stayed in any one place long enough a cue would run and another profile would come on and create yet another shadow. But full credit to the operator, Chris Hatcher, who systematically probed his way through the lighting using each rehearsal to learn which lights came on when and to plan his positions and his moves accordingly. In the end there was just one camera shadow that he never managed to avoid, but he stayed still and as the shadow was diffused even the camera director was not aware of it.

Before the broadcast Helen Mirren spoke on Radio 4's 'Start the Week' and discussed the problem

of how the performance should be played - as an experienced actress she knew how different stage was to TV and Film, and had to be sure what was required for this unusual situation. This was actually a question we all had to ask ourselves - what are we actually making? And the answer for everyone was that we were relaying a stage performance to a cinema audience. We were not making a film or a TV programme, and if the camera shots didn't work for stage performances then the camera shots had to change. Intimate dialogue on TV might well be almost mumbled to get the right feel, but this is not the case on stage. And big close-ups of cast projecting tender scenes to the back of the stalls just look wrong. There is a commonly held

misconception that you could leave the shots all wide to see the action develop as you would see it in a theatre, but I can assure you this just doesn't work. The variety of shots is not only necessary, it can add to the viewer's enjoyment and appreciation of the production.

There is a lot of misunderstanding about lighting for TV cameras, the most common being that cameras need more light - but this is far from true. Seeing anything through a camera is more like seeing it with a new pair of eyes, things aren't worse - they are just different. The contrast range of the images is heavily reduced, making bright areas of the image burn out when exposing for darker areas. The reduced contrast range makes TV cameras quite unforgiving with evenness

of cyc lighting, yet it can hide spill on masking so things aren't all bad. Some colours come out different too, but again the results are not necessarily bad - just different. Modern cameras have an enormous latitude for adjustment for picture quality, from the pin-sharp sports coverage to the saturated crushed black 'Light Entertainment' look, to the almost filmic look used for drama. The crucial thing is to decide what the pictures should look like, and then - even more importantly - make all the cameras look the same.

When lighting a TV show it is generally assumed that it will be watched in domestic living rooms on televisions. That might seem an all too obvious observation, but on this occasion we were not making a TV show.

Phèdre would be seen in cinemas, which have very different viewing conditions to the average living room. More than that, a modern digital projector performs differently from a glass-tubed television which is what I would normally use when lighting. I wanted to be next to NT programmer Sarah Brown so we could make adjustments all through any rehearsals, and even shot by shot if necessary just as I would with a TV programme - and as the lighting box is not big I used a high quality flat-screen TV that just fitted on the ledge in front of the lighting desk. Now flat screen TVs perform differently from glass tubed TVs in that the black end of the picture gets a little more stretched, and my guess was that this might actually be closer to what the cinema audience would see.

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It allowed me to keep faces of people with their backs to the sun much darker than I would usually, so preserving the integrity of Paule's lighting with its strong sense of light direction. I went to a BFI viewing of the recording of our rehearsal which showed that this was the case so we knew we had made the right decision.

Robin Lough was also able to reassess his choice of shots, and a new camera script was prepared for our next run, and then the Live broadcast.

We were all very pleased with the results, and the reviews were excellent which was a great relief to everyone. Dominic Cavendish said in *The Telegraph*:

*"In technical terms, last night marked the dawn of a new age. Though introduced by NT chief Nick Hytner as an experiment, the production*



GT 14:51:47:08



values, in terms of camera-work and transmission quality, were so high, you'd swear they'd been trialling this for years. There wasn't a dropped sound or image; the definition was crystal-clear."

And Michael Billington wrote in The Guardian:

"...the main lesson is that a theatre production can be made democratically available to a mass audience without any loss of quality: indeed because the camera can mix close-up and long shot and because we can all hear easily,

the aesthetic impact may actually be enhanced"

I have heard that one cinema suffered from sound sync slipping which is unfortunate, and I would hope that would not happen again.

One observer sent in a critique from a collective viewing, saying:

The camera work was slightly 'Wimbledon' at first but settled well. Sound was perfect throughout. We would like to pay tribute to the fantastic lighting by Paule

Constable, even as modified by the TV lighting director. The fact that this difficult ceilinged set was lit at all was amazing but to get such a sense of the light was nothing short of a miracle. The careful control of cameras and light levels meant that all faces were not only visible at all times, even against a bright cyc, but the lighting looked absolutely right all the time.

