

December 2007 / January 2008

Interviews Special

# ALD # FOCUS

The Journal of the Association of Lighting Designers  
“More art, less advertisements”

*Saint Joan at the National Theatre with Anne-Marie Duff as Joan. Lighting by Paule Constable. Photo: Kevin Cummins. What makes Paule tick? Find out on page 7.*

*Under the cool wash this issue:*

**Seasonal lighting tips from Francis • What's a re-lighter do? • Johanna Town's 17 years at the Royal Court • Lighting designers get personal • Rough Crossings studied • Opera reviews from Ash Khandekar... and much more!**

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# Rick's Retreat

OK, so I will start out by getting the bit that you could be jealous of over first... I am in Sydney and the weather is *warm and sunny* and the beach is a 25-minute bus ride away. I have been put in a nice serviced apartment which, apart from very expensive internet, has everything you could possibly need and a gym and pool in the building as well.

But the reality check is that we are still on 12-hour days, six days a week, so there is not that much fun to be had. Everyone else's notes always seem to take priority, so we end up working extra time just to get through the thankfully small jobs on our list. Most days I do not stray from the three blocks from the theatre to the apartment.

Still I have a great team of people working with me and we virtually never wait for lighting, even as scenes are being re-directed, re-blocked and re-ordered with little or no warning.

The ability to be able to light someone virtually anywhere

on stage in a wide variety of angles, shapes of beams, and colours instantly, without any recourse to a ladder due to a heavily automated lighting rig, is totally taken for granted. With a great programmer (ALD member Vic Smerdon) we can respond so quickly to the moving goal posts that sometimes I almost long for a bit more discussion and waiting time to let the ideas settle, mature, and develop before relighting a scene again and again.

I would also like the fact that we can respond so quickly to changes and new ideas to be at least acknowledged by our collaborators. But I guess we just have to take comfort that we can solve and fix things, as directorial and scenic changes are thrown at us.

Speaking of *Collaborators*, those visiting London will want to make sure they visit the exhibition at the V&A that has just opened showcasing some of the best of theatre design from the last four years. This exhibit is part of the excellent

show seen in Nottingham last year and includes a ALD group exhibition put together by Ken Coker for which we are all very grateful for his persistence in making this happen once again.

While teching *Billy Elliot* I also had the opportunity to host a group of twelve students from various technical theatre courses in Australia and New Zealand. While watching a tech, where you often do a scene four times due to multiple casts of child actors, might figure under the terms of torture set out in the Geneva Convention, they seemed to enjoy seeing that the process on a large scale show is not all that much different than what they are doing in college. Our lighting hire company in Australia, Chameleon, were able to loan us enough headsets so they could listen into the lighting and stage management loop. The chance to meet various people on the team – programmer, production and house electricians, followspot caller as well as designer

– offered lots of opportunities for questions and sharing of information about the various roles that these excellent students will be pursuing as they finish their training. I think it is great that the students were allowed to take time from their coursework to join us. Sometimes the demands of the schedule on courses seem to prohibit students getting some exposure to professional experiences and that is a real shame. I appreciate Selecon's help in setting this up and sponsoring this event. I think we can often underestimate how useful watching the process can be for students.

Please consider how you can make observers welcome when you are working. It is welcome to have a group of people who do notice how quickly lighting is able to respond to the whims of the technical rehearsal.

And please have a happy holiday season, I'll be thinking of you over my BBQ.

*Regards, Rick #*

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# PROFESSIONALS' COLOUR SUPPLEMENT

With Mark Jonathan



**I'm writing this as we prepare for the onslaught of seasonal shows and by the time your copy of *Focus* lands through your letterbox you will all be in the thick of production if you haven't opened your shows. My last show opens at the Royal Opera House on Sunday 23rd December so I don't know if I'll get to write any Christmas cards, again...**

## **Pastures new for a few**

Let's celebrate a few things apart from Christmas and New Year... our publication, *Focus*, has gone from strength to strength and in this issue we have a wealth of lighting design and designer articles including an interview with Johanna Town, who's leaving the Royal Court in favour of a freelance career. I've just been lighting *Free Outgoing* at the Royal Court's Jerwood Upstairs and it was simply a great joy to

be there again. I followed Phil Gladwell, who has also launched his freelance career, after his residency at the Young Vic. I can't wait to read Nick Moran's new book *Performance Lighting Design*. The word from our editor is that it's sensational and Jim Laws is writing a review for the next *Focus*. Many thanks to the publishers A&C Black who have offered ALD members a £5 discount (see page 14 for details). We have our new slot "Sixty seconds with..." created by Paule Constable. Thanks to Paule and Durham who have got the ball rolling.

## **Another opening, another show...**

I've been to two openings this week. The first at the V&A was the London showcase of the designers' exhibition "Collaborators". While I thought the V&A would be a good venue, I hope that interested parties can find

their way to the exhibition within this enormous building. Despite the size of the V&A the exhibition had to be cutback since it opened in Nottingham so it's frustrating for those exhibitors who went to the trouble of making an individual exhibit in Nottingham to not be displayed here.

"What interests me is that lighting fees seem to stagnate, year on year, while programmer's fees have gone up. Why is this?"

However, the excellent catalogue is still on sale and is a great snapshot of British stage, costume and lighting design over the last four years. The ALD's collective entry is in place and our thanks go to Ken Coker for his work in realising our exhibit. Without Ken it wouldn't have happened and I doubt that the exhibition as a whole would have happened without the incredible hard work of the SBTD's Kate Burnett. I

suppose you should all start thinking about whether you will exhibit in four years time; start collecting your pictures now.

My other opening was to return to the newly refurbished National Theatre Studio next to the Old Vic, originally built to house the National Theatre's workshops,

opportunities for so many people.

It was wonderful to see the refurbished spaces that retain the 'rough' feeling but with new spaces big and small for projects to be developed both for the NT and for many other places too. I've been lucky enough to teach on the annual directors' course which has given directors a three-week intensive course for the last 11 years. It's interesting to see what many of those directors are now doing. I was reminded too of lighting a workshop of a new musical play that went on to be mounted by Oldham, followed by three regional tours, the West End, Paris and which finally took me to Broadway. Of course, more recently, *His Dark Materials*, *Coram Boy* and *War Horse* were all developed at The Studio. The new NT archive facility, also based there, will be of tremendous value to students and researchers.

### Raising the profile of lighting design

One of the ALD's on-going themes has been to try and raise the profile of lighting design in the hope that we will be valued more highly and, in an ideal world, perhaps be paid more. I'm delighted to report that following a campaign, headed by Rick Fisher, the TMA will be introducing an award specifically for lighting at the TMA awards from next year. This is fantastic news. I'm delighted and my thanks go to Katherine Hamilton at SOLT/TMA for her help in this matter.

While we try to raise the profile of lighting design we also need to try and raise fees. I was interested to hear that the going rate for programmers is now £220-£280 a day. What interests me is that lighting fees seem to stagnate, year on year, while programmer's fees have gone



*Kate (who made a great speech about the special nature of design work for performance) on an unlit podium against a background of rather well lit 19th century landscapes.*

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up. Why is this? Is it that fees for programmers are agreed with production managers who are closer to the work and our fees are agreed by a producer who isn't as close to the work? Maybe the programmers amongst you can tell me what the secret is and how we get our fees up?

This week, Ian Saunders and I met with Barbara Eiffler, the Executive Director of the Stage Management Association. We had an interesting discussion about the common difficulties and challenges facing both of our associations and our members. A common theme was whether our members perceived Equity to be worth belonging to, and if they didn't, what did Equity need to do for membership of the union to become valuable to our members? Have a think about this issue because I think we will return to this in 2008.

### Overseas rider

Those of you who 'work overseas' (and by that I mean 'live in one country and work in another') may like to contribute to the new Overseas Rider. Colin Grenfell is co-ordinating this on his website: [www.colingrenfell.com](http://www.colingrenfell.com)

Give your thoughts to Colin and let's see what we can collectively come up with. The Rider will cover issues that may fall outside the boundaries of the regular contract as well as acting as a checklist to ensure that all aspects are considered including transportation, per diems and accommodation. Many thanks to Colin and others who contribute to this.



