

# ALPD



The People in  
Performance  
Lighting

The Association for Lighting  
Production and Design  
[www.thealpd.org.uk](http://www.thealpd.org.uk)  
Winter 2025  
£5.00 / FREE to Members



## PLASA LONDON RELIT

Talks, Workshops and  
Seminars at the annual  
trade fair

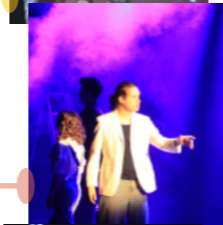
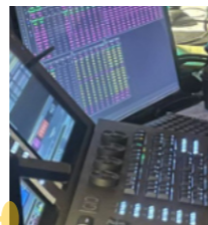
## LIGHTING GHOSTS

Sustainable methods aid  
set electrics at story telling  
tour

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**Welcome to the Christmas edition of Focus. I hope by the time this lands at your door all your Christmas shows will have opened and that it has been a joyful time for everyone involved.**

Hopefully, you will now have time for a well - deserved rest over Christmas and to enjoy all the festivities that brings, including much lighting design, whether on a show, a park, or a shopping Mall. For those of you who are still working on these Christmas shows and festivities, giving joy to many, have a fun and enjoyable festive season and stay safe.

We have another bumper packed Focus for you to enjoy whilst relaxing on the sofa with a cup of Winter Fare. Firstly, we have members reporting on the seminars at PLASA, including our own organised and led by Nick Moran. Arnim takes us through the delights of the Durham Light festival; we are featuring members working on outside Winter Fairs and Light shows, including a visit by our administrator Amanda to Efteling in the Netherlands which has a 14 minute light show on the lake. More postcards about light around the country, the world are very welcome. Lastly, we have a great article on lighting a ghost story by candlelight, and of course much more.

I have just finished my last Christmas show with portal after portal of LED pixel tape, a long way from using candlelight. This year the team found an amazingly thin tape less than 5mm, that could not be seen when not in use and yet was brighter

than anything we had previously used. When switched on the stage required a higher and brighter level of general face lighting to help compensate for its brightness. I loved having such a dynamic and flexible lighting source to play with and we had lots of fun with it, but will next year's tape arrive even brighter! How will in - house lighting equipment compete in the future?

On a personal note I have had, in some ways, the most amazing 2025, with a full diary of very exciting shows. But I was also made painfully aware of how fragile the world of a freelancer can be. How do you stop when something goes wrong, how do you find the time to deal with an illness or a bereavement. A single family drama can throw you completely off kilter: how do you find the time, resources and mental capacity to act on what's going on and find the time to recover, when the next show and the show after that is marching towards you.

All the venues I was working for were kind and supportive, but I still felt an immense pressure to not let them down, the cast down and the audiences down. There is also the added pressure of having to financially keep earning: we get no sick leave or compassionate leave. Should I have walked away from the shows I was working on, that was the question at the back of my mind the whole time? Maybe you can, maybe you can't for many different reasons. Being a freelancer in our world of long hours and long weeks is difficult

**From the Chair of the Association for Lighting Production and Design, Johanna Town**



and for the first time I realised just how fragile a freelance career can be.

I was lucky to have been supported by lighting friends who offered their time, if I needed it. I would like to thank everyone who gave me that support. We are an amazing lighting community, and please, if you ever find yourself in a position where you need support, do contact me

or the ALPD liteline email address, or contact another member you know. I know the support is out there to help you get through.

On a happier note, I hope to see some of you at the Lighting Lunch this year, we will be celebrating this year's ALPD Fellows. I will also see you in January at The New Technology Showcase, where we will



also be awarding our ALPD Awards for Excellence, alongside our Michael Northen Award. If you haven't nominated your favourite programmer or production lighting/venue Chief for this year, then there is still time to get nominations before the deadline of 17th December. And lastly, I hope to see many of you at the AGM, which this year will be back on Zoom on 17th January. However lovely it is to meet in person at the AGM, we are equally aware of our members across the whole country not being able to come to London. We would like to catch up with you all, which makes zoom a good option. I hope to see you there.

So, in closing, I would like to wish all our members a very Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.



**Cinderella at Theatr Clwyd.**  
**Director / Cyfarwyddwr – Daniel Lloyd**  
**Set & Costume Designer / Dylunydd Set & Gwisgoedd – Adrian Gee**  
**Lighting Designer / Dylunydd Goleuo – Johanna Town**  
**Photo Andrew AB**

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## AGM

Our AGM will take place on Saturday 17th January on Zoom. The statutory notification will be circulated soon (you may even receive it before Focus!).

## SOCIALS

We hope to have two exciting visits to announce very soon, taking place in January and February. If you have any ideas for socials, do please let us know. Not just in London, but in your own region too.

## PIPA – PARENTS IN PERFORMING ARTS

PiPA has recently celebrated its 10th anniversary and the ALPD is one of 81 organisations who have signed up to their new pledge. We're proud to join a sector-wide commitment to support parents and carers in the performing arts. The five principles of the Pledge are to

- Recognise barriers and take informed action.
- Champion parents and carers as integral to our creative strength.
- Balance work - life to support well-being and power creativity.
- Evolve policies and practices to stay adaptable, responsive and relevant.
- Celebrate the creativity, skills and experiences carers and parents bring.

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## TRADE SHOWS

The ALPD will be attending PLASA Leeds, ABTT and PLASA London in 2026. Josie Ireland, Chair of our Students working group, ably assisted by Rivers Streeter, did a great job manning our stand at Theatre-Craft, judging by the number of student applications following.

The New Technology Showcase is taking place on Thursday 29th January at RC-SSD. Do book in good time. We will also be presenting the ALPD Awards at that event – and there will be a social to round off the day.

## DESIGN LUMIÈRE 2026

We had over 20 applications for this, and first round interviews have taken place. The second interviews will take place at Glyndebourne in January.

## THE ABTT THEATRE SHOW

will once again take place at the stunning Alexandra Palace on 3rd and 4th June.

## ALPD WORLDWIDE

Did you know that we have 74 international members in 23 countries around the world? So if you're invited to work outside of the UK, maybe see if there's an ALPD member who might like to link up? Do send us news and a picture! 📷

**News and information from the ALPD office by Amanda Laidler**

## DATES 2026

- 17 Jan AGM on Zoom
- 29 Jan New Technology Showcase RCSSD
- ~~Cancelled!~~ 24 - 26 March Prolight + Sound Frankfurt
- 12 - 13 May PLASA Leeds
- 3 - 4 June ABTT Theatre Show Alexandra Palace

Contact Amanda directly at office@thealpd.org.uk



## A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW ALPD MEMBERS

### Professional

Kai D McIlquham, Cardiff  
Amanda Fleming, Eastbourne  
Nao Nagai, London  
Afif Samoeil Daoud, Dubai  
Oliver C Duncan, Norwich

### Associate

Beth Bains, Biggleswade

### Affiliate

Natalia Chan, Bristol  
Tegan Bickmore, Grantham  
Laura Hulme, London

### Student

Bryn Fergusson, Bristol  
Freya Game, London  
Devesh Nandwani, London  
Daniel Claydon, London  
Dylan P Wright, Wolverhampton  
Amelia Isabelle Gregg, London  
Morgan K Lang, Sandhurst


Edward Wilcox, Wallingford  
Toby Silver, Dorking  
Adrien E Mathieu, London  
Nathan Bibaud, Bath  
Euan Steven, Glasgow  
Jack Rudd, Glasgow  
Dale Muir, Glasgow  
Charlie Ward, Cardiff  
Ben Cassels, London  
Isaac Roitt, Brent  
GM Ong, London  
Mika Myrholt, London  
Caleb A. Bendana, Sidcup  
Raf Tawasil, Sidcup  
Clayton Scholz - Every, Bristol  
Taryn W Masters, Kingswinford  
Charles A Bamsey, Horsham  
Ben Birkwood, London  
Jacobus Flynn, Haywards Heath  
Kyra Erickson, Sidcup  
Hannah Kirby, Pulborough  
Aristotelis Armando Mema, Thessaloniki  
Gus Papagiannis, Dublin  
Nova Tze Tung Chin, Guildford



## VISUALISATION SYMPOSIUM

Many ALPD members followed the invitation to the National Theatre by Ammonite Studios, the London experience designers, to join a symposium entirely around digital event pre-visualisation, and “how the technology is rapidly altering our workflows in every corner of major commercial production across the globe.”