I would question the suggestion that the camera coverage settled well as it might have been made

## NT Live Bernie Davis

from the viewpoint that the camera shots were selected from what was offered rather than being carefully planned, rehearsed and executed from start to finish. I wonder if it might have been a little disorientating for some audience members more used to watching this type of performance on the stage, and now being presented with a repertoire of shots. I suspect that the audience settled into the new experience rather than the camera shots settling.

But all in all *Phèdre* set a high standard for NT Live to follow.

### All's Well That End's Well

September saw NT Live start work on their second project - 'All's Well That Ends Well' this time in the Olivier Theatre where both the production and the venue presented a whole different set of challenges for the cameras.

Peter Mumford's lighting leads the audience through

the many scenes and several countries, all played on a standing set with projection used to help create moods and effects throughout. Costumes were mostly black, and the set was mostly black too. Even the projection was onto black. When I first saw the production I freely admit I was rather concerned about the amount of work that would have to be done to reach the standard we had now set.

The set was a curved solid set with a couple of doors in it, and a high walk-way over the structure at the rear. The projection was all on the backing to the high walkway and although that meant it was visible at all times to the theatre audience it would not feature on any shots apart from extremely wide ones or the occasional walk along the walkway. In fact most of the shots would end up against black unless we could make some changes.

We were able to streak

some moving lights down the set to introduce a background to most of the close shots and after that the process was very similar to Phèdre. The first attempt at making the camera positions work proved a problem as with the Olivier auditorium the cameras ended up going too high trying to avoid seeing each other. The rostra had to be re-built and all was well. The mirror doors proved to be an asset rather than the problem predicted, as they always offered some background to the camera shots - and luckily never reflected a view of a camera as we feared! In what seemed no time we had notched up the second of what ought to be a long and happy association between the National Theatre and cinema audiences.

In the preface to *A National Theatre: Scheme and Estimates* by William Archer and H. Granville Barker, London 1907 it states:

*"...the National Theatre must be its own advertisement - must impose itself on public notice, not by posters or column advertisements in the newspapers, but by the very fact of its ample, dignified, and liberal existence. It must bulk large in the social and intellectual life of London...It must not even have the air of appealing to a specially literary and cultured class. It must be visibly and unmistakably a popular institution, making a large appeal to the whole community...It will be seen that the Theatre we propose would be a National Theatre in this sense, that it would be from the first conditionally - and, in the event of success, would become absolutely - the property of the nation."*

I think it is fair to say that the NT Live project has embraced modern technology to take those ideals a step further than the original writers could ever have imagined.#



*December 2009 / January 2010*

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# Letter

From Kelli Zezulka

I just wanted to say a huge thanks to everyone who emailed following my article in the previous issue of *Focus*. I'd particularly like to thank Chris Baldwin for his memories of working under Andy Phillips (*"with the help of a little alcohol he painted picture after picture rather like a photographer"*) and especially Richard Pilbrow, who took the time to write extensive emails answering my many questions, and engaged in a provoking discussion about the history of lighting design and its origin as a profession.

The next step in my research will take me to London for a weekend of interviews and informal chats over coffee (part of an ongoing process, really), and a day trip to Suffolk to visit Jim Laws and his extensive collection of historical lighting paraphernalia. I am also indebted to John Simpson at White Light for all his assistance so far and for his kind invitation for a

chat and tour of White Light in the near future.

Upon my return to Leeds, and in between programming and operating the Christmas show at WYP, I will compile all my research and begin writing what will eventually become the bulk of my final thesis, starting with a long chapter on George Devine, focusing on his contributions to theatre lighting, as both a teacher and facilitator. From there, I will move on chronologically, using the Royal Court's artistic directors as a framework. Although my official finish date is December of next year, my paper will be submitted for examination in September. I am looking forward to the next nine months and learning what I can about the history of our esoteric profession. Please feel free to email in the meantime if you'd like to contribute anything. I'll write again next year to update you on my research and findings. Until then, thanks to everyone for their help so far! #



## International Theatre Engineering Architecture Conference 2010

13-15th June 2010 at Central Hall Westminster, London  
[www.theatre-event.com/conference.html](http://www.theatre-event.com/conference.html)

The 4-yearly Theatre Engineering and Architecture Conferences are attended by all those involved or interested in the built environment for the performing arts. Everyone with an interest in planning, designing, building, equipping, managing or working in performing arts venues is welcome. The 2010 event will provide another unique opportunity for leading professional planners and designers to get together with working practitioners for three days of seminars and debates. Delegate registration opens January 2010, but you can reserve a place by emailing [director@theatre-event.com](mailto:director@theatre-event.com). Sponsorship opportunities for companies are available now. Visit the website for more details.