*The two sheep who 'guard' the entrance to the galleries.*

I'll close by wishing you all a very Happy Christmas and a wonderful 2008. May all those "Scrooge-like" managements who underpay us be visited by the ghosts of productions past, present

and yet to come and realise that the wealth of brilliance (and atmospheric darkness) that lighting designers bring to productions is valuable and deserves to be well rewarded! #

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*War Horse at the National Theatre, London. Craig Leo (puppeteer) and Joey (puppet). Lighting by Paule Constable. Directors: Marianne Elliott and Tom Morris, designer: Rae Smith. Photo by Simon Annand.*



# “Sixty seconds with...”

**In this new series, Paule Constable asks her lighting design chums some quick-fire personal questions – and to show there is no favouritism, she asked herself first...**

## **Name?**

Paule Constable.

## **Sum up your career to date in a short sentence.**

I'm the only mother of two living in Brighton and working as a lighting designer to have won two Olivier awards.

## **What are the three favourite shows you have lit and why?**

*Saint Joan* (Olivier Theatre, July 2007) because it's the first time I've got close to getting somewhere in the Olivier. *Don Carlos* (Sheffield Crucible and West End, 2005) because I stayed in the dirtiest digs in the world and made one of my favourite shows with some of my favourite people. *The Prince of Homburg* (Lyric, Hammersmith and RSC, 2003) because the play is so thrilling and meant so much to Neil Bartlett who cried every time the play started. It was amazing to go on that journey with him.

## **What was the worst moment of your career?**

Any moment when I am not taken seriously as a lighting designer because I'm female – and believe me, there are many.

## **Where are you now?**

7:47 train from Brighton to London – off to start a tech at the Donmar Warehouse.

## **What is your favourite theatre/space?**

I love the Young Vic, the Olivier when it was in the round, Bramante's Tempietto in Rome.

## **Where/what would you most like to light?**

I'd love to light at the Garnier in Paris and have never had a chance – I've never worked at the Almeida!

## **If you weren't a lighting designer what would you be?**

I fantasise about being a film editor. I also originally wanted

to be an English academic. I also fall into hippy/beach bum very happily!

## **Where would you rather be right now?**

On the beach.

## **What is your favourite colour?**

Anyone who knows me would say L202

## **If you were a colour what would it be?**

Either L728 because it's the colour of the sea or L747 because it's scruffy round the edges and quite grubby!

## **If you could scrap one piece of kit or one tradition or part of the job from every theatre in the world what would it be?**

Sexism, Minuette colour frames and barn doors, any set of dimmers that don't match and have different curves, dimmers that respond at 5%, stock scrolls which don't get the basic colour palette right, the English habit of not acknowledging one's

colleagues when you arrive at work...

## **Which part of the job do you enjoy most?**

Any lit rehearsal where the rig is doing what I want and more, and I get a chance to kick ideas around.

## **Which part of the job do you enjoy least?**

Focusing – particularly if it involves bounce focusing at all!

## **If you were going to light a show on a desert island (accepting that it had a rudimentary theatre and power!), what three things would you take with you?**

Parcans, and a roll of L202 – anything else would be too much!

## **What keeps you awake at night?**

Wondering why they don't use PCs in the United States, my children, notes.



## **What common**

**piece of kit would you be least likely to find in one of your rigs?**

A gobo! Very much conventional front of house.

## **What/who have been the major influences on your work?**

The great Stevie Whitsun; Jennifer Tipton's work, the madness of the light we see around ourselves everyday!

## **What's the most useful thing you have learnt as a lighting designer?**

You are only as good as the relationships you make...

## **How would you like to be remembered?**

As a good lighting designer, a good laugh and a good mother. #

*Front cover image: One of Paule's favourite designs. Saint Joan at the National Theatre with Anne-Marie Duff as Joan. Photo: Kevin Cummins.*

# PRO'S PLATFORM

## James Laws steps up to the soapbox to ask: *Tearing up the script or losing the plot?*

I must have been lucky because, despite having my share of penniless premieres and try-outs, I've always known the game was afoot when a heavy A4 envelope came through the slot in the front door and landed on the mat with a dependable thud. Until last week.

Apparently there is a new way of doing things and people are receiving scripts via e-mail. The first I knew of this was when a 115 pager from a management of reasonable substance arrived in my e-mail box with the comment "... I attach the script." I wrote back, thanking the sender for a "first glimpse of the script" and saying how I was looking forward to receiving the hard copy. As we hadn't signed contracts at that stage, the next 10 days of silence from the management were slightly worrying but in fact the real script, an

un-virtual 115 pages, arrived hot off the press with the revised contract and a nice letter. I just have to punch it, find a ring binder and read it. Deep joy.

Still, the nagging question persisted: if I had obliged by buying a ream and an extra ink cartridge, printing it and binding it, would I have found a reward in this world, or

even the next? Probably not; the status quo would have changed and I would have had another unexpected overhead to nibble at my fixed and pre-negotiated expenses. I think that a sign of being part of an organised production is each member of the company having the same edition of the script, ideally in the management

house style.

I've heard the proposition "only print off the bits you need", but what bits would they be? It's hard to predict without reading it all first and I want to do that in front of a roaring fire with a mug of tea, rather than sitting at a laptop. In the old days of twice-weekly rep, everyone had their own dialogue and entrances/exits/cues and not much else and the results were terrible. You need the full script to get the rhythm of the piece and planning where the cues are going to come is probably weeks away from your first reading at home.

I suspect that there will be other surprises for me as we get through to first night but perhaps the ALD contract rider (which, in its present form, has been accepted by the management in question) should include references to the script, the production



plans and how they will be sent to and fro. However this is done, the onus should be with the management to provide them in a printed form or to pay for the LD to do so. How many printing folk does it take to design the lighting?  
*James Laws, ALD # 16*



# A Right Royal Romp

## Johanna Town and 17 years at the top in Sloane Square

We couldn't let Ms. Town leave the Royal Court Theatre in London for pastures new without looking back on those exciting, fun and sometimes frustrating years, could we? Your editor investigates (with some help from a passer-by).

Jo (for I have always known her so, and will refer to her thus in the name of ecology and ink-saving) greets me, as ever, with that winning smile. Has she ever been seen without it? From what

she tells me, lighting for her and her team has to be fun. Unlike many other heads of lighting, Jo seems to have started at the top. "I was lucky enough to be a chief LX at the age of 21, and I've been there ever since," she enthuses. But there again, she started early. The daughter of a professional actress from Colwyn Bay who transferred to the amateur circuit in Lytham St. Annes (that's near Blackpool for those of you in Surrey without



*Terrorism (Royal Court 2003).*

operates something like that now", she comments, clutching her virtual Royal Court Health and Safety manual. They were also the days of rampant sexism. "Only boys do lighting", they told Jo at school. But by the time she left school, Jo had a passion for theatre, and light. "I have always been aware of light, its quality, texture, colour. Just look at that daylight contrasting with the tungsten halogen

SatNav), Jo seemed to spend much of her childhood in and around amateur dramatics, especially after the early loss of her father, after which her mother took her along to every rehearsal. Needless to say, Jo was given diversionary parts on stage, but helping the man who did the lighting held more interest.

Those were the days of Junior 8 resistance dimmers. "I wouldn't be able to even suggest one of my team



*A Girl in a Car with a Man (Royal Court 2004).*



*Rhinoceros (Royal Court 2007).*



*Megan Dodds in My Name is Rachel Corrie (Royal Court 2005).*



downlighters on the pillars”, she explained, looking over my shoulder. Err, yes.