About a dozen visualisation teams exhibited their latest designs. Ranging from essential pre-plotting for Glastonbury (“otherwise the tight overnight turn-arounds couldn’t be met”) to the in-house planning at the RBO, impressively accurate visuals and movies showed the latest cutting edge developments.

This followed a panel discussion hosted by Tpi magazine’s Stew Hume, joined by Tim Routledge, Nigel Catmur, Zoe Spurr, Patrick Woodroffe and Shona M’gadzah. (left to right). Takeaway: While the technology has become a must for large scale productions, the initial outlay and time seems to make it hard to implement for medium and smaller events - for now. And AI seems just around the corner, with studio Routledge using it “for ideas only” while Woodroffe rather wants “a board I can talk to - without programmer!” 



## PROLIGHT + SOUND

**Many in the lighting, sound and entertainment industry will be surprised by the news: the internationally visited trade fair will not continue in Frankfurt. The brand states that it “will remain active internationally”.**

This statement from Messe Frankfurt: “Over the past few weeks, we have held many conversations and conducted an in-depth review of how we can shape the future of Prolight + Sound in Frankfurt. Unfortunately, it has become clear that there is insufficient demand for a separate Prolight + Sound themed area within the upcoming Light + Building 2026 to successfully implement such an area and offer exhibitors and visitors the added value they have come to expect. For this reason, we have made the difficult decision to no longer hold Prolight + Sound in Frankfurt in the future.”

Since the first “Frankfurter Musikmesse” in 1980, and apart from COVID closures, there has always been a tradefair around entertainment technology in the Hessian metropole, and disappointment has been palpable in the online forums, not helped by P+S announced that visitors are welcome to the next exhibition in Guangzhou, China. 

**At the Annual Lighting Lunch held on Monday 15 December, the Association for Lighting Production and Design (The ALPD) awarded 4 new Fellowships to Gerry Amies, Michael Hulls and Sarah Rushton-Read.**

Fellowship of the ALPD is awarded to someone who, in the opinion of the Executive have rendered signal service to the technical aspects of the art of lighting.

**GERRY AMIES**

Started theatre work at Theatre Royal Norwich in the early 70s before moving to the opera world, working for Glyndebourne Festival Opera, Kent Opera and English National Opera. Since that time he has worked on a huge variety of shows in the West End and elsewhere, including *La Cage Aux Folles* at the London Palladium, *Beauty and The Beast* (Dominion), *Jesus Christ Superstar* (Lyceum Theatre), *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* and *Lord of the Rings* (Theatre Royal Drury Lane), *War Horse* (Gillian Lynne – UK Tour – World Tour) *Crazy for You* (Gillian Lynne).

# ALPD FELLOWSHIPS

**ALPD awards 4 new Fellowships at the Annual Lighting Lunch**

**MICHAEL HULLS**

Michael trained in Dance and Theatre at Dartington College of Arts and by accident became a lighting designer who has worked exclusively in the dance world for the past 35 years. He is perhaps best known for his long term collaborations with leading choreographers such as Russell Maliphant, and Akram Khan sharing four Olivier awards for Best New Dance Production with them.

He was the recipient of the 2014 Olivier

Award for Outstanding Achievement in Dance and Knight of Illumination Awards in 2009 and 2016. Michael is an associate artist of Sadler's Wells Theatre where in 2016 he created the memorable Light-Space installation at the Wells, the first presentation on the main stage without dancers or performers.

In 2023 he was awarded an OBE for services to Dance and the Arts. He is an Honorary Fellow of Rose Bruford College where he is a visiting professional on the Light in Performance MA course. He is

now enjoying retirement in Hastings with his partner and their dogs.

**SARAH RUSHTON-READ**

Sarah started out as an actress before moving to stage management. Noticing the better-paid roles were in the male-dominated tech departments, she went back to college for an HND in electronic engineering, secured a placement at the

Royal Opera House, and found herself firmly 'doing' lighting.

Two years later she was teaching at Guildhall, then to Glyndebourne, where she became Deputy Lighting Manager and designed for touring productions.

She moved into production management with PRG, co-founded an event lighting company, and after 9/11 forced another rethink, shifted into journalism as Deputy Editor of Lighting & Sound International. From there she

built a PR firm, embarked on Masters degrees in PR and then in Energy & Environment, and began championing sustainability long before it became fashionable.

Her mission in press and PR has always been to make backstage work visible: through trade press, brand strategy, awards, and by naming the issues usually left smouldering in the wings. That led to founding Eco Theatre, co-founding Women in Stage Entertainment with Paule Constable, and helping grow the Knight of Illumination Awards into a major international celebration of design. She says of her career:

"I was, more often than not, the first woman in the room — something that taught me how to hold space, open firmly closed doors, and leave them ajar for the next under-represented person coming through."

The ALPD would like to thank Paul de Ville, Goboplus and Rosco for their sponsorship of the Awards presented. 🎄



**Left to right: Gerry Amies, Michael Hulls (photo Gavin Evans), Sarah Rushton-Read**

**ALPD member Ben Sassoon observed David Howe designing the lighting for *Christmas Carol Goes Wrong* at the West End production:**

"I recently had the opportunity to observe David Howe and programmer Ed Locke on *A Christmas Carol Goes Wrong* at London's Apollo Theatre through the ALPD Observation Scheme. I was able to sit in for the entire week, arriving while the rig was still going in and staying right through to the show being ready for an audience. My background is as a lighting designer and programmer in amateur theatre, so this was an opportunity to see how professional teams work and how their processes differ from what I am used to.

The experience was eye - opening and helped me form a new understanding of how theatre is made in the West End, as I was able to participate in focus and tech sessions while also listening in on sensitive cross - team discussions. David and Ed immediately made me feel part of the lighting team and encouraged me to ask anything, whether about creative choices, technical decisions, or day - to - day working habits.

The show had previously toured, David and Ed already knew it inside out and were able to walk me through earlier decisions,

including the reasoning behind fixture placements and elements of the set. Moving a touring production into a West End venue brings plenty of changes, but what surprised me most were the challenges created by the comparatively limited wing and flying space at the Apollo, which in some ways made it more restrictive than many touring houses.

When I design shows in amateur theatre, I am also the programmer, which is very different from the separation of roles in the West End. I wanted to understand how designers and programmers collaborate, and it was striking how closely integrated the partnership is. Ed and David have worked together for years, and it can be seen in how naturally they anticipate each other's needs. Ed often knows what David will want before he asks, which makes rapid experimentation far more efficient and allows them to move through ideas quickly. That shared understanding also shapes how they judge which elements from the West End version can translate back into a touring production, where the rig is more constrained.

The timescale for tech on a West End production is naturally very different from what I'm used to in amateur theatre, where

we often have less than a day to tech a show and only a few hours with the cast on stage before opening. Even with far more time available in the West End, it's still a scarce resource, and departments constantly juggle for stage access. What really stood out was the dynamic between the Director and Lighting Designer: the way they exchange ideas, refine moments, and use subtle adjustments to sharpen the impact of comedic beats.

## ALPD OBSERVATIONS

### **Ben Sassoon and Daisy Roberts observe David Howe for a day at *A Christmas Carol Goes Wrong***

I would strongly recommend the ALPD Observation Scheme to anyone looking to develop their working practices and expand their knowledge of the field. It surprised me how similar the process was to what I am used to, which helped demystify the "real world" and made me feel much more comfortable in my own work going forward. Thank you David and Ed!"