# Greening The Theatre Round Table, One Year On...

Nick Moran

As the Muppets told us years ago, "It's not easy being green!" Often it costs more money or time, and the material benefits don't always accrue to the people putting in the effort.

Two examples: Reducing your show's CO2 emissions by using (more expensive) energy-efficient lighting equipment will not save your production money if you don't get directly charged for each unit of electricity consumed. Offering discounts to audience members who travel to your venue by public transport may help you feel good, but won't necessarily impress the company's accountants – or some (un-enlightened) funders!

Then there are the many frankly confusing and contradictory messages coming from seemingly

everywhere. We know it is greener to travel by train – but it is often cheaper to travel by car, or even by air. Why? How should the economics be changed to make the price paid more directly relate to the environmental cost? Would this be a good idea? What is stopping this happening?

What is the difference in environmental terms between using locally sourced timber without a sustainability stamp and "sustainable" Canadian timber shipped across the Atlantic? Does the sustainability of Canadian forests compensate for the CO2 produced in transporting the timber such vast distances?

While governments and others promote the use of Compact Fluorescent bulbs, some pressure groups are beginning to

argue against this. These lamps undoubtedly do use less energy to provide a similar amount of light, and they last longer. But it is argued that the energy used to produce these bulbs, combined with the potential problems of environmental contamination caused by disposing of these bulbs at the end of their life, outweighs the benefits. Who is right?

To follow the arguments requires a sophisticated understanding of both science and economics, and many of us just give up. I believe however, that the educators of the next generation of theatre and performance makers have a responsibility to ensure our students do engage with these arguments. As future practitioners they need to be equipped to make rational

choices that have both artistic integrity and avoid having an unnecessary negative impact on the environment.

A year on from the round table at *Theatre Materials* I'd like to highlight three key messages that come out of the experience of both Ben Todd at the Arcola and Brian Raven at White Light.

The first is that doing nothing is not an option. Just as a greater awareness of health and safety – intelligently applied – is fundamental to today's best run organisations, so concern for reducing the environmental impact of the business will be a marker of successful organisations in the near future. Many small steps can be as useful as a single large leap here; refuse collection that allows people to separate different types of rubbish to reduce the

volumes going to land-fill and turning off computers at night to save energy for example. But increasingly contracts and funding will depend on being able to establish the green credentials of an organisation. This means looking not only at what you do, but what your suppliers do, and, for performing companies and venues, what your audience (can) do.

Second is that we need to get reliable information, delivered in appropriate ways, to every part of our organisations. There is little point having the separate bins if users don't know how to tell the difference between plastic that can and cannot be re-cycled. (There should be the triangular recycling symbol on anything that can be recycled.) Or if they believe that they use more electricity switching lights off

when they leave a room for, say, lunch than just leaving then on all day (they don't.) But making too grand or unsubstantiated claims for a particular practice also has to stop, because it turns potential greens off. We need to help people have a sense of proportion. The positive impact of moving away from bottled water in the rehearsal rooms would be totally wiped out by leaving even a relatively small moving light rig on for hours at a time when its not in use! We all need to be better informed about how different courses of action impact on both CO2 production and other sources of environmental degradation.

Thirdly, it is clear that many of the best ideas come from passionate people at the "sharp end" of an organisation rather than

from board room. Making sure your organisation – large or small – is open and receptive to good ideas from the cleaners as well as from the executive director is a good start. For training establishments this means making sure the students can change things for the better just as much as the staff can. For example At CSSD a short campaign by two final year stage designers ensured that it is now policy for most of our sets now get recycled rather than broken up and put into land-fill.