Just down the road from Lytham is Manchester’s Royal Exchange Theatre. This was Jo’s second home; a regular treat with her mum. “We always tried to sit next to the lighting desk, just so I could see what was going on.” So after leaving school, it was off to the Royal Exchange she went as the last ABTT trainee. This is where Jo started design. The Royal Exchange taught Jo that with the right team and environment, lighting was truly the equal of other disciplines within the creative element of the show. She learnt the importance of assisting visiting lighting designers, learning from them and enjoying the thrill of being part of their creative process. It was all learning,

and fun. After three formative years working with the likes of Joe Davis, Mick Hughes and a young Mark Henderson she moved on, first to Guildford’s Yvonne Arnaud Theatre and then to the London Bubble Theatre at the tender age of 21. “I always wanted to get to London. If nothing more, it was to see if what I had learned could stand up for itself.” For Jo though, London wasn’t the West End, “...didn’t like the shows”. London Bubble was her first experience as Chief LX. Liverpool Playhouse was next.

While at Liverpool, Jo worked on a series of contemporary theatre pieces emanating from London. How does she describe ‘contemporary’? “It was *real* theatre, describing real life. Life stripped to the bone; absorbing.” The lighting style

used was simply “as normal as possible”. Not there to create a picture, more to create the atmosphere; to enhance the emotion on a stage which was devoid of scenery, but bursting with passion. For Jo, this theatre had its roots in the London fringe; Stratford East, the Lyric Hammersmith, oh, and the Royal Court. The style of drama demanded a certain style of lighting, raw and vital. “When the production peels away the layers of a play to the basic truth and reality of a situation, the mood of the characters define the atmosphere rather than shafts of light through window gobos. Jo had found her niche; contemporary theatre.

Jo arrived at the Royal Court as head of lighting in 1990, slightly concerned that her previous experience had

boxed her into the confines of tradition. But she reflects that in those days there was time to discuss, experiment, develop and learn as directors brought new ideas onto stage. Particularly Stephen Daldry, who brought the flavour of 1950’s angry brigade back to the Court. Exciting times. So when did this halcyon theatrical environment change? “It was after we had to close for three years in 1997 for the refurbishment. After that, things changed.” The new building dictated a doubling of the programming, and twice the output meant that models often arrived on the first day of rehearsal, so there was precious little time for design meetings, “Now we had to think on our feet,” remembers Jo. The creative time had gone, as Jo explained to us in the last

issue of *Focus*. Was this the reason that Jo finds it the right time to move on now? “It might be...”, she says with that wry smile.

So what makes Johanna Town, soon to be freelance lighting designer, tick where it comes to lighting design style? “For me it’s colour first,” she explained. “Wherever I am, whatever I am doing, I’m looking at colours, lighting, light and shade.” Her gaze drifts off over my shoulder again, and as I turn around to share the view she comments, “There you go – daylight coming through that skylight contrasting with the almost orange tungsten, and those specials we put up in salmon for a recent party – lovely.” Direction, angles, natural colours. Yes, we’re back to raw realism again. But the key phrase is looking. Knowing

how to see. Now where have we heard that before? Could it be the Great Masters of the canvas?

Cues don't come that high up Jo's list of design topics. "I don't fiddle too much with lots of cues. I like to get the emotion right and leave it there for the scene. Most of my shows have fewer than 50 cues." But what about that upcoming panto in Derby, *Treasure Island*, I ask? "It's not panto. I don't do panto. It's a play... OK, with some music. A musical play. I don't do music."

The joy of working at the Royal Court, Jo repeatedly told me, was working with a marvellous team. To work with others and to see others at work. What changes has she seen in her 17 years here? "Lighting has become more sophisticated, I suppose." *Sophisticated?* "I mean there are more statements made by the lighting, more sophistication." Jo explained that there is also much more equipment available now, more varied. There are really no limitations any more. "I

really appreciate the help we lighting designers get from the rental companies," she said unprompted, "when we can go along and play with the new toys and see what they can do."

Jo started at the Court under the direction of Max Stafford-Clark, who had been the artistic director since 1979. Max exuded a love of the text, the raw essence of drama which drew Jo to London in the first place. Stephen Daldry brought a contrasting style to Max in 1992, as he looked further into the spectacle of the drama. One of the joys and the frustrations of working with new writing is that often the cast which appears on the first day of rehearsal isn't the same cast on opening night. She doesn't mean the actors are replaced, "in one play five of the cast were written out during rehearsals." Jo has lit sixty-five shows at the Court and was thrilled to be asked to light two in the current season, *Rhinoceros* and *The Arsonists*.

The last words go to Mark

Jonathan, who just happened to grab a few minutes with us during rehearsals for *Free Outgoing* in the Jerwood Theatre Upstairs. "What a lighting designer enjoys at the Royal Court is that you are supported 100% by the lighting team. They are all above the calibre of what is probably required, and that talent has to come from one place only – the head of

lighting. You feel that you are working with collaborators rather than staff. And it's all because the lighting team is run by a lighting designer." Good luck Jo. #



Stephen Jeffreys' *I Just Stopped by to See The Man*.

# OFFICE ORACLE

## Latest news from Ian's production desk



### **SBTD Collaborators at the V&A**

And so to the V&A Museum and the opening of the London showing of the Society of British Theatre Designers' Collaborators Exhibition in Galleries 103 to 106.

There were a number of ALD members present for the private viewing on launch night. Some had exhibited individually, and some were part of the joint ALD exhibit that had received a small re-vamp and tidy since its appearance in Nottingham at the start of the year. Many thanks to Ken Coker for all his work on this exhibit over the last 12 months.

The exhibition is there for the next 12 months, and although not as extensive as the Nottingham display, still has a wide range of shows, scales and styles to wile away a couple of hours during the cold winter months. Worth a visit!

### **Sponsored Student Scheme 2008 – final call**

This is your last chance to apply for this corporate members' funded scheme for students studying at Conference of Drama School Colleges. The closing date for applications is Christmas 2007. All current student members have been contacted via email. Even if you are already a member of the scheme for 2007/08 you will need to complete a new application form and return it to the office complete with proof of your student status in order to maintain your current membership beyond April 2008. Please note that if you do not apply your membership will revert to a normal student category and you will need to pay an annual subscription. Full details and an application form can be found on the students page of the website ([www.ald.org.uk/students](http://www.ald.org.uk/students)).

We would also be pleased to hear from corporate members with ideas for meetings or experiences tailored specifically to our sponsored students.

### **Subscription Payments**

Thanks to all those members who recently paid up their subscription arrears. Next year's subscriptions are due in a few months time, so could all members ensure that which ever method they choose to pay their subscription that they ensure there is a reference to where the payment originated? I have received a few electronic transfers lately that have no name or membership number to them, and this not only increases the amount of work and time taken in the office to query the payment with our bank, but also results in members potentially having their membership suspended if I cannot trace

the payment. If you have paid your subscription lately but have yet to receive a confirmation letter complete with new sticker for your membership card, please contact the office as soon as possible.

### **Creativity and Employability Conference**

This major conference, a knowledge transfer and research initiative, will take place at LIPA between Wednesday 26 March and Saturday 29 March 2008. The conference will explore the future trends, issues and practices in vocational performing arts education and training.

A full events programme with details of keynote speakers and an online booking form for delegates will be available on the conference website from January ([www.lipaconference.org.uk](http://www.lipaconference.org.uk))

### **Light Relief news**

Light Relief Day, held earlier this year to raise funds for the charity Light Relief, proved to be a great success, raising more than £5000, thanks to donations of a day's royalties from numerous lighting designers.

Now set to become an annual event, the first Light Relief Day took place on 24 April 2007, when lighting designers were asked to donate a day's royalties from their current shows. Organised by Rick Fisher, the day is in honour of the late Tony Gottelier, who played such a big part in setting up the charity.

Light Relief exists to help lighting designers and technicians during times of hardship and Chris Luscombe was a recent beneficiary as featured in the last issue of *Focus*.

Rick hopes that more

people and organisations will come on board next year, saying: "As the first event of its kind, Light Relief Day was a huge success and demonstrates how lighting designers are fully behind Tony Gottelier's idea of having a fund to help members of the industry. It would be great to have more people coming on board – I would like to see the rental companies as well as more designers and suppliers next year."