### **Daisy Roberts, a student at Arden University (Manchester), observed for a week at The Lowry:**

"During my time observing the lighting designer, David Howe, on Mischief's production of *Christmas Carol Goes Wrong*, I believe being able to see how the lighting designer and technician work so closely together definitely gave me more of a passion for working within the lighting world. It also allowed me to see the inner workings of a high - end production and showed me a different perspective of theatre all

together. It gave me the opportunity to see, and understand, how important every part of a tech week is when it comes to a production or even an event. Allowing to be within the meetings at the end of a technical day really gave me an insight into how many things go on at once. The whole experience was eye - opening and has given me even more interest in the lighting business. " 🍷

**Interested to offer or observe? Members visit [thealpd.org.uk/observation-opportunities](http://thealpd.org.uk/observation-opportunities)**

**Left to right: David Howe, Ben Sassoon, Programmer Ed Locke**

**Daisy Roberts, Ed Locke at The Lowry**

**On Monday 3rd November, myself and Rivers Streeter represented the ALPD at TheatreCraft 2025! Held once again in Royal Opera House's Paul Hamlyn Hall, the event was stacked with educational institutions, unions, associations, and training opportunities for those interested in theatre careers.**

This was my first time attending TheatreCraft, after seeing adverts for it throughout my later teenage years. As I could never attend then, it was a full circle moment to speak to so many young technicians & designers whose eyes lit up at a table specifically championing lighting.

TheatreCraft is the largest free careers event in the UK for people interested in working in production & off-stage theatre roles. Aimed at people aged 16-30, it offers an abundance of opportunities to discuss and reflect on goals, especially for current students, recent graduates, and people wanting to move into the industry. The event is perfect for those who are unsure of their direction, whether that is their next steps, or what discipline they're stepping into.

We spent the day decked out in pink lanyards, explaining who the ALPD are, what we do, and how we can help young,

aspiring technicians and designers. In a room full of training opportunities, we stood out by offering direct links to a community of lighting professionals that's been supporting one another for nearly 65 years. If that doesn't draw new members in, I don't know what would (although, perhaps the bowl of sweets we had on the table played a role).

## TheatreCraft

**Josie Ireland and Rivers Streeter represented the ALPD at the yearly fair for budding back-stage theatre professionals**

The first hour, from 9 to 10AM, was 'quiet hour', giving priority to neurodivergent and disabled people, and others who have difficulty with sensory processing. This meant first picks of the industry freebies, individual & patient attention from stalls, and just the right amount of ambient noise. I spoke to several young people about their interest in lighting, and loved connecting with them about their experiences and favourite parts of the practice. For some of the quieter or non-verbal attendees, this meant asking 'yes' or 'no'

questions to place where they were in their journey, pointing them towards our pamphlets with directions to the website, and writing down any additional information we thought would be helpful. TheatreCraft facilitated this hour beautifully, giving additional tickets to parents, carers, and companions who could point both their person and us in the right direction.

Additionally, TheatreCraft did a magnificent job advertising the accessibility of the rest of the event, offering in-depth access information for each of the areas and workshops available as part of the day. Kudos to them for ensuring attendees received proper, full, and detailed information about their experience. Workshops were held in a number of West End venues, including the Lyceum, Prince of Wales, Garrick, Adelphi, Dominion, Trafalgar, and Lyric Theatres, as well as Theatre Royal Drury Lane and Soho Place. It is particularly encouraging to see the number of theatres that offer complete step-free accessibility for their audiences, from the pavement to their seat.

A surprise highlight was the representative for University Centre Leeds excitedly sharing how brilliant Jason Addison is, a Lumière Graduate and their new Lighting Tutor. There was a real camaraderie between stalls at this event, offering

smiles, cross-borrowing pens and scrap paper, and of course offering out leftover sweets and chocolate at the end of the event.

Out of intrigue, we kept a tally of how many people we spoke to and what their interest was in the ALPD. We totalled 32 students, from secondary school through to masters degrees: anyone currently in education. A majority of these students were just starting their A-Levels, some studying Drama with a lighting or sound

bias. There were 18 potential Affiliate members, including recent graduates and other young lighting professionals, some of whom having completed degrees entirely separate from the arts. It was the 10 theatre professionals not looking to work in lighting that held some real surprises. I spoke to one woman, a playwright, who would be interested in talking to lighting designers about their use of shadow and darkness to inform her current project. Another woman is



leading a community theatre project involving a young tech team entirely new to lighting, who asked for advice on possible networking or workshop ideas. We were pleasantly surprised by the enthusiasm of the Royal Opera House and TheatreCraft volunteers, who found time to chat for a bit.

Our student membership, providing free access to the ALPD for 3 years of any form of education or study, was of particular interest. For young people doing GCSEs, A-Levels, or other broad theatre training, it's so important to offer routes that don't restrict them to one discipline. Student membership allows students to freely test out different areas of the industry, maybe ask some advice from professionals, and read resources like Focus, before

later on potentially narrowing down their field of study elsewhere.

I enjoyed sharing how the ALPD can support people through every stage of their professional journey. From more formal offerings such as the Lumière

Scheme, to community-fostering events like our socials, and the brilliantly curated ALD Academy resources from 2020, we run the gamut of practical and interpersonal resources for lighting practitioners. Many young people were interested in the vari-



ous paths available after college, so we spent a lot of time discussing the merits of formal training, freelance/full-time employment, apprenticeships, and studying a non-theatre degree while taking part in drama societies. We made sure to stress that there is no wrong option here. It's entirely dependent on the individual, their goals, and their previous experience. There are unfortunately barriers to entry for every option, though these conversations are difficult to hold in a fast-paced public environment, so we passed our contact information to several individuals, as well as signposting them to the ALPD resource hub. TheatreCraft also broadcasts

advice on this topic through their social media, as well as posting about new training opportunities. There seems to be a lot of demand and interest in apprenticeship-style training, where people can learn on the job with the security of a contracted work period. Offering apprenticeships is a considerable commitment for venues and theatre companies to make, and they certainly will be gifted with some tenacious and inspired applicants in the coming years.

"TheatreCraft was such a great experience, getting to talk to an array of aspiring practitioners. It was a blast to connect and spread the word and make sure they are

supported along their journey. Seeing the amount of people engage with the ALPD, was a great feeling. It fills me with hope for the future of our industry." - Rivers Streeter

"Where's Amanda? We miss her when she's not here!" - multiple other organisations!

By the time we'd

left Covent Garden, Amanda informed us we had three new Student sign-ups and one new Affiliate. This is already an excellent turnout, and I'm so inspired by the assured speed of our new members.

A wide majority of technical theatre resources and communities live online, especially after 2020, making it incredibly special to continue to have these events to bring people together and signpost young practitioners in useful directions. PLASA and the ABTT Theatre Show are electric displays of our industry and the communities it creates, and it is so important that we champion off-stage events like these.

TheatreCraft Next Generation, aimed at people aged 7-15 years old, run events offering the chance to use lighting desks, a follow-spot, and get introduced to rigging. A fantastic opportunity for younger people who otherwise are often kept away from tech for insurance purposes. For those of you reading who run younger theatre groups, work with your local community theatre, or just know some fantastic younger people who would be interested, definitely point them in this direction.

Check the TheatreCraft website ([Theatrecraft.org](http://Theatrecraft.org)) to sign up to their newsletter for information on their next events. Thanks to TheatreCraft & Royal Opera House for having us! 🍷



**The Guildford school of Acting (GSA) is proud to announce that it is offering executive producing support to the Tech Table backstage podcast. In a commitment to work on outreach material to promote the variety of jobs available working in production backstage.**

The Tech Table podcast was created and produced by Ian "Bram" Bramley, a professional sound technician currently working on the *Book of Mormon* at the Prince of Wales theatre in London. The podcast, first created in October 2023 has four seasons worth of podcast content. GSA joined forces to offer support for this great project from season 5 onwards.