It is increasingly clear that there is no single golden route forward when it comes to reducing the environmental impact of theatre and theatre makers. It is also clear that what ever we do in the live performance sector will only have a small impact on the global production of

CO2 and on reducing other environmentally damage. But we cannot ignore the role of all kinds of performance in promoting the message, both in the work we make, and also by example in the way we make that work. Like Kermit the frog says; "It's not easy being green", but it is something we should try to be more of the time: at times because it's the law, at times because it saves money, but mostly because all the time it's the right thing to do for the future of the planet.#



*This article first appeared as the foreword to the chapter in the book 'Theatre Materials' describing the discussion 'A Round Table on Greening Theatre' with contributions from a range of experts on energy efficiency including Ben Todd, Bryan Raven, Mhora Samuelson, and others working for ARUP, TFL and the Mayor's Office. 'Theatre Materials' is available from the Central School of Speech & Drama. For details email: CETT@CSSD.UK*

# “Mine’s a Dublin!”

**Nigel Lawson Dick tests the Guinness (eventually) as he travels to Eventech on behalf of the ALD.**

Oddly enough it was only at the airport on the way back that the Guinness was sampled – there were other opportunities (even some free ones) but they were passed by. Now how’s that for single-mindedness – or perhaps it was feeble-mindedness?

Eventech is in its second year in this location so it’s still very new ground – but the ALD decided to venture ‘offshore’ and test the waters of the Liffey.

Dublin airport on a beautiful sunny morning has the usual quota of roadworks that seems to go with the territory but the taxi driver negotiated those easily enough. He coped with the traffic – which was fairly horrendous but appeared to come as something of a surprise to him. More tricky was actually knowing where

we were going to – there was some broad awareness of the location but any sort of detailed understanding was a bit lacking – so an extended external circumnavigation of the area (we passed a whopping great sign advertising the event!) followed by an almost equally extended internal circumnavigation (we drove past the door three times) did get us there. Profuse and charming apologies followed with the explanation ‘there are two gates, you see’ – so what can you say?

But the RDS – the Royal Dublin Society – is quite a sizeable site with a curious medley of buildings – exhibition space, concert hall, ‘Main Hall’ (whatever that may be) and the rest of it. Funny this ‘Royal’ business in a republic. Mind you, I know the Royal Cork Yacht Club

well which wears its name with pride – and incidentally is the oldest yacht club in the world dating from 1720. Now I have sampled several Guinnesses there (and the odd Murphy!) Enough of that - back to Dublin.

The show – well, a bit quiet with few visitors on the first day and then a bit more of a trickle on the second. But of those that did visit the stand everyone seemed to know everyone else – so whether they live in Dublin or Cork or Waterford or Limerick; they know each other. I know the world of lighting design may seem small, but this is something else. The ALD database contains quite a number of Irish contacts – most of them lapsed members! – but their names all rang bells!

Didn’t look too promising really and then during the

second afternoon a positive shoal of contacts giving rise to three new members – a couple of Associates and a Professional. You never can tell.

A quick get out (just the ‘travelling stand’ this time) and out to the coach – which goes from outside the door all the way to the airport (will know, next time). But back into ‘the traffic’ which made for a 90 minute trip – three times the inward journey, for all its shortcomings.

By which time a Guinness was definitely on the agenda!  
#



# Squaring the Circle

Notes from the meeting arranged for the Critics' Circle.

This is a taste of what Rick Fisher explained about the role of lighting to the assembly of critics...

**A** useful metaphor for what Lighting does in the theatre is painting. We paint the stage with light. Sometimes what is required is like a base coat, providing basic illumination coverage so that the performance can be seen by the audience, but more often light is called upon to provide so much more to make up the stage picture.

Lighting can create focus, atmosphere, rhythm, and texture, to the scenic environment and the performance. It can add expectation, emotion, and drama.

What elevates basic illumination into stage lighting design is the desire and hopefully the ability to join with the rest of the creative makers of performance to help tell the story with light.

Modern lighting designers have an increasingly bewildering set of choices of types and qualities of light to deliver to the stage; but whatever the tools, the attributes that constitute the impact of light to the observer remain the same.

These attributes are **brightness, colour, angle, shape** and **texture** and they are used together to give the right blend of emotional information to the audience. This information can be very subtle or smack the audience right between the eyes. While it is often believed that the best lighting is never noticed, I prefer to think that the best lighting choices seem natural and inevitable even if they are very noticeable.

The range of choices that all lighting designers consider consciously or subconsciously of each of these

specific qualities is worth mentioning briefly.

## **Brightness:**

Is the playing area bright or dim, evenly lit or with certain areas highlighted in chosen ways? In fact, contrast is perhaps the more important component quality of brightness.