For more information about how you can help – or get help from – Light Relief, visit [www.lightrelief.org.uk](http://www.lightrelief.org.uk)

### **Can Performance Lighting be Sustainable?**

Sustainability has become a benchmark by which everything from Government policy to our choice of holiday destination is judged. But what does sustainability mean for us as lighting designers, production electricians or chiefs? What should sustainability mean for manufacturers and hire companies? For students training to enter the industry,

for their institutions and their teachers?

What should we do to decrease the carbon footprint of what we do at work, and is that all it's about? How much could we be doing right now to avoid being forced to do more by law later?

The segment of our industry most visible to the public is already under attack from the Mayor of London – but is he right? Are there too many 'lights' in West End Shows? Is it acceptable to have generators outside the Theatre Royal Drury Lane?

Sustainability will be a major strand of the work of the Centre for Excellence in Theatre Training team at Central School of Speech & Drama in 2008. From January, they will be running a series of open forums to find out what the industry is already thinking and doing. The outcomes of these discussions will be published, and we hope to put together recommendations to policy makers by the end of 2008. If you are interested in getting involved please contact [n.moran@cssd.ac.uk](mailto:n.moran@cssd.ac.uk).

### **Stop press...**

A new lighting book, just in time for Christmas!



Nick Moran, who serves on the ALD Exec, is author of the new 240pp *Performance Lighting Design*, which is being published by Methuen Drama, an imprint of A&C Black just as this issue reaches you. It will be reviewed in detail by James Laws in our Feb/March issue of *Focus*. The publishers blurb says:

*"New technologies have made lighting more prominent in live performances of all kinds, not just stage theatre, and in many courses lighting*

*has been subsumed into 'performance lighting'. Performance Lighting Design is a practical guide to the art and technique of lighting for the stage, concerts, exhibitions and live events. The book will also cover the use of projected images in performance including projected scenery on the West End stage, in fringe shows, and on the stadium "rock" stage, as well as the use of images from live camera and from other sources as "performers". The book will serve students of lighting design and will also be accessible to anyone with an awareness of technical theatre. Practical knowledge is combined with aesthetic and theoretical considerations. The book will also address the difficult area of getting inspiration and evolving design ideas through a broad range of performance genre. The author will use case studies of top professional practitioners, discuss the pros and cons of several computer based techniques, and incorporate 25 years of his own professional experience in the UK and Europe."*

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The publishers, A&C Black, have offered us a generous discount. ALD members can purchase the book for just £14.99 (RRP £19.99) and with FREE p&p by calling Macmillan Distribution on 01256 302699 or emailing [direct@macmillan.co.uk](mailto:direct@macmillan.co.uk), quoting offer code GLR U64 and ISBN 9780713677577.

# Letters

People,

Just a note to comment on two the excellent articles in *Focus*. Ken Miller's reminiscences of the days of "Variety" made me smile – that was also my introduction to paid theatre work! Summer Season, where (very quickly, or else) I learned the joys of 'fade to colours' and how or (more

importantly) when, to do a slow fade to a pin-spot lime, and then a DBO.

Or when/how fast to come to a full up to get the maximum audience response. I later incorporated the techniques learned and honed from variety, summer shows and floorshows, into repertory and panto lighting. The first time I ever dared suggest a permanent pin followspot in

a Shakespeare production nearly got me lynched at the production meeting – but it got the green light and both director and designer were suitably impressed (gobsmacked –hohoho!)

Joanna Town's article on needing both time and quiet for the business of focusing and lighting was also a timely reminder of how things should go. I have always insisted on

both, as well as having the stage being left clean, or at least tidy! Too often I have had to focus on incomplete sets... imagine the outcry if at the technical, a point was reached where the LD had to say, "Sorry, folks, I ran out of time here." I rest my case.

I am also well known for throwing any unnecessary people out of the auditorium when the lighting session commences, and insisting on complete quiet too; wails of "... please, we need to finish building this part of the set/prop," are met with a very stern, "You have a simple choice: either I light this show in a quiet environment, or I

go home and let you make all the noise you want. Both are not an option." I have left a few choice words out, of course... I mean, we LDs are the last to get *near* the stage, and have the *least* amount of time to do our job properly. Oh, alright, I will confess to there being an ulterior motive to ejecting people from the auditorium – I am, by nature, an ole gossip... as soon as I hear any voices (muffled, or not) my ears twitch, and I can't help homing in on what is being said, and by whom about who or whatever! Or is it just old age/paranoia?

Regards,

*Jim Woodley ALD #202*

## Welcome to our new members!

### Professional Members (rejoining)

Meic Watkins, Oldham. Warren Letton, Beckenham. Mark Doubleday, East Sussex.

### Associate Member

Tom Cousins, London

### Student Members

Daniel Mohamed, Cardiff. Adam Henderson, Loughborough.

Joe Allwood, Shropshire.

### Sponsored Students' Scheme

Rose Bruford College: Rick Boyce, Scott Bramall, Richard Burton, Isaac Conroy, Simon Gray, Nicholas Hamblin, Luke Haywood, Diane Hosker, Candy Lench, Jonathan Martin, Nicole Smith, Jon Spencer, Ralph Stokeld, Michael Swan, Matt Ward. RADA: Avril Cook, Tom Lightbody, Gabriel Phillips-Sanchez. Central SS&D: Abigail Bates.

## Calling all Associate Members!

It's been mighty quiet out there in associate-member-land recently. What's going on? We know that many Associate Members of the ALD are hard at work lighting local amateur shows, helping with school plays and refocusing Patt. 23s. We hope that many are reading *Focus* too. We'd be very pleased to hear from you about what you'd like to see in future issues of *Focus*. More design ideas? Meetings? Training courses? A "Stage lighters' Question Time" section with a panel of experts to help with tricky problems? It's your journal too – so let us know. editor@ald.org.uk.

## Contact us

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To submit articles, information, correspondence, ideas, and comments about Focus, please email **editor@ald.org.uk**

To submit industry and corporate press releases (Corporate Members only), please send them directly to the ALD office (office@ald.org.uk) and not to Focus so that they can be posted on the News pages of the ALD website for more immediate and wider coverage. Contact the office to arrange advertising in Focus. Editorial guidelines for authors are available on request from editor@ald.org.uk.

*The opinions published within Focus are not necessarily those of the Association. #*

## Dates for your (new) diaries

### All year!

Collaborators at the V&A, London

### 1st January 2008

Application deadline for Sponsored student applications

### 12th January

Deadline for Focus copy Feb/March

### 12th March

Deadline for Focus copy April/May

### 26 – 29th March 2008

Creativity and Employability Conference at LIPA

### 1st April 2008

2007/08 Subscriptions Due

### 24th April 2008

Light Relief day

### 29-30th April 2008

AC Lighting North Trade Show\*

### 12th May

Deadline for Focus copy June/July

### 11th & 12th June 2008

ABTT Show 2008 \*

Clay Paky awards for "The Knight of Illumination"

### 1st July 2008

Deadline for Subscription Payment.

### 12th July

Deadline for Focus copy August/September

### 7th – 10th September 2008

PLASA 08 \*

### May 2009

Showlight 09 – Glasgow

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

Keep an eye on [www.ald.org.uk/diary](http://www.ald.org.uk/diary) for more information on these and other events and members' show openings. If we have missed any interesting events in this list, please let us know!

# Opera and lighting design

We are pleased to welcome the editor of *Opera Now*, Ash Khandekar with his eye on the lighting

The Bastille, Paris, and the workers are revolting. The Paris Opera is out on one its perennial strikes following a stand-off between management and stage crew.

It was last February, and I was at the Opéra de Bastille to see a performance of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* directed by the Michael Haneke, the controversial Austrian filmmaker whose elusively powerful *Hidden* had recently taken the French cinema by storm. In spite of the strike and with typically Gallic intransigence, the show went on – fully staged but with stripped down effects. It's a production in which Giovanni suffers death by defenestration, but on this particular evening, amid the chaos of industrial sabotage, it was André Diot's lighting that got thrown out of the window, reduced to a general illumination that flattened any sense of theatricality.



Glyndebourne's 2007 production of *Tristan und Isolde* with Robert Gambill as *Tristan* and Nina Stemme as *Isolde*. Lighting by Robin Carter. Photo: Mike Hoban.