The podcast is supported by Mig Walsh & Gareth Evans, lecturers in technical production at GSA, part of the University of Surrey. They will be offering executive producing support to this much-needed project. Under their tenure, they have already secured support from industry companies such as Stage Electrics and Tait. They have expanded the podcast team to include Jam Lam from Sadlers Wells East, Flynn Mehlhopt founder of Quelight and Nathan Friend, freelance stage manager. The team are all working

hard to promote and develop this fantastic outreach project for the backstage sector.

"We were looking to explore the idea of producing a podcast but came across Bram's already established work. Not one wanted to reinvent the wheel; it was a "no-brainer" to just jump on board to support this podcast. We are excited to give this podcast our energy and passion for our wonderful industry. If you would like to ex-

## THE TECH TABLE PODCAST

**A Podcast that is shining a light on Backstage Jobs.  
By Mig Walsh – GSA Senior Lecturer**

plore producing an episode with us, please get in touch. Do go and check out the brilliant six seasons of content, and make sure to tune into Season 7 next January 17th 2026. Please take the time to share and celebrate this great and expanding body of content celebrating our fantastic and vibrant sector"

Mig says: "I'm so grateful to have the support from GSA to develop this podcast.

I'm glad they can see the potential for the project and look forward to seeing the podcast develop and grow."

With GSA's supports Season 5 launched on Saturday the 10th of May 2025. With ten episodes including an interview with Olivier Award winning sound designer Tony Gale. Season 6 recently concluded with another season of great content, including Elysia Moore talking about the ABTT Theatre show, a special Q and A session with the team to mark the podcast's second birthday and an episode with Oscar Thompson talking more about Backstage Radio, with whom the podcast has partnered. Make sure to stay tuned for future seasons, as we have a couple of brilliant episodes interviewing backstage Eurovision staff.

The podcast aims to give an insight into the backstage technical side of theatre and events, and the people who work there. Making offstage workers more visible and showcasing the vast range of jobs backstage. The many people who have already been interviewed share their love of working behind the scenes, how they got to where they are now in their careers and industry tips. Alongside sharing the people who work backstage, the podcast will also shine a light on industry events, manufacturers, suppliers and companies

who all make up our vibrant production industry.

It is our hope that this podcast can be a collective celebration of our backstage production industry. Offering a much-needed catalogue of podcast episodes capturing the essence of our sector and the people who work in it. As well as being a backstage podcast for backstage workers, we aim to share the content with anyone who works in education, or who teaches our next generation of backstage workers. It would be great for higher edu-



cation establishments, apprenticeship schemes and industry training courses. We also hope to share this content with people and places much earlier in our talent pipeline, schools, amateur dramatics groups and backstage clubs. The podcast will offer valuable content to support their learning and hopefully encourage and support people that might want to explore a career backstage.

The podcast can be found on which ever platform you listen to your podcasts on. You can also follow the "techtalepod" on

Instagram, Facebook and Tik Tok. We would greatly appreciate it if everyone could follow and share this great resource, so we can really showcase and make more visible the great work that all our backstage workers do. 💎



**The Tech Table Podcast can be found on:**

**You Tube:** <https://youtube.com/@tech-tablepod?si=PZr4NjlZNR2jWKvA>

**Pod Bean:** <https://techtalepod.podbean.com/>

**Spotify:** <https://open.spotify.com/show/3uMtWWnfQpedMI-GzTIXc0x>

**Apple:** <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/techtalepod/id1712933178>

**Confession: I fell into theatre through the musical *Chess*. An ABBA fan at a time when that wasn't particularly fashionable amongst kids, I was saddened when the band split, thrilled a few years later to find a new album with the names of two of its members on the front.**

The songs were great, but it was really fascinating to find them all working to tell a story rather than sitting in isolation from each other. When the show opened in London I was in the audience; trips to *Cats* and *Starlight* followed. They were formative (the National and 'serious' theatre came later!), and it was a thrill, a few years later, to meet the lighting designer of all of them and so many more shows, David Hersey, and then to get to work with him and, ultimately, to call him a friend.

Perhaps director Matt Ryan knew all of that when he called to ask if I'd be interested in returning to the Royal Academy of Music to light their Christmas concert, a musical tribute to – well, not David Hersey (though that would make for quite a collection of shows), but rather to director Trevor Nunn. Certainly he knew I'd had an involvement with many of the shows that would be featured, either as they were made (the likes of *Oklahoma!*), revisited and updated (*Cats*, *Starlight*), or, particu-

larly, re-made with new technology, as when we put moving lights onto *Les Mis* for the first time then took that version around the world – Matt knew that because he was involved with those versions of *Les Mis* too!

Matt's done a number of these shows before for RAM, but most of them have been tributes to composers or lyricists and so staged very much in a concert - lighting style, often lit by Charlie Morgan Jones. But a director does more than just shape the book, music and lyrics of a show, they lead its entire visual appearance as a key part of their complete production. It therefore felt important to me that in this show we try to reflect at least something of the look and feel of the remarkable run of shows Nunn created and which the show would feature, from *Nicholas Nickleby* through *Cats*, *Starlight*, *Les Mis*, *Chess*, *The Baker's Wife*, and then the run of re-

inventions of the Great American musicals at the National and beyond – *Oklahoma!*, *South Pacific*, *A Little Night Music* and more. There followed fascinating discussions between Matt, the designer Rachael Ryan and I. RAM's Susie Sainsbury Theatre has a distinctive brick back wall; that would provide the perfect backdrop for the *Cats* and *Les Mis* era of shows. 'Junk' was also a theme – the oversized junk in the original *Cats*, the barricades in *Les Mis*. We could use the ephemera of theatre – chairs, tables, old props in storage from other shows – to achieve that.

But it felt like the run of American shows Nunn directed at the National needed something different – *Oklahoma* and *South Pacific* in particular seemed to demand vast open skies. So why not make a change for that segment of the show, introducing a cyclorama. I think I described it as offering a breath of fresh air in the middle of the show, and that's certainly how it felt in reality.

## TREV: A LIGHTING HOMAGE

**Rob Halliday lights a tribute concert to Trevor Nunn at the Royal Academy of Music - and pays his own homage to some famous rigs**

I wanted not just the lighting but the rig as a whole to give a feel of the often very distinctive rigs for the original productions. The first idea that jumped out at me was the ring of lights that opened the original *Cats* sitting at ground level, then sparkled to life and flew out as the set and seating revolved around it. So I drew a circle on the plan, and put the eight Mac Ones the theatre owns on it, diffuser lenses removed to better approximate the pinspots of the original. I worried it might be an indulgence, right up until the point Jake Wiltshire, lighting the opera that was in the theatre before our show, spotted it on the plan and said "that's the *Cats* ring; I remember seeing it when I was eleven years old; it was amazing." Maybe this crazy idea might just work. Then I worried again through the load in right up until the point when Dan Bowling, who runs the Academy's Musical Theatre course but previously conducted the London *Cats* walked in, saw the ring flying out and, unprompted by me, went "that's the *Cats* ring... I love it!", Who says no - one remembers the lighting?

Next on the list, the light curtains that were such a feature of David's work. There are two sets of actual Digital Light Curtains looking for homes right now – if you want them, and you should, let me know and I'll



**"The Naming of Shows", based on 'The Naming of Cats' from *Cats*, with the homage to the *Cats* ring of lights**

put you in touch – though *Nickleby*, *Chess* and *Les Mis* used earlier versions, moved by flying lines or antenna rotators. In any case the practicalities of a concert demanded a slightly more versatile solution, the ability to change colour without worrying about scroll order, the ability to change their size. GLP's X4 Bar was of course the obvious choice, but in order to get the number I wanted for the budget production manager Sean Laing had, Liam Rudd and Gary Landick from the theatre proposed an alternative offered by their supplier, Limelite Lighting, the Clay Paky Tambara. It's always slightly nerve-racking going into a show reliant on a product you don't know, but I've done well with Clay Paky gear in the past and these battens worked really well, once you remembered you had to count in blocks of 16 cells rather than 20...