With brightness, contrast is the key. And as I often found to be true, it is not what lights you turn on that matter, *it is the lights you turn off.*

## **Colour:**

Is the colour or colours of the light that is perceived by the audience a natural or theatrical colour? Is it relevant to the sun, or some specifically shown light source on stage or some more emotional depiction of the character or story of the performer? Also how is that colour made?

Unlike paint, where if you mix many colours together the result is a sludge colour leading towards black, it is often forgotten by non-lighting folk that the colour of lighting sludge is white. Too many different colours mixed on stage have no real discernable colour and that can be useful or not depending on the effect desired. Also the colour of light is directly affected by the colour of the previous lighting as the eye always perceives colour in relation to what has just been seen.

There are as many variations to the creation of a white light as can be imagined, and finding the right type of colour or even the right white light is one of the most personal choices that lighting designers make.

The way that the colour of the light is made can

dramatically affect the way the performers, scenery and costumes look and that colour has to be appropriate for the story we are collectively trying to tell. Finding consensus among the designers and directors is often a major challenge!

## **Angle:**

Due to our experience of the natural world where the great light source of the sun moves throughout our day, the angle of light has great connotations and meaning that we often don't consciously think about, and as we all have countless other references to artificial light sources in addition to the sun – the direction the light originates from and how that hits the stage space is an important and emotive choice for the lighting designer.

## Notes from the meeting arranged for the Critics' Circle by Rick Fisher.

### Shape and Texture:

Is the light hard edged – a spot or shape within the space, or softly filling an entire space; is it evenly textured across the field of that specific light or is the scene textured subtly or even graphically to convey specific information like location?

Brightness, colour, angle, shape and texture are utilized to provide information as well as illumination. The necessary interface between the technology that produces and controls the light, and the creative and dramatic use of that light in performance, is what lighting design is all about.

I do not have to tell you professional writers that it is difficult to put light into words. Lighting designers struggle to describe and explain in advance how the

stage might look at any given moment, and the words we try and use can mean very different things to other people. Despite some new computer rendering tools expensively available to some, the light is one of the last aspects that is applied to any performance as it can only happen in the real place with the real performers moving in the real scenic environment in real time.

Often envy other designers ability to experiment with models, or costume drawing in the privacy of their own studios with many a seemingly good idea crumpled in the bin. When you have something you hope is right you can show it to others. And usually make adjustments in the scene or costume shop before it is exposed on stage.

Lighting designers are showing their first idea at an extremely pressurized and vulnerable time for all. The scenery may not be finished, the scene painting not finally adjusted, the costumes and hair and make-up often not available, the director is worrying about a whole variety of concerns about the transference of the piece onto the stage from the now familiar world of the rehearsal room, and often there are no performers on stage to assert their primacy in the performance. And this is time for the lighting designer to have a first go. It is a pretty public forum for your first sketch and that can be daunting.

So after a surprisingly few advance discussions and after we have watched rehearsals in a badly lit studio lighting designers start developing

the actual lighting. We work individually, yet as part of the creative team to exploit and distil the entire performance. Collaboration is often limited during the technical rehearsals as directors and designers are focussing on their own areas and normally there is trust to allow the lighting designer to paint the stage with light on their own. Then the final refinements are made during dress rehearsals and the previews available to us.

Technological advancements such as computer control and moving lights, which can do multiple jobs and be remotely refocused and coloured during the show have given us greater flexibility and creative opportunities. But they have also given us more potential technical pitfalls in the same way that the computer failure

is so much more devastating to our lives than a typewriter jamming.

Lighting is being asked to provide more and more to contemporary performance, after all, lighting design has only really been perceived as a specific creative role in the last fifty years. How well we do our job is very much in the eye of the beholder, but at its best lighting is contributing to and enhancing every moment of any stage performance.

Location... I have done many shows where there is a single candle on stage for a theatrical moment. You can see the performer and the scenery atmospherically and yet many thousands of watts later it is hard to get the definition, clarity, and atmosphere that the single candle produced.

Also I have noticed that the way white light is created reflects national tastes. To generalize heavily, in the USA it is more common to use more heavily saturated colours to make a white light with many different colour components, where in Britain a majority of designers use a much more limited number of tints and often only a single lighting tint at one time, and on continental Europe it sometimes seems that using any colour on stage at some of the larger opera houses is perceived as a sign of theatrical pandering and the preference is for choosing a light source that has the desired colour without any intervention."