Seeing an opera staged without lighting (or at least without the impact of lighting design) was an unexpectedly disorientating experience. The shifts in mood were difficult to gauge, the tensions limp, the focus unclear. When I saw the production later in the run, Diot's lights back in action, it was literally a revelation, a gripping staging that cut to the

core of Don Giovanni's dark soul. Ironically, it was its very absence that switched me on to how important lighting in opera could really be.

Paule Constable calls lighting 'a secret language' which at its best works on a subconscious level. Constable is one of the UK's finest and most versatile lighting designers with a

long list of credits in opera. Her masterful contribution to English National Opera's production of *Satyagraha* last season added subtlety and radiance to Philip Glass's gently shifting, minimalist score, responding to what Constable calls the 'emotional temperature' of the music.

Deciphering this secret language is difficult. The





best lighting designers working in opera tend to take the composer's score as their starting point for unraveling the meaning of a work. Jennifer Tipton, well known for her lighting work with choreographer Paul Taylor, has also lent her talents to several operas and refers to lighting as 'the music of the eye because, like dance, it does have theme and variation; it does exist in time as well as in space.' At its best lighting is a catalyst that helps us to generate a reaction between the various elements that make up opera, (music, drama, design). Without it, it's difficult to make these elements gel.

At its quintessential level, opera as we see it today is an exploration of the relationship between music and light. Robert Wilson is the arch exponent of this reductive vision. Wilson is perhaps the only opera director who has completely assimilated for himself the

role of a lighting designer, regarding light as the most important part of theatre. His work is meticulous and his lighting cues so detailed and complex that they unfold like music itself, in seamless phrases of crescendos and diminuendos, punctuated by sudden accents and dramatic pauses. 'If you know how to light,' Wilson is quoted as saying, 'you can make shit look like gold. I paint, I build, I compose with light. Light is a magic wand.'

Wilson's stagings cast their spell slowly... sometimes very slowly. He may consider light to be his equivalent of paint but for some, experiencing his work is like watching paint dry. It was fascinating, therefore, to observe a New York audience give an enthusiastic ovation to Wilson's vivid revival of Wagner's *Lohengrin* at the Metropolitan Opera a couple of years ago, whereas the production had been roundly booed first time round at the same theatre in 1998.

(Perhaps even the Met's notoriously conservative audience has finally, er, seen the light?)

Richard Wagner, as is often the case, gives us chapter and verse on the subject of the relationship between light and sound. He was instrumental in turning what had been little more than a series special effects in 18<sup>th</sup>-century opera in to an integrated part of the emotional and intellectual experience of music drama: 'We must not be able to tell in the theatre where music ends and light begins,' he writes, 'it must be singular thing where drama is generated through "sound-light" for then we have the makings of real *gesamtkunstwerk* (total-art-work).' Wagner's made huge demands of his designers, pushing the boundaries of what lighting was expected to achieve in the opera house. His *Ring Cycle* still throws down the gauntlet to lighting designers, not just because of its epic

scale, but also because of its elemental extremes. Water and fire appear more or less literally as characters in the piece (embodied in the river Rhine and the god Loge), the glimmer of gold pervades the story and there's plenty of Nordic weather too: storms, floods, rainbows, stygian gloom, glints of sunshine – you name it, Wagner asks for it. It doesn't always work even in with all the technological sophistication of today. However, one of the most impressive *Rings* of recent times was Canadian Opera's extraordinary cycle that opened the new opera house in Toronto in 2006 and was recently revived in Lyons. It was blessed with David Finn's spectacular lighting plot, which saw radiant shards of objects and incandescent human bodies assuming the shape of trees, mountains and monsters, bringing the spectacular tableaux formed by Michael Levine's sets to life.

For all these Wagnerian

fireworks, it's often the starkest productions that really show off the skills and ingenuity of a lighting designer. Christoph Gluck's 'reform' operas have an in-built severity that affects production teams in different ways: some go out of their way to fill the stage with effects to counteract the rigour of the music; but at the Chicago Lyric Opera (and more recently in San Francisco and at London's Covent Garden) director Robert Carsen entirely embraced the bleak intensity of Gluck's *Iphigénie en Tauride* by setting the work in black box, with the principal singers and chorus dressed in black. Tobias Hoheisel's subtle shades of monochrome, ranging from dark charcoals to inky indigo and deepest jet, were masterfully illuminated by Peter Van Praet, credited with lighting design along with the stage director. This was lighting that, paradoxically, explored the

nature of darkness itself in a world where shadows spoke as eloquently as substance. This *Iphigénie* created a fascinating, physically present void against which music and emotions registered intensely.

Less is not necessarily more, however. Rick Fisher's beautiful lighting plot for Rachel Portman's new opera *The Little Prince* (which premiered at Houston Grand Opera) succeeded in saturating the charming, playful designs of Maria Bjornson in the all the vivid colour and definition that they deserved. And Thomas Webster's evocative lighting captured the decadent hues of Paul Brown's gorgeous set in Glyndebourne's classic *Pelléas et Mélisande*. If ever there was an opera that lent itself to light, it is this. Debussy strove to create 'an orchestral colour that is illuminated from behind' and as a result, produced a score that is translucent, gently blurring the definitions

of sound and light. Wagner would have approved.

At the other extreme is Shostakovich's *Lady Macbeth of Mtsensk District*, an expressionist romp, screeching with irony and pungent with satire. It took somebody with the punch of Mimi Jordan Sherin to light Richard Jones's spectacular production revived last season at Covent Garden. Sherin followed the every boisterous twist and turn of this roller-coaster score with a lighting plot that threw caution to the wind and seemed to enjoy the ride.

More than any other theatrical form, opera tends to focus on the predicament of the individual against the backdrop of society. The private, internalised world of the aria, contrasted with the public pronouncements of the chorus is a dichotomy that opera has handled supremely well from its early 17th-century origins. But this is, again, something that presents challenges to the

lighting designer: how do you make those sudden changes from the particular to the universal without the clunk of a gear change hanging in the air? For me, the best sort of operatic lighting behaves like the theatrical equivalent of the lens of a movie camera honing the audience's attention right into the close-up of an interior monologue before pulling out to reveal the sweeping panorama behind in one seamless take.

Sometimes, I don't notice lighting in the opera house. Perhaps that's a positive thing, an instance of how good lighting acts primarily on the subconscious, illuminating the subtext of a work in absolute harmony with the music. Sometimes, however, lighting takes centre stage in the opera, and for me the supreme example of this came at the end of Glyndebourne's *Tristan und Isolde*. Robin Carter traces every flicker of emotion in Nikolaus Lehnhoff's

hypnotic production of Wagner's masterpiece with a luminosity that is spellbinding at the start and by the end becomes almost spiritual, as Isolde's transfiguration from life to death becomes a metaphysical transformation from being into pure, unadulterated light. Magic. #

*Photos pages 33-35: The Royal Opera Iphigénie en Tauride, September 2007. Lighting by Peter Van Praet. Photos: Bill Cooper*

# Meetings

## **18<sup>th</sup> January, 2pm onwards, London Roscolux meeting in association with Hawthorn Theatrical**

What's the one thing all theatrical lighting designers have in common? Gel! We all use it and rather take it for granted but every now and then gel manufacturers come up with some new ideas. At the end of last year, Rosco launched their new 'Roscolux' range. Hawthorn invites you along to their London office on Friday 18th January 2008 to 'try before you buy' with this exciting new range of colours. So often as an LD we rely on tried and trusted colours because we know they work and, lets face it, shining a maglite through some colours in a swatch book is nothing like putting it in a front of house wash.

So come along and sample this new range using (wait for it) actual lanterns! See how the colours mix and react

in a real situation. David Lapham, a lighting designer himself, will be demonstrating the range to attendees and showing the possibilities of colour. We aim to make this event informal and there will be plenty of chatting and trying out for yourself, who knows, you may even discover a new classic to add into your next show. There will also be plenty of wine and nibbles and a chance to socialise with other members.