Around that core, a more conventional rig, pulled almost entirely from RAM's stock – it is fascinating how versatile and comprehensive this is compared to my first visit to the theatre a quarter of a century ago. Encores. Lustr2s. Desire V Fresnels. And they haven't thrown away the old stuff – there are still Par Cans, and 5K Fresnels and a couple of VL500s and delights like that. With the Tamboras to look after straight backlights, the rest of the rig be-



**Clockwise from top left: Aspects of Love, Chess, Lovely Ladies from Les Misérables, Sunset Boulevard**



came about angles and diagonals, with gobos at about 45 degrees from one side, Desire Fresnels at about the same from the other. I've gently mocked the ability of many of these LED non-moving fresnels to change size remotely before, but we used it here to move from big washes to diagonal shafts of light. Then around the edge, the kind of dance rig – shins, mid Pars, head high Source Fours – I've used at RAM since the days it was really the only option given the lack of weight loading available on their hemp and winch fly bars – even though that's no longer a problem in the fully motorized system they have now. My favourite achievement in this show, getting back the high side followspots we used to achieve in the old RAM theatre but which we've never quite managed in the new one (for those who don't know, the auditorium was replaced with an entirely new one in 2019; it's the strangest feeling standing in a completely different theatre looking onto the same stage. It's also frustrating that where the old, ugly but dark auditorium would disappear when you turned the lights down, letting you focus entirely on the show, the beautiful pale blonde wood new one never goes away). The clever DMX Faders from Leon Leitner, which give the spot ops control of their fade ins and outs while letting

the level and colour be set by the desk, let James and Luis do great work to keep the performers visible through all of this. As soon as Leon gets to a final version, every theatre should own a set of these.

I am relieved to say, I think the big idea worked. There were bits of this show that definitely looked like bits of the original productions of those legendary shows. *Homage*, I think we can call it. Certainly they felt familiar to me, to Matt, to friends I sent pictures during tech. Rosco 03 and Rosco 68, two of David's staples, were pre-dominant colours, but not all the shows were his; for *Sunset Boulevard* and *Aspects of Love*, both lit originally by Andrew Bridge, I found myself going a bit richer, deeper, more colourful.

It is of course interesting whether any of this was a genuine representation of the original lighting, or actually a representation of photographs, and descriptions in the magazine articles I used to devour, and of memories that of course shift and change and exaggerate over time. It's entirely possible that what we ended up creating were homages to the lighting one step removed, filtered through memory and the lenses of production photographers. That's certainly true of the shows, like *Baker's Wife*, that I never actually saw. But maybe that's ultimately how we all remem-

ber lighting after a show closes and the reality of it is gone. Besides, whatever we did also had to work within the confines of this show, to suit the songs and the order in which they appeared, the high - contrast black and white looks for numbers from *Chess* following immediately after the vivid, saturated colour of *Aspects* (it was also interesting how much harder it sometimes was to light numbers from shows that hadn't become huge hits compared to those that had; that perhaps tells you something, though I can't quite pin down what!)

I threw in some other little moments too, 'easter eggs' perhaps, direct references to the originals, noting each time how our technologies have evolved in the years since. The closing window blinds from *My Fair Lady* (custom YoYo effects in low - voltage Selecon fixtures then, Robe Fortes now). The ship's smoke from *Anything Goes* (large format Pani projection then, Encores now). The dot gobos from *Cats*. The chessboard gobo that rotated slowly into place, referencing the rotating chessboard set of the original production (projected here by a Forte fixture, which Robe kindly lent us for this moment). The shafts of light from windows on the wall and floor referencing *Les Mis*. It's entirely possible no - one other than me noticed any of

these things, but they made me happy. As did the simple shadow play of a windmill (3' high in real life, bought cheap on the internet, rendered 20' high on the cyc by the magic of light) for *Oklahoma!*.

But maybe I wasn't the only one that noticed. No pressure, but it turned out the audience for our gala night performance included not just Trevor Nunn himself, but also designer John Napier, lighting designer David Hersey and sound designer Andrew Bruce who lived through all of those shows in various combinations. I think they might have thought they were coming to see a little concert of singing with some blue backlight and a followspot. Instead at the end you got a sense they had experienced something of their lives flashing before their eyes, leaving them all rather moved. I guess that means maybe the idea worked.

There's a funny line in Richard Pilbrow's *Stage Lighting Design* book, where David jokes about how trained American lighting students have become almost able to get "a master's degree in hook - up charts from 1947 to 1951". I feel like this was maybe my final practical for a master's degree in hit show light plots 1979 - 2019 that I've been studying for for most of my life. It was fun. I hope I did OK. 🍀



Les Misérables  
All Photos Rob Halliday

**It's behind you! Only it isn't. At Imagine Theatre, based in a huge warehouse on the outskirts of Coventry, Panto never ends. Focus visited ALPD member Glyn Edwards, in charge of the temporary homes of Aladdins, Cinderellas and Mothers Goose, when they are not on stages all over the country this season, and discovered that paint and glitter is mixed with more and more pixels. Lots of them.**

**Focus:** Let's start with your background. How did you get into theatre - specifically technical theatre - and what were the steps that led you to Imagine?

**Glyn:** I've always been involved in the technical side of the industry. My dad was a BBC lighting technician before moving into opera and theatre in Manchester, so I grew up around it. My parents also ran a successful hire business until my dad passed away, so this world was always familiar.

I went to university to study something completely different, which didn't work out. I then found work as a casual technician at the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry. I happened to be there when the assistant job opened up, then later the deputy role, and so on. I left the Belgrade around spring 2017, freelanced for a while, and built Imagine's first digital pantomime

set in 2019 for Croydon. Then Covid hit, work stopped, and Imagine brought me in initially just for a few days of PAT testing. That turned into more work, then a five - month contract, then a seven - month contract, and eventually a full - time position.

**Focus:** Before we come back to the digital set, describe your day - to - day role. Imagine is known as one of the biggest panto producers in the country.

**Glyn:** Arguably the biggest. My day - to - day varies depending on the time of year.

From November to January, we're loading wagons and sending sets out, or unloading them when they return.

The rest of the year is PAT testing, repairs, and in some cases building completely new sets and systems.

I might be in production or design meetings, or in the warehouse soldering something. It's a very hands - on role.

**Focus:** Would you describe your role as

production manager, technical manager, or more maintenance - focused?

**Glyn:** Closer to a technical manager. I'm not responsible for budgets or

## CHRISTMAS EVERY DAY

**For ALPD member Glyn Edwards, everyday is panto at Imagine Theatre, Coventry.**



strategic planning, but I design systems, cost them, and send them up the chain for

approval. It's varied and very practical. I work directly with some regular collaborators, and others through the formal venue - to - producer route.

**Focus:** How many pantos can Imagine produce in a year?

**Glyn:** This season we're producing 22 of our own shows - 20 pantomimes plus a children's Santa show. We also have nine additional sets on hire to other producers, plus wardrobe items and various extras. So we usually have between 30 and 35 shows out in a typical season.

**Focus:** That's enormous. When do the productions start leaving the warehouse?

**Glyn:** The first sets left around 14

November. The last ones leave today. They start returning around New Year's Eve.

**Focus:** So tomorrow, just at the end of the first week in December, the warehouse is practically empty?

**Glyn:** Not empty, but nowhere near as full.

**Focus:** So for roughly a quarter of the year the shows are out. The other three

**Cinderella at Fairfield Halls Croydon, with the video screens blending into painted set elements. Video design by Studio Nina Dunn.**

**Next Page: Another truck leaving Imagine with Panto sets. Cinderella - the digital set seen backstage. Photos Imagine Theatre, Studio Nina Dunn**

quarters are maintenance and planning for the next season. When does that planning begin?

**Glyn:** Panto works on a two - year cycle. We're already planning the 26/27 season and have been seriously looking at it since April. We work around 18 months ahead. Venue titles can be decided even earlier.

**Focus:** Including the Belgrade, where you used to work?

**Glyn:** Yes. Imagine and the Belgrade have a long - standing relationship. We're not responsible for casting or music there, but we invest in the set and take it over at the end of their run. We support their production, but don't organise it.