*Rick Fisher #*

*December 2009 / January 2010*

# LIGHTING



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*'Betrayal'. Lighting: Rick Fisher. Photo: Catherine Ashmore.*

# Matt Wolf on a theatrical canvas: London's Donmar – uniquely alive to light

The Donmar in Covent Garden is a theatre that inspires unique affection amongst both audiences and practitioners and not only because the scarcity of available tickets makes those who cross its portals feel like part of an elite. In aesthetic terms, there is a particular thrill that comes with watching an immutable space transformed by its designers, as the Donmar more or less is with each new show. This isn't a venue that can be made over along the lines of the Cottesloe or the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs, where the seating configuration and layout often vary from play to play. Physically, the Donmar is pretty well fixed, that imposing back wall a feature akin to an easel fashioned out of brick, upon which lighting designers can work their (often wondrous) ways.

Indeed, to attend the Donmar regularly is to receive an ad hoc crash course in lighting that reveals the ability of designers in that field to shape a production no less fully than a given director or cast. Sure, *The Blue Room* will forever be known for the nanosecond of nudity from Nicole Kidman in her UK stage debut. But David Hare's Schnitzler rewrite owed much of its sleek, feline cool to the corresponding hues of Hugh Vanstone's lighting scheme, which was simultaneously sexy and suggestive and gently mysterious in accordance with a leading lady who turned the two-hander into a trans-Atlantic event. (Vanstone won an Olivier for both that play and the RSC's premiere of *The Unexpected Man*.)

Whether under Sam Mendes or his successor, Michael Grandage, the

Donmar has revealed itself as a canvas that gives its designers real room to play. Mendes' own revival of *Company* in 1995 allowed Paul Pyant to riff brightly, as it were, on the patterned floor of Mark Thompson's minimalist-chic set, an approach that honoured the vibrancy of the Manhattan where Stephen Sondheim's pioneering musical is set while at the same time darkening as shadows attend what, after all, begins as a festive birthday party for the unmarried Bobby. An early West End transfer for what was Mendes' then still-young Donmar regime, *Company* was unimaginable without lighting bold enough for the hip-swivelling hipsters' aspect of the piece and reflective enough to honour its equal emphasis on loneliness and ache: a celebration coloured by doubt.

Pyant lit the opening show of Mendes' tenure, *Assassins*, and was something of a Donmar regular, as others have become since. I shan't quickly forget Paule Constable's contribution to the 2001 reclamation from Marianne Elliott of *The Little Foxes*, an American theatrical mainstay shown in Constable's view of it to be suffused with the heat of the American south even as dramatist Lillian Hellman's narrative comes shrouded in deception and subterfuge. The brooding quality of the production was felt via a design that opted for moral ambiguity over the melodrama for which the play is best known, and upon which Constable expanded when she later worked with Grandage on the West End *Evita*: a musical at once admiring of – and lethal towards – the doomed

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## Matt Wolf on a theatrical canvas: London's Donmar – uniquely alive to light

Argentinian leader that the show is about.

The Donmar, it seems, does especially well by ambivalence and doubt, as if that back wall existed as a rare constant in a world given over to confusion. Reviving Pinter's *Old Times* in 2004, the director Roger Michell made uncertainty a visual leitmotif courtesy of William Dudley's gauze-encased set, shimmeringly lit by Rick Fisher so as to capture the realm between memory and desire that the play inhabits. The same team reconvened three years later with an imperfectly cast *Betrayal* in which a notably spare design was at intriguing odds with the complexity of the tale told, Fisher's lighting anatomising a three-way courtship that itself is forever moving toward and away from the shadows. This Pinter play, too, swings between

connection and isolation, a point implicit in a lighting scheme that paid due attention to both states of being.

The concentrated nature of the space allows for effects at least as exciting as those achieved in venues, and with budgets, many times the size of what the 251-seat Donmar can offer. I am thinking in particular of Hugh Vanstone again, this time with his elegantly spectral work on *Mary Stuart*, not least the way in which Harriet Walter's ever-startling Elizabeth seemed to be imprisoned in her brilliantly lit luminosity even if it was Janet McTeer's Mary who, as history reports, actually lost her life. Or Neil Austin's contribution to *John Gabriel Borkman*, which at no point burned more brightly – and ironically – than at the crushing conclusion of Ibsen's mightily disturbing

play. Austin, indeed, has made singularly witty use of that back wall, whether glistening in *Caligula* so as to suggest the very realm that for its title character remains forever out of reach, or quite literally mapping out the terrain of the recent *Life Is A Dream*, set designer Angela Davies's peeling gold backdrop lit so as to remind us that Calderon's play itself dates back to the Spanish Golden Age.