This meeting is open to all members, please email: [meetings@ald.org.uk](mailto:meetings@ald.org.uk) to let us know if you are attending. Hawthorn Theatrical is at Unit F, Western Trading Estate London, NW10 7LU

## **7th February, 11am, London Professional development with Philip Norfolk**

Wondering how to market yourself more effectively as a professional LD? Philip Norfolk, commercial director of PRG Europe will be hosting a seminar for all ALD members at PRG in London on Thursday 7th February.

Philip Writes... "Well over a year ago I sat with two super talented working LDs as they discussed the various difficulties of getting well-paid work. As the conversation developed it struck me that their product, the skill of design, is closely related to most other products our industry uses. Whether we like the idea or not, all products need selling at some point and that is the bit that I am skilled in.

"As a long-time failed LD (I discovered mercifully early on that enthusiasm was no match for actual talent) I have instead carved a long career

selling into an industry that has a healthy distrust of sales people. The skills of brand management, up selling, knowing when to ask for the order, listening for buying messages are probably alien to a busy working LD. Yet these skills are in use, subtly most of the time, overtly on occasion to get work, keep work and to be better paid for work.

"I have little doubt that if I was from outside our industry this would be a difficult task but hopefully it will bring some small benefit to a group of people that have talents I lack yet may be lacking in skills that I am happy to share."

This short, frankly experimental workshop will cover what your product is, how it might be sold to a buyer, what a buying signal is, handling buying objections, asking for the order, open questions and what they mean, accepting lost business and what to do

about it, getting the most from a client and a few other things besides.

Join us at PRG where the seminar should last no more than a couple of hours and after a lunch break there will be an opportunity to get a tour of PRG and have a look at some of the productions and services they provide which include supply and hire of VariLite fixtures.

If you wish to attend please let us know at: [meetings@ald.org.uk](mailto:meetings@ald.org.uk) by the 1st of February. PRG Europe, 20 - 22 Fairway Drive, Greenford, Middlesex, UB6 8PW.

# It's in front of you... Panto lighting!

**What does it feel like to light your last show and hang up your gobos? Francis Reid expected withdrawal symptoms but finally took off his cans in 2001 and the addiction disappeared on a fast FBO. We asked him to record some tips from his 40 years of lighting pantos.**

Moments of nostalgia remain. Usually when I remember a production that went really well. Occasional shows that I felt I might have got as much as 75 or even 80% looking as good as it should. Shows with a production team so integrated that none of us could remember or care who had the idea. Most such nostalgic moments are triggered by a fragment of music overheard or an actor's face flashing across television. And, of course, Christmas. Yes, come December, I even get the occasional hint of a symptom that might just possibly be related to panto withdrawal. The antidote is to pour a glass and remember the schedules.

Programme biogs for Edinburgh King's (where I was always at my happiest) started with 'Francis saw his

first panto in this theatre over fifty years ago and a life in the theatre became inevitable'. It was true. Although opera is my first love as audience (I go to little else nowadays), panto is where I felt most at home as worker.

My tally is 66 (53 as lighting designer, the rest as stage manager, theatre manager, assistant director). I was privileged to work with such great panto directors as Freddie Carpenter, Pauline Grant, Michael Hurril and Richard Frost. The sets giving me greatest pleasure were designed by Hugh Durrant and although only working with him twice, I inherited many of his shows.

Indeed relatively few panto rehearsals ever had a set or costume designer present. Many sets had nearly as long a life as me (some I

suspect were older!). Models had long disappeared and ground plans were by no means a certainty. I lit many from photocopies of sets, hanging plot and script. Director contact prior to a single run through was often limited to phone calls that became faxes then emails as technology advanced.

Not quite as horrific as it sounds because panto is a world apart – even on a different planet – from the conceptual processes of the playhouse. Panto production style changes so slowly that, although some development can be noted over a decade, little is discernible from year to year.

## Strategy

So my design strategy varied surprisingly little over forty years. Of course, the

technology developed but, as we all know, the key decision is *It ain't what you put, it's the where that you put it*. The paints on the palette might have changed but the brush strokes were as fixed as the portals...

Booms in the first bay with six instruments paired 1&4, 2&5, 3&6 for a three-colour cross wash. If budget allowed, an additional two-colour wash going diagonally upstage. Similar cross-lights in every bay but on ladders to clear truck movements and reducing to two colours upstage.

A bar brailed into every portal with two-colour downlights, break-up gobo wash and face lighting that diminished towards upstage. The grid was usually too full for backlight except in the last bay where it could be

brailed under the flood bar. Tight grids usually precluded battens for midstage cloths, cuts and borders, so soft-gobo textured colour washes were angled upwards from low circle front positions. Also very useful to shade in tops of flattage.

The circle front also provided flat angle wash for front cloths, and mounting the effects projectors. FOH was limited by the theatre's installation but the scope of hanging provision gradually improved from totally inadequate to generous over my panto career. Space, budgets and channel considerations kept specials to a minimum.

In the early sixties, there was often a refocus electrician on each perch throughout the show and two-a-side was the norm for stage electricians. But

setting and striking lamps on stands in scene changes was an option soon eroded, and long before I retired we were down to a single stage LX, often doubling as mic runner.

### Focus

Downlighters vertical with only a couple of degrees

tilt to downstage. Booms and ladders straight across. Gobos crossing with as much upstage angling as cut cloths would allow. Face light in overlapping left, centre and right areas on angles that McCandless would have recognised. FOH provided downstage face light, gobo and colour washes. The

pageant, acting area and Pattern 23 of the fifties gradually gave way to the Fresnel and the 264. Then halogen lamps liberated us from blackening and blowing.

But the big breakthrough was the parcan. Here was a light with oomph to penetrate saturated gels. And fast to

focus! They became my downlights and crosslights (wider angles in the top three than the bottom three) with my ideal recipe being profiles for gobos, Fresnels or PCs for faces and pars for everything else.

### Tools

That saw me through until my final two or three years when a MAC500 at the top of each pros boom introduced the luxury of re-focusable specials. And with strobing MACs, forked lightning stopped striking in the same place twice.

Colours? Well, they got fruitier with experience. Cinemoid was abandoned for the robust clarity of Supergel. The warms varied but the down blue was 85 and the faces lavender.

Bournemouth Stelmars converted to Xenon were the best limes. Robust and free from the endemic wobble of the stands used with most CSI and CID. As soon as we got memory, plotting became a doddle and, if the operator liked the board, it did not matter which one it was.

The old song goes *It ain't where you start, its where you finish*. I started panto in Luton Grand and finished in Milton Keynes. It was moving lights that finished me. I love them and wanted to use them to improve the panto magic. But the choreographer wanted a disco. #



*Panto is most children's introduction to the magic of theatre, so lighting it is serious business.*

### Hearing the Light – 50 Years Backstage

Francis Reid £24.95  
ISBN 1904031188

This highly enjoyable memoir delves deeply into the



theatricality of the industry. The author's almost fanatical interest in opera, his formative period as lighting designer at Glyndebourne and his experiences as a theatre administrator, writer and teacher make for a broad and unique background.

# “Sixty seconds with...”

## **Name?**

Durham Marengi

## **Sum up your career to date in a short sentence**

Starting in theatre I have been fortunate enough to have worked in virtually every genre of entertainment lighting.

## **What are the three favourite shows you have lit and why?**

*The Wall* in Berlin, the Queen's Golden Jubilee and The Winter Olympics. I can't think why!

## **What were the worst /best moments of your career?**

First review 'atrociously lit'/ hopefully still to come...

## **Where are you now?**

At home in East Yorkshire

## **What is your favourite theatre/ space?**

Favourite performance space to light is the Royal Albert Hall.

## **Where/what would you most like to light?**

London/Olympics!

## **If you weren't a lighting designer what would you be?**

Marine Biologist or photographer.

## **Where would you rather be right now?**

Diving in the Maldives.

## **What is your favourite colour?**

Burgundy, or a nice Beaujolais.

## **If you were a colour what would it be?**

The rich golden hue of a fine single malt.