**Focus:** Do you build sets in - house?

**Glyn:** We outsource full set construction. We don't have the space, facilities, or workforce for that. We handle repairs and small - scale builds. I design the technical systems and often install them myself, sometimes with trusted associates

**Focus:** Let's talk about the first digital panto set.

**Glyn:** Our first digital set was Cinderella, which premiered in Croydon in 2019.

**Focus:** What exactly is a digital set?

**Glyn:** Fairfield Halls had recently been refurbished, and financially the show had

to be staged on the concert platform rather than a traditional theatre stage. That meant we couldn't use stick - and - canvas scenery, so we used video wall as changeable cloths.

We commissioned a digital design based on the traditional artwork. The set had portals and frames like a classic panto, but they were made of video wall, allowing animation, transitions, and movement. The first set had five video walls and about 17,000 pixels of pixel tape.

**Focus:** So a traditional layout, but with changeable screen surfaces.

**Glyn:** Exactly. We've developed that further. Some newer designs are full 3D worlds created in Unreal Engine. You can move through landscapes or rotate perspectives. Lighting can control elements of the 3D world, though I'm not sure how far that integration went. We've used motion capture for animated characters such as a Genie.

**Focus:** So panto - theatre is moving into the same territory as gaming and modern film.

**Glyn:** Very much so.

**Focus:** Any use of AI in graphics yet?

**Glyn:** I'm not involved in that side. It may happen, but it's in the hands of the

graphics designers.

**Focus:** Do you send out lighting equipment or special effects?

**Glyn:** We have low - smoke machines and Sparkulars, but we don't stock lighting fixtures. Technology moves too fast, and maintaining a large lighting stock would be unrealistic. Our digital shows alone use around 180 automated fixtures each, across four shows. We'd need to be a major hire company to own that stock.

**Focus:** What about screens?

**Glyn:** We own some screens but subhire most of them. For example, a digital show needing 350 panels will need the same number every year, so it's easier to subhire. If something breaks, we can simply get a replacement.

**Focus:** Is there demand for higher resolution?

**Glyn:** We've always aimed for high quality. Even years ago, *Cinderella* used 2.5 mm pitch panels. Most of our screens now are 2.5 mm. With typical viewing distances of around 5 m, you don't need to go narrower unless working very close up.

**Focus:** Do you mix video and traditional painted elements?

**Glyn:** All our digital sets include some traditional scenic pieces - frames, cloths,

flown borders. Colour matching is handled by the video team and the set designer.

**Focus:** Do you get out to see any panto yourself?

**Glyn:** Sometimes. I'm off to High



Wycombe tomorrow for a fit - up. I often go out to build elements of sets. There's a small window when everything is open and I can relax before returns begin. Seeing the shows also helps us assess what work will be needed when sets come back.

**Focus:** You've worked as a lighting

technician for many years. Do you still see yourself that way, or more as a technical manager now?

**Glyn:** I still think of myself as a lighting technician, but the skill set has changed. It's no longer about hanging par cans and focusing them. Control has evolved. I remember when a venue having four DMX universes seemed excessive - now our big digital shows run around 250 universes plus video networking.

**Focus:** I think I met your father once in Manchester, without realising he was your dad. What would he make of what you're doing now?

**Glyn:** He would have loved it. One of his proudest moments was when people stopped referring to me as "Phil's son" and started referring to him as "Glyn's dad." He passed in 2013, before any of the digital work began, but he was excited by LED technology and about the advances in technology generally. I like to think he'd be fully on board with pixel tape and video walls. At the end of the day, we all enjoy playing with new toys!

Interview by Arnim Friess 

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**HighTide's touring production of *Even More... Ghost Stories by Candlelight* invited audiences into a world built on tension, intimacy, and carefully crafted atmosphere.**

While much attention often falls on the lighting rig in productions of this nature, the real heart of this show's visual identity lay elsewhere: in the set electrics that shaped its atmospheric storytelling from within the set itself. HighTide's approach

to climate dramaturgy, embedding ecological thinking into every creative choice, shaped the way the set electrics were conceived, constructed, and toured. Working closely with Lighting Designer Jonathan Chan

and Set & Costume Designer Lu Herbert, the set electrics became a key layer in delivering the show's haunting visual language and their artistic approach of climate dramaturgy.

As Production Electrician and Set Electrics Maker for the tour, my role centred on

designing and building a system of low-voltage practicals and integrated lighting elements that could survive the demands of travel, venue variation, and nightly resets; all while supporting HighTide's commitment to sustainable, climate-conscious production practices, by actively reusing, repurposing, and reducing waste.

A large proportion of the set electrics came from a personal stock of equipment that has been accumulated, maintained,

adapted, and reused across multiple past productions. LED drivers, cabling, housings, connectors, power supplies, and even lengths of LED tape all had previous lives.

Instead of purchasing new

materials, the production leaned heavily on these existing components, integrating them into new configurations that met the designers' intentions while avoiding unnecessary waste. Even the housings and cable management solutions were constructed with reuse in mind, designed to

be removed cleanly and repurposed for future productions.

By the time the tour closed, over 70% of the set electrics used had already served on prior projects, and nearly all of it is now heading straight back into stock ready to be redeployed on future productions.

This production became a clear example of the value a circular model can bring to set electrics. With budgets tightening across the industry and increasing pressure to adopt more sustainable production methods, the reuse-first approach offers a practical, achievable strategy that aligns with both environmental values and financial realities.

The success of *Ghost Stories by Candlelight* demonstrated that high-quality set electrics do not need to rely on brand-new kit, whether that's high-quality purchases or cheap one-time solutions. Instead: careful planning, thoughtful stock management, and a willingness to repurpose materials can deliver results that are aesthetically rich, technically reliable, and significantly lower in carbon footprint.

As this kit returns to the shelves - now carrying the history of yet another production - it represents something more than equipment. It marks a growing shift in small-scale touring: a recognition that cir-

cular set electrics can support artistic ambition just as effectively as newly purchased hardware.

If *Ghost Stories by Candlelight* proved anything, it's that sustainability in theatre often happens behind the scenes: in the solder joints, in the reused housings, in the careful decision to build something that can live again and again.

And in this case, the result wasn't just environmentally responsible: it was beautifully, atmospherically, hauntingly effective.

If you have any more questions, or want to take part in the ALPD Sustainability working group, please feel free to contact Daniella Beattie:

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**Credits:**

**Produced by High Tide and Pentabus Theatre**

**Directed by Elle While**

**Set & Costume Designer Lu Herbert**

**Lighting Designer Jonathan Chan**

**Production Electrician Will Gibbs**

**Photo Ali Wright**

SUSTAINABILITY

**Lighting designer Jodie Underwood talks to FOCUS about navigating Japanese storytelling, a mirror-like floor, and a video wall that filled the entire field of view.**

**Focus:** To start, could you give readers a quick sense of what *Our Cosmic Dust* is about? I originally thought the show was a straight import from Japan, but that wasn't quite the case.

**Jodie:** Sure. *Our Cosmic Dust* follows a young boy, Shotaro, whose father has died. Through a misunderstanding with his mum, he believes his dad has literally become a star. So he becomes fixated on reaching the stars to find him. The piece follows him during a single day as he moves around his town, speaking to different people about their own experiences of death.

Eventually he reaches the observatory, where he has an emotional, almost philosophical rediscovery of his father. It's a gentle, very tender story about a child processing loss.

**Focus:** It's heavy material. Did you treat it as a family show?

**Jodie:** Not at all. The Japanese creative team were very clear: this wasn't meant for children or young adults. They didn't want to dilute or soften the subject. They wanted to talk about death honestly, without patronising the audience.

**Focus:** Japanese culture approaches death differently - especially death involving children.



## LIGHTING THE INFINITE

**Jodie Underwood lights *Our Cosmic Dust* at the Park Theatre and adjusts to an unusual set and cultural differences**

**Jodie:** Completely. There's a graveyard scene in the show, and my Western instinct was to treat a graveyard as cold or sombre. But the director explained that, in their perspective, a graveyard is warm - a place where you go to be with the spirits of people you've lost. There are spirits and ghosts throughout

the story, but they aren't frightening; they're comforting. That was a major cultural difference.