Sometimes, as Austin made plain with the Donmar revival of Pam Gems's *Piaf*, the lighting is the show – at least as coupled with a surpassingly smart production from Jamie Lloyd and a blazing star performance from Elena Roger in the title role. Here was a staging as feisty and deliberately scrappy as the heroine at its wounded core, and Austin's lighting led the way, punctuating the piece

with abrupt changes in style and mood, weaving in and out of the hallucinatory realm of nightmare. At one point, the diminutive Piaf seemed in the process of being devoured whole by a looming shadow of herself, while the hard-edged look of the show reminded us that this was a performing legend for whom life itself was theatre. Austin's lighting took no prisoners, and nor did Piaf.

As I write this, the Donmar is deep in rehearsals for *Red*, a new John Logan play directed by Grandage and starring Alfred Molina as the abstract expressionist painter whose much-vaunted geometric grids of colour seem - when encountered in three dimensions - both to absorb and generate light in separate but equal measure. Already, I can imagine that wall pressed into service as

the high-walled gallery of one's dreams across which Rothko's art is refracted anew, this time within a theatre. As for Austin, who has the job of lighting it, well, what more could you want: one artist faced with the task quite literally of illuminating another. The capacity of the Donmar to delight and astonish is, I suspect, with us for a very long run.#



*'Piaf'. Lighting: Neil Austin. Photo: Johan Persson.*



*'Caligula'. Lighting: Neil Austin. Photo: Ivan Kyncl.*



*'Old Times'. Lighting: Rick Fisher. Photo: Ivan Kyncl.*



*'Life is a Dream'. Lighting: Neil Austin. Photo: Johan Persson.*



*'Mary Stuart'. Lighting: Hugh Vanstone. Photo: Neil Libbert.*

**"HOW AN APACHE  
NEARLY BIT THE  
DUST THANKS  
TO THE QUEEN'S  
ONE MAN LIGHT  
BRIGADE"**

**T**hus proclaimed the *Daily Express* on October 18\*.

A piece by James Fielding reported that theatre lighting company owner Torben Merriot, awakened from his slumbers in deepest Suffolk by a 'thunderous noise', picked up his trusty £8.45 torch rushed outside and shone it skywards to investigate. Three weeks later he was arrested for trying to dazzle a helicopter pilot. As he has previously been employed to illuminate helicopters at official displays for the Queen (using BIG searchlights) the irony was not lost; unlike the many hours he did lose at Bury St. Edmunds police station, before being released on bail. *Focus* asked the ALD's resident Bard of Suffolk, coincidentally a neighbour of Torben (but evidently a heavier sleeper) to comment.

**December 2009 / January 2010**

\* [www.dailyexpress.co.uk/posts/view/134679/How-an-Apache-nearly-bit-the-dust-thanks-to-the-Queen-s-one-man-light-brigade-](http://www.dailyexpress.co.uk/posts/view/134679/How-an-Apache-nearly-bit-the-dust-thanks-to-the-Queen-s-one-man-light-brigade-)

## **The Battle of Battlesea Green**

**by James Laws**

*In military circles, from C of G S  
To the lowliest Naval Attaché,  
They quake at the mention of Torben, alias  
The scourge of the gunship Apache.*

*T'was one of the clock on the stillest of nights  
In Suffolk, where still still means still.  
No light pollution to sully the sight  
No nightjar to jar with its trill.*

*E'en nature declined to abhor this vacuum,  
But where there's a void to be found,  
You can count on the Army to dive and to zoom  
And to fill it right down to the ground.*

*For the silence was shattered by roars and by riot  
The air seemed alive with a gust  
As Apaches flew in, to shatter the quiet,  
To raise both the night and the dust.*

*Now Torben knows lighting; he lights the elite.  
When he's finished he likes a good slumber.  
Awaked by a 'copter at height of 10 feet  
He wanted to take down its number.*

*What to use to uncover this nighttimes' debauch  
When you've skytrackers, raylights and zappers?  
You've guessed it! A grabbable, jumbo-sized torch,  
Two million CP on the wrapper.*

*Search-lighting aircraft takes patience and care,  
So the pilots still know where to go.  
But spotting the crew from ABOVE is quite rare-  
And implies that the 'craft is quite low.*