## **If you could scrap one piece of kit or one tradition or part of the job from every theatre in the world what would it be?**

Accountants!

## **Which part of the job do you enjoy most?**

Watching an arena of 10,000 people physically leaning back from a nicely timed mega lighting cue.

## **Which part of the job do you enjoy least?**

Chasing payments and bending light around speaker cabinets.

## **If you were going to light a show on a desert island (accepting that it had a rudimentary theatre and power!), what three things would you take with you?**

Scuba Gear, Laptop and jungle formula DEET.

## **What keeps you awake at night?**

Bouncing ideas around the skull, trying to sort out software problems and feeling guilty for not walking the dog.

## **What common piece of kit would you be least likely to find in one of your rigs?**

A strobe, great effect but health and safety concerns and warning signs are not worth the hassle; especially as a responsible lighting designer will not trigger photo sensitive medical conditions in the first place.

## **What/who have been the major influences on your work?**

Richard Pilbrow, Andy Bridge, Robert Ornbo, Joe Davis, Brian Croft, my wife Jennie

and my family's support whilst working away from home.

## **What's the most useful thing you have learnt as a lighting designer?**

Why the sun goes red at night and why you should take a tungsten torch underwater when diving a reef, even in daylight.

## **How would you like to be remembered?**

As a good lighting designer by my peers and crew and as an attentive and loving father by my children. I have as well the Lee colour 'Durham Frost' which is a kind of immortality!



*Opposite page:  
St. Pancras Station London, opened on 14<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Photo by Durham Marengi courtesy of LCR.  
Lighting by Durham Marengi.*



# Seen at the Liverpool Playhouse: *Rough Crossings*

Hugh Carruthers took time out from his lighting design studies at LIPA to study Paul Pyant's design.

I was recently lucky enough to catch a new touring production of *Rough Crossings* by Simon Schama,

adapted for the stage by Caryl Phillips and directed by Rupert Goold at the Liverpool Playhouse. It was lit by Paul

Pyant and designed by Laura Hopkins and was one of the most simplistic but amazingly powerful and impressive

## Hugh Carruthers

Hugh became involved with the technical side of theatre in his native city of York, North Yorkshire. His interest in lighting drew him to LIPA (Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts) where he is currently studying for a degree in lighting design.



*Rough Crossings* company ready for battle.  
Photo: Manuel Harlan.

production designs I have seen recently.

*Rough Crossings* is a play based on the search for freedom by slaves during the American War of Independence. During a time when 17,000 black slaves are promised freedom in return for fighting for Britain, two characters – Thomas Peters and John Clarkson – set out in search of this new freedom on a journey to Africa which takes us on some epic adventures through many different locations. It is the set design by Laura Hopkins that makes this journey so visually exhilarating and moving for the audience.

The stage is essentially a large wooden platform,

almost like the deck of a ship, set upon a large hydraulic seesaw structure which allows the set to tilt backwards and forwards on its centre line. As we are taken on the adventurous journey the stage reacts to create the environments and location needed. The show opens with a ship on the high seas, suggested by the stage tilting backwards and forwards while actors roll up and down as if they were being thrown around on deck. Throughout the production there is a very heavy use of projection onto a flown screen at the back of the stage, shaped as a ship's sail and also directly onto the tilting floor from above. The show opens with video of a rolling rough sea projected onto both the floor and screen.

It was apparent from the start that the stage was difficult to act on at the best of times and more than just good leg muscles were needed to stay standing upright. It was interesting to see how the minimal set and props that were used stayed in their

required positions without the use of any obvious locking devices. At one point as the stage slowly tilted down toward the audience a chair broke free and began to roll in the direction of a man sat in the front row but was skilfully stopped in passage by a member of the cast, although I can imagine it not being the case every time!

In a production that was obviously personally moving for many of the audience members watching it, it was Paul Pyant's use of lighting that I felt made the story so moving and emotionally powerful. The scenes were mainly lit using side lighting from a series of four booms both stage left and right in the wings, and a covering of haze used throughout the whole performance made these boom positions so effective. Being able to see beams of light streaming in from the wings in the different environments, it almost felt as if they were actually creating a set in which the actors were playing.

As the stage moved

through its different planes we travelled from America to England and back again before finally arriving in England before the end of the first act. When in England, the stage tilted up completely out of sight and revealed a hidden under stage area; the front of the tilted stage was dressed with canvas drawings of large ship plans and the projection changed to show manuscripts against the back wall. The front was lit with a warm straw wash that felt emotionless compared to scenes before in Nova Scotia, but using low-level side light and haze, the beams crossing through this space created another new environment that hadn't been seen before – another impressive example of creating a space using different lighting styles.

After travelling along the journey of slavery we arrive back in Nova Scotia to see the freezing conditions that the slaves are living in after fighting for Britain. We face the distressing sight of a baby being buried after dying of exposure. Paul's

lighting builds on this sad environment but almost immediately the story moves from a cold Nova Scotia to the other side of the world, to the heat of Sierra Leone, lit using a warm pink/orange side light which contrasted with the acting area representing Nova Scotia still lit in 'sad'. At the end of this scene a quick fade changes the stage into a dark night-time blue and we are back in England, but with snippets from every country on the stage. Paul's lighting described this so well and gave a real feeling of three completely different environments, with the main action happening centre stage in England (lit with a very soft focus wash) which beautifully spilled out into his dark blue night time Sierra Leone and the cold, sad Nova Scotia.

Into the second act of the play we are taken back to a final scene in Nova Scotia which uses a fantastic video on both the screen and stage floor that shows an impressive snow scene including stained glass windows and snow

flickering past both the stage and the screen! A final wet crossing over the Atlantic to Sierra Leone follows, where most the second act of the play is set. The stage is once again transformed into a rocking ship on high seas, and while crossing the ocean we experience the death of an officer. This is realistically played under the ship's deck in a cabin by tilting the stage to its upright position again and with Paul's amazingly up-lighting catches the underside of the wooden stage detailing a wooden log cabin room. The look was so realistic and fantastic!

Upon arriving in Sierra Leone the screen is flown out for the first time and we are introduced to a much warmer and jazzy lighting environment. A light box represents the rising 'deep orange' sun is a stunning visual element while the use of some 'foliage' type break-up gobos in a deep orange gives a real feeling of the heat of Sierra Leone. Now we had arrived in a completely different country it



*The death of an officer. Ed Hughes as John Clarkson and Peter De Jersey as David George. Photo: Manuel Harlan.*

was interesting to see a much heavier use of haze which helped even more to define the cross lighting beams beautifully which I feel helped to make the scenes more intimate by closing up the space. In some scenes it was almost like the actors were cutting through the shafts of light and you could feel the struggle for them, such as in a court room scene where the lighting changes were less timid, although the use of a single line of parcans from one side of the stage, flooding into the space, creates a real unbalanced feeling of difficulty.

The show ends with a video projection of archive black and white slavery footage and this nicely ended a production that although had less meaning for me personally than for most the people watching, I felt the emotion first hand from the impressive lighting design and ingenious use of such a simplistic visual set. #

*The prison scene. Patrick Robinson is Thomas Peters. Photo: Manuel Harlan.*



# Relighting – What’s all that about then?

**A casual question put to Will Evans in the confines of a London tube train elicited this response...**

Put simply, relighting is recreating the lighting designer’s work on tour. The days when the stage manager would hand over few notes and a general plan to the chief LX of a venue and attempt to make the lighting resemble something close to the original production are thankfully gone in mid-scale touring and upwards. The position of ‘relighter’ is a complex and often ill-defined one. Sometimes you may also be tour electrician and be required to operate the lighting, maybe even the sound as well on smaller scale tours. You may have been the production electrician on the original run, the associate LD or maybe even the assistant, or perhaps you have been parachuted into the production half way through the opening run purely to go on tour. I have had positions as a relighter in all of the above situations.