**Focus:** I think that's partly why some UK critics struggled. They assumed anything involving a child protagonist and "poetry" must be a young - audience show. But Studio Ghibli films are the same - adult stories that Western audiences mislabel as children's films.

**Jodie:** Exactly. The Japanese team weren't interested in making a kids' version. They wanted to keep its emotional and cultural integrity.

**Focus:** Let's move into the design. Ceci Calf wasn't the original designer, correct?

**Jodie:** Correct. Michi, the director, was also the designer on the Japanese production. For the UK transfer, he handed the design to Ceci because he was busy with other parts of the show.

Ceci designed all the costumes. The set - video, the shiny black floor, the circular hole in the centre - came from Michi's original design, and Ceci helped realise it in the UK.

**Focus:** The floor looked almost like a mirror.

**Jodie:** It was a shiny black dance floor, but we buffed it to near - mirror perfection.



The production photos capture it perfectly because of the angle - but yes, it behaved like a mirror. The reflection of the video wall created the sense of infinite depth, which was intentional.

**Focus:** In The Park Theatre, the audience practically sits in the wings. Lighting a mirror-like floor in that space sounds brutal.

**Jodie:** I honestly couldn't predict what it would

feel like until I walked into the room. Almost everything had to come from the top because front light bounced straight into the video wall. I used very steep crosslight for general cover. Anything lower either blinded the audience or lit the floor instead of the actors. But that shiny black floor was also a gift - if you hit it at the right angle, a full - on PAR or gobo beam disappears off into the grid. You get the performer emerging from blackness with no visible spill. We used the bounce to light the underside of faces and relied on low side positions to fill what we could. Tricky, but surprisingly usable.

**Focus:** I looked at the photos and thought, "This is impossible."

**Jodie:** We only had about five seats on each side that were at risk of



direct glare, and because The Park's top positions are so steep, we could avoid most issues.

**Focus:** Judging from the production stills, the cueing rhythm looks extremely active.

**Jodie:** It was. For a 90 - minute no - interval show, there were a lot of cues - many tiny shifts: light a small area, expand, then contract again to hide reflections. Every scene was a new lighting state; we never returned to the same look twice, which fit the "journey through the town" structure.

**Focus:** Let's talk video - this huge wall dominated the space. One plane or curved?

**Jodie:** Mostly a flat plane across the back, nearly the entire width of the Park Theatre's thrust. On the far edges, the wall curved slightly toward the seating banks. It almost reached the





grid. It filled your peripheral vision completely - something you'd normally only see in a 1,000 - seat house, not a 200 - seat theatre.

**Focus:** How much of your cueing was dictated by pre - existing video?

**Jodie:** All of it. The video design - white on black - came directly from the Japanese production. Eika, the video designer, and Raph, the video associate, were amazing collaborators.

I had a recording of the Japanese run, and we checked the video sequences in rehearsals, but honestly, nothing prepares you for seeing it in the room. It was extremely bright.

We broke their long continuous video files into cueable sections so we could actually sync lighting transitions with video movement. In Japan, they don't cue in the same way - they perform in time with the video.

Because of the rendering time for that giant wall, we had limited ability to alter anything. My job was to keep pace with the video and support the flow, not fight it.

**Focus:** What are you working on now?

**Jodie:** I'm lighting Tabby Lam's *The Law of Mayhem*, previewing soon in Basingstoke. After that, I'm doing *I Dreamed of*

*Theresa May* at Tara Theatre, and my Christmas show this year is *A Christmas Carol* at The Barn Theatre, Cirencester.

**Focus:** How should we describe where you are in your career - "emerging lighting designer"?

**Jodie:** Hard to say. I'm doing venues like The Park, but I've also designed at the Royal Court. I don't think I fit neatly into a box.

**Focus:** Looking at the pictures, you managed to light performers in front of an overwhelming video environment - very much like staring at the Sphere in Las Vegas.

**Jodie:** Pamela, our photographer, deserves huge credit. She captured everything beautifully. But yes - the video was always going to dominate visually. I could do a lot or almost nothing, and the audience would still talk about the screen! I spent a lot of time very politely asking the video team, "Could that be a bit darker, please?"

**Focus:** Lighting designers will see the photos and know exactly how hard that job was.

**Jodie:** It was a challenge, but a rewarding one!

Interview by Arnim Friess 

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Photos by Pamela Raith

**Will Monks looks at old and new machines at this year's trade fair: "The showroom floor of Olympia is packed with stalls designed to grab attention for the PLASA Show 2025."**

Priorities for designers are reflected in innovations from manufacturers, who are showing off products that are variously brighter, tighter, quieter, higher fidelity, minutely controllable and more weather resistant.

Before joining my first workshop I check out the Gallery Level. Classic Gear Live sits just along from The Innovation Gallery. It's inspiring to see how far we've come in the decades that sit between these two exhibits. The affectionately named Betty, a lighting console from 1956, has an array of circular faders that would each control a motor attached to a resistor dimmer as a convoluted way to achieve control of the rig. The cue list for *Jesus Christ Superstar*, her final show, is literally a folder of papers with instructions on which of her organ-style keys to push and how hard to press her pedal. One of PLASA's Innovation Award winners is Ask Ald3n, Disguise's offer of an AI assistant to help programmers automate tasks. Betty's generation of lighting professionals were looking for exactly the same thing as those

who are about to start working with Ald3n, but the pool of ideas to be drawn from has grown far beyond church organs. We're now stood on the shoulders of bigger giants. I move along to a talk titled "The DNA of Lighting Control".

Sarah Clausen, Luke Delwiche and Declan Randall from ETC sit in front of a blisteringly bright LED screen (Picture next

## PLASA '25 RELIT

**Away from the shiny new toys, our authors find engaging seminars, lively discussion and valuable advice**

page). The talk starts by outlining the range of needs that LDs and programmers have. A graph is populated by event types. An axis of how often events recur is perpendicular to how sequential the show is. Theatre and musicals are in one corner and parties and festivals at the other, with worship services, dance and TV series floating around the middle. The talk is speaking to the wide range of subsectors within entertainment lighting that are represented in the exhibition hall. Cross-pollination between practitioners who are on paths that are close but not the same clearly enriches lighting programming the

same way that it spreads ideas throughout the art of lighting in general.

The panel run through core principles common throughout the industry and you can see those principles in Betty's operation. Her organ keys were effectively controlling the tracking for each channel. Her DNA expressed itself according to the knowledgebase and equipment of her time. As rigs grow in complexity though, there's much more data to handle, which all needs normalising and abstracting to be useful. The bytes and bits that make up DMX values are more understandable as percentage and degrees, which then make up RGBWA, pan and tilt values which we put into HSI and XYZ spaces and record into colour and focus palettes, which we finally give the names of "orange" and "downstage right" that we actually use when talking about the images we're creating onstage.

This journey leads to the truism that modern lighting programming is effectively data management – taking numbers that are useful to machines and putting them through enough layers of abstraction that they conform to human speech and thinking. It's easy to get bogged down and forget that a key aim is to understand what's going on. "Rule number 1 is to label everything" quips Declan "and rule num-



**Paul Johnson from the Historic Stage Lighting Collective, demonstrating Strand's 'Betty' Monk**



From left Declan Randall, Luke Delwiche, Sarah Clausen

ber 2 is to remember rule number 1.”

The first question of the Q&A is about AI. Maybe I’m projecting, but there’s a slight sag in the room. It feels like every discussion at this point contains this question. It’s clear from Ald3n’s award that this is going to be something we all have to be thinking about though. There are some interesting con-

versations about how tricky it can be for lighting control companies to implement new ideas since their consoles are built on a long history of interconnected parts.