*Sleep well disrupted, our hero's annoyed  
And lodges complaints the next day.  
Thinks nothing more till the police are deployed;  
He's arrested for lighting affray!*

*Nine hours in a cell makes Torben incensed  
And he comes out prepared for a fight.  
Reasoning attack is best form of defence,  
The Media appraised of his plight.*

*Was the pilots affrighted when Torben alighted  
That beam on the cockpit below?  
Or were their larks smothered, 'cos someone discovered  
They'd gone places they shouldn't go?*

*We'll never discover the wherefores and reasons  
They shattered the stillness that night.  
The MoD dropped charges; no peril, no treason.  
No public report on the flight.*

### **THE QUESTION**

*Invasive, raucous; night manoeuvres.  
Hell descends! What can we do?  
If we spotlight an Apache  
The MoD might choose to Sioux.*



# News about PQ011

## Scott Palmer reports from Amsterdam

Plans are now emerging about the next Prague Quadrennial which will take place in the Czech capital between June 16th and 26th 2011. Significantly, PQ is re-inventing itself and has gained a new title *The Prague Quadrennial of Performance Design and Space*.

The proposals were announced at the *Expanding Scenography* conference in Amsterdam over the weekend of 2-4th October which also explored the nature, purpose and the impossibility of exhibiting work from performances.

Despite the acknowledged difficulties of presenting the work of theatre practitioners to a wider audience, most of whom will not have seen the original performance, the importance of the PQ as an event was underlined. Whilst there have been recent issues surrounding the nature

of the World Stage Design exhibition, PQ continues to be a vital event at which the work of designers can be celebrated.

Over the last few PQs there has been a noticeable shift away from the presentation of beautiful modelboxes and costumes to embrace lighting and sound design, and the use of projection screens and installations to attempt to convey something of the work outside of its original context. In re-thinking what PQ is for, there seems to be a genuine attempt to give the next exhibition a much broader focus. The General Commissioner is Slovakian designer Boris Kudlíčka who won a gold medal in 2007 for his use of technology and some stunning projections. Interestingly he is also taking responsibility for curating the Lighting section of the quadrennial which sends out

an interesting signal about the new importance placed on our area of specialism.

PQ011 aims to examine scenography between the visual and performing arts and there is a sense here also about considering how design for performance may be thought of as both inside and outside of the traditional theatre space (room here then for architectural light).

Because of last year's fire in the Industrial palace the national exhibitions will be housed in 2011 at the Veletržní Palace - home to the National gallery's collection of contemporary art (and rather like a Czech equivalent of Tate Modern). This relocation immediately places the work in a rather different context - that of an art gallery rather than a trade fair!

Student work and Scenofest will be housed at DAMU - the Theatre Faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in the city centre. The American LD Cindy Limauro is coordinating this aspect.

There is an ambition to

host a range of lighting (and sound) events in Josef Svoboda's *Laterna Magika* theatre space and this space will appropriately become a focus for Lighting Design (and designers) throughout the 11 days - and no doubt there will be a call for masterclasses, technical assistance and other proposals in due course.

There will also be a focus on light in outdoor interactive performance spaces and 22 of these events will be commissioned and be displayed throughout the quadrennial.

At the Amsterdam conference, Peter Farley (Wimbledon College of Art) who is leading the SBTd team and coordinating the UK entry for PQ011, presented the UK's theme for the National Exhibition. This will build on *Time+Space, 2D>3D*, and *Collaborators* which over the last 12 years have all had specific contributions from the ALD and its members. The UK exhibition will be entitled *TRANSform* - and this theme explicitly references and

acknowledges the potential of light to transform space. We should begin to think now about how the ALD will want to contribute to the UK's entry - especially as it has been at the forefront of exhibiting lighting design on this international stage. Individual designers can submit work and there will be a call from the SBTd in due course - work from the preceding five years is eligible.

Members who have visited this international celebration of theatre design in the past will already be pencilling these dates in their diaries - but if you haven't experienced this event before I would recommend the journey. The scale and scope is truly staggering and where better to gain cultural nourishment than in one of the world's most beautiful cities?

The PQ website provides more detail on what is planned and this will be updated regularly as events are firmed up. #

[www.pq.cz/en/](http://www.pq.cz/en/)



*The industrial palace in Prague - the home of PQ07. Photo: J. McKinney*



[www.claypaky.it](http://www.claypaky.it)

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