Once on tour, you are effectively the lighting designer, you are solely responsible for making the show’s lighting resemble the original design as closely as possible. If you have done your job well, there will be little or no difference. If any lighting issues with the show arise, it is your job to deal with them; if the blocking of a scene changes, it is your responsibility to light around it whilst keeping the original feel to the scene. The director, if visiting the venue, will come to you to discuss the lighting. In practical terms you will liaise with the chief electrician, draw the plan, focus and plot for each new venue.



West Yorkshire Playhouse has a very comprehensive approach to focus notes, one that is well worth considering despite its time consuming efforts.

## **Will Evans**

Will has recently re-lit *Casanova* for West Yorkshire Playhouse and *Told by an Idiot* lit by Colin Grenfell. Previously he has re-lit for Shared Experience’s productions of *Jane Eyre* (Chris Davey), *Oresties* (Peter Harrison), *Kindertransport* (Natasha Chivers) and next year will be on the road again for Shared Experience relighting *War and Peace* (Chris Davey).

## **What’s the process of relighting a show?**

You start from the beginning: in my opinion the most productive purpose a relighter can serve during the production process is as an associate to the lighting designer (even perhaps if



The ‘Ratcatcher’ character scenes were often lit very starkly using sidelight. Shared Experience production of *Kindertransport*. Photo: Robert Day.

you are not paid to be so, it will make your life easier later on!). I say this as it helps enormously to have a role in the pre-production and production period. Second to this, production electrician is also a useful role. If you can, you should attend rehearsals,

production meetings and design meetings so you can start to get the feel of the show and the direction which you will be required to travel in later. A good rapport with the director, stage management team and above all, the lighting designer

is absolutely essential. I'm not saying you and the LD have to be close friends but you need to understand their design process and where they are coming from. After all, when on tour, you will be required to think as closely as possible in the same way.

When you are in the first venue, try to be present at the fit up to see how it all goes together, what problems arise and how they were solved. This helps when you meet the same problems on tour! During the focus, watch carefully. You can't be expected to take exact notes at this point because things will change and there won't be enough time to do your focus notes properly, but take some general notes, watch those tricky focuses and how the LD deals with them (you never know, you may learn something new!). The plotting is where it all comes together, of course. I often prefer helping to plot, taking turns on the desk when the programmer or chief LX gets tired or needs a break. I find this helps me familiarise myself with the show and maybe any complex cues with effects, multi parts or strange times. Not all people find this helpful though; above all take notes and watch what is happening on stage and how the LD is building the states. Make sure you sit next to the

LD and don't be afraid to quiz them if there is something you don't understand (find the right time obviously!). If you see the LD lighting a scene in a particular way that seems strange to you, ask why, because you need to understand why – you will be lighting the same scene very soon. During the dress rehearsal, offer your services as another pair of eyes, go and sit somewhere else like the circle. Watch what's happening on stage and take note of anything interesting or important to the show, any overtones in the lighting that are key to preserve at all costs, any very tight specials or areas of light that are crucial they hit the mark.

After the press night, when changes have been made and the production team has left to go off to their next production, your work really starts. Try to get a final copy of the lighting plan with all the various changes over the production period and also get a final disk copy of the show. Now you must compile



*Caption: Taking Photos of tricky focuses is important.*

your 'bible': the focus notes. These notes will be the most important set of paperwork for you on tour, lose them, and you've lost the show! Different rightlighters have different ways of doing their focus notes, personally I print out two simplified drawings of the set onto a sheet of A4 and then hit the photocopier with a vengeance! Once I have my 50 or so sheets with the set on I set about calling up each channel and sketching out on the diagram where the beam hits the stage, at what points it covers full height and any shutter cuts it has. Plus the basics like colour, position, type of lamp and general notes such as who it is lighting and when. Often I will also take a photo, particularly of specials with tricky focuses. These could be compiled into a PowerPoint presentation as at West Yorkshire Playhouse (see illustrations). If you think this process sounds boring, well, it is... but very necessary. You'll need to leave about half a day to do the notes for an average rig of say 80 or so luminaires. You

will also need to do notes for any moving light groups used on tour, as these will have to be 'focused' too.

Now you have all your information, you're ready to hit the road! Before the production week, get all your tech specs and ground plans from the venues and highlight any serious equipment issues so either the LD is aware of the limitations at theatre X or you can arrange to hire in the needed equipment. On most tours you will need to draw a lighting plan for each venue (occasionally the LD is contracted to do this but that is now rare) nearly always you will have to compromise with something somewhere at each venue, either they don't have lighting bars in the right positions or the right amount of the kind of kit you need. A classic example of this is a tight special on actress A needs to come in from a steep angle front of house to avoid hitting actress B who is lit differently with sidelight. In the original theatre this lamp was on the advance bar, but playhouse X doesn't have an

advance bar. In situations like these you need to consider alternative options: Will it hit from LX1? Can we move the actress? Could we spot line a trapeze for that one lantern? Answers on a postcard to the usual address! It's little niggles like this and many more that you will have to deal with on tour, which is why you need to know the show inside out and back to front.

"If you see the LD lighting a scene in a particular way that seems strange to you, ask why, because you need to *understand* why."

Once in the venue you have to focus just as the LD did, but probably with only half the time, which is why it's always wise to go over your focus notes the night before. If you are lucky enough to tour a desk (or be going to houses that all have, say, Strand 500s) the plotting will be relatively simple, you will just need to account for different dimmers (assuming you are not touring those as

well), different equipment (is a Source Four 36 deg at 10m throw in Playhouse X as bright as your 26 deg at 15m throw in your original venue?) and a different space. Watch the first night to make sure there aren't any holes in the wash, any missed cues or noisy movers, do notes and hopefully go home to draw the plan for the next venue.

#### **Sounds like a lot of work, is it well paid?**

Well, as with all things in theatre, no. However, I often say "relighting is my bread and butter", it can provide a stable income for a season while hopefully giving you time to squeeze in the odd design during the weeks off or during the rest of the week. Typically I travel Sunday, fit up on Monday, dress and opening night Tuesday, home by Wednesday morning which leaves Thursday, Friday and Saturday to do something else! Plus, if you've done a good job, companies and lighting designers will use you again.

The ALD suggested fees

document says an average of £550 per move not including expenses, for commercial theatre, and I feel this is about right. For the non-commercial and subsidised sectors fees are lower. Some companies will just present you with a fee, others will ask you to name your price. In both situations you must consider these factors: What time is involved in each move, what is my travel time? And remember your time is not just your time on site; I find I spend about a full working day at my desk per venue drawing the plan and making phone calls.

#### **So how do I become a relighter?**

Typically relighters are 'junior' lighting designers (I deliberately avoid using the phrase 'aspiring lighting designers' as most of us are already out there lighting our socks off but on smaller projects for a lot less money!). It's a great way to gain experience and 'light above your weight' you will go into theatres and light shows that



*Classic 'actress A/actress B' lighting problem. The actresses were approximately 2m apart yet supposed to be in very different locations. Shared Experience production of Kindertransport. Photo: Robert Day.*

you wouldn't normally be able to do. The experience you gain can then be applied to your own work which in turn will make you a better lighting designer. Plus you'll make contacts in 'the next level up'. It has happened to me and other LDs that a company you relight for then goes on to ask you to light their next show.

As with all fields of lighting, you have to start at the bottom. I started doing relights for small companies and often had to operate the show or had some stage management duties during the week. Sometimes relighters are advertised for in the usual places, other times it's the time-honoured tradition of sending out CVs and getting to know lighting designers. There's much more to explain about the details of this rather complex job that can involve many different roles but I think the editor will cut me short! If you have any questions, further thoughts or random musings on relighting, please email me at: [will.evans@ald.org.uk](mailto:will.evans@ald.org.uk) #

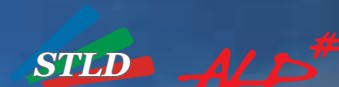


*Making practicals such as this pre-War signalman's lamp can also be a part of the relighter's diverse range of jobs. This lamp came out of an antiques shop complete with corroded wiring and acid-leaking period batteries. I re-wired and re-fitted it with a 12v capsule lamp, lead acid re-chargable battery and new switch. Shared Experience production of Kindertransport. Photo: Robert Day.*



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