The talk concludes by stating that the concepts of lighting programming are global, and it’s just the specifics of implementation that vary. The legacy of foundational ideas is present in all the innovations I pass as I walk back through the showroom floor. Past Betty and Ald3n, seeing fixtures that are tighter, quieter and definitely brighter than the year before. The lighting industry has always been moving in the same direction, sharing ideas as we go, and each PLASA Show is sharing and celebrating the steps that have been taken down that path.”

**Nick Moran reports on hosting the ALPD Seminar at The PLASA Show 2025: “The seminar asked a question – important to us as people interested in lighting performance, and somewhat controversial at a time when Higher Education in the UK is under significant financial pressure – Is it worth doing a degree in Lighting Design?”**

To address the question, we invited Professional LD Rep David Howe (Diploma in Stage Management – like Richard Pilbrow), successful RADA graduate LD Jai Morjaria, and the National Theatre’s Head of Technical Qualifications, Kath Geraghty. I chaired, and although I have led an undergraduate programme teaching Lighting Design for over 20 years, I have no formal qualifications in the subject.

You will soon be able to see an edited video of the session on the PLASA website, and I recommend watching it as the discussions were open and illuminating (sorry). Here’s a taster:

The main things that make any vocational degree “worth it” are that you graduate with knowledge, skills and experience enough to get you started in your chosen field. But, just as a graduate from a law school still has some way to go before becoming a lawyer, it is almost unheard of for anyone to graduate from a lighting



From left: Jai Morjaria, Kath Geraghty, David Howe, Nick Moran. Photos Will Monks

design programme and be able to make a living solely as a theatre LD. [Many an experienced LD has to supplement their income from work as a theatre LD to earn a decent living – but that’s a different art-

icle].

David talked about how working for White Light shortly after leaving drama school helped him learn more about the

**On all three days Olympia was well visited and traders and seminar organisers said they “were very busy”. Photos Arnim Friess**



tech, make more contacts, and gave him opportunities to “practise” for example, lighting shows for amateurs at Watford Palace. Then there were the years he spent working internationally as Paul Pyant’s assistant, then associate.

Jai talked about making the most of the contacts made at Drama School, lighting friends shows on the Fringe in London and Edinburgh, and how groups of theatre makers who work together can rise together, helping to build each other’s reputations.

Kath told us how she started as an apprentice, rising to regional Chief Lx, and learnt most of what she knows about lighting “at work. She and I both talked about how we learnt most about the art and the craft of lighting theatre while sitting next to great practitioners doing it.

We all talked about how much you learn from reproducing someone else’s work too, and it’s no surprise that relighting is on the full CV of most theatre LDs in this country.

So if what you really want to do is spend your life lighting shows, what, if anything, makes it worth taking out the big loan and spending 3 years getting letters after your name?

If your family background and / or per-

sonal inclination makes having a degree important – as a demonstration of intellect and a right of passage perhaps – then doing a vocational degree in the field you want to work in still makes a lot of sense. If you are lucky, you should be able to start earning money putting some of the stuff you are learning into practice by halfway through your studies – even if that’s only during the long vacations.

If you can base yourself near to a good technical theatre apprenticeship programme, then that’s a way to start learning the technical side of the business and get paid. Apprenticeship wages are still generally low, and most programmes run for a year and don’t guarantee a job at the end – and you will need to be proactive and lucky if you are going to pick much that will help you with the art of lighting in that time. But it’s a valid first step.

If you get the chance to walk straight into a job on an Electrics team – brilliant. But be aware that the next steps will be very much in your hands. For example, it can be very hard to build a useful LD portfolio when you work in a receiving venue – and producing venues generally hire established LDs and programmers.

Whatever your route into Performance Lighting, keep in mind that the ALPD community is there to support you, informally

through Focus and the resources on the website, and more directly through the Professional Members network.

None of the panel members entered the world of work with a £55000+ loan. Deciding to do so is a big decision, especially if the field you want to work in is generally not that well paid. In my view, LD’s fees is something that really needs to change if UK Theatre is going to retain the rising generation of LDs. Either that, or UK Theatre needs to develop an alternative “talent pipeline” that means new entrants don’t have a big loan to pay off. The alternative is that increasingly, the most talented graduates of UK lighting degrees will not be going into UK Theatre.”



### **Matt Leventhall is reporting from the PLASA Innovation Awards Judging Panel and asks: IP = Innovation in Private?**

“Two concepts I always cover early with my students are internet protocol and ingress protection, two unrelated “IPs” that share one thing: each represents a pillar of standardisation with sweeping benefit for all. Not found on my curriculum is the third IP, namely intellectual property, which stands harshly at the counterpoint of its homonymous colleagues in representing the catalogue of patents, copyrights and other protections that prevent the dissemination of innovation to protect profit. At PLASA 2025, the only stand plastered with No Photography signs was the Innovation Gallery. Intellectual property protection in full defensive mode. More on that shortly.

A reminder of how the judging for the Innovation Awards operates: Before the show, each judge receives a 100-word submission per entry to prepare us for the live pitches. We all declare any prejudicial interests before we begin. At the exhibition, under the guidance of Chair James Eade, we spend two days reviewing around 30 entries from teams hoping for recognition. Judges are split into two groups, each following a route across the show floor. During breaks we compare notes, flag prom-

ising entries, and ensure nothing innovative slips through. We assess fresh thinking, safety, technical improvement, sustainability, and disruption. Achievement of a patent is one easy-to-spot hallmark of innovation. We’re not looking for the best products, we’re looking for the most innovative.

We can select up to eight winners, plus an optional sustainability award, with the possibility of elevating one winner to a Gold Award for a genuinely game-changing product. This year wasn’t as rich as last year, and we found only seven products that met our benchmark. No sustainability award was given, but we were thrilled to present a **Gold Award to Sennheiser’s Spectera**, a technology that rewrites the rulebook for wireless mics and IEMs, with a radical rethink of the entire signal chain and some extremely clever spectrum management. From my Lighting Designers’ point-of-view, it’s refreshing to see audio professionals taking photons more seriously, even if they’re the ones you can’t see.

A standout worth looking up is **Doughty’s new lightweight quick trigger**. It was one of those entries we approached with a collective eyeroll; how innovative can a hook really be? Turns out, very. Sometimes the simplest re-engineer-

ing leads to a whole new generation of quality, reliability and usability. Hats off to Doughty.

My personal highlight was **Hydra-Storm from Luminous Show Technology** (photo p43). Rain on stage is always nerve-racking, both difficult to manage and to light. This rain-curtain system lets designers curate rainfall without devouring grid space or hours of leak-hunting. It's elegant, clever, modular and just good fun.

At the show, my advice to those asking was to seek out **Vari-Lite's VLHive 151 Digital FX**, another winner and a genuinely new species of moving light. It maps its 151-strong LED array into a low-resolution projected image, eliminating the need for physical gobos, animation wheels, shutters, irises and potentially even zoom optics. It's probably not ready yet, because it's too heavy, too loud, and the resolution is still too crude for my taste, but it's a hugely promising beginning. If they keep going, the generation after next could reshape the whole topology of the moving-light landscape.

Back in the mid 2000s I attended a (then) ALD members meeting at the Novello, where Rick Fisher guided us through his work on the landmark production of *An Inspector Calls*. Then, the biggest talking point was the explosion in our use of frost

filters. In the last five years, we noted, there had been a total evolution of practice; we were no longer running barrels and instead we were sticking a cut of Hamburg frost into pretty much everything with an ellipsoidal reflector. Rick shared the innovations in his work freely and in the spirit of knowledge sharing and education. Indeed, every single profile had a cut of frost behind the colour. Fast forward twenty years, and the Innovation Judging Panel wasn't allowed to see the mechanism behind **Robe's ProFrost** entry (pictured right). The moving-light police were too jumpy about potential IP leaks. Notwithstanding, the result was impressive enough that we were able



to recognise it.

Today, Robe lists at least forty trademarked innovations on its website, Clay Paky have twenty-eight and Elation have nineteen (and those are just the ones I happened to check). Each trademarked innovation has its own logo and branding, entirely separate from the fixtures they relate to. Hoarding intellectual property has been the norm for years, and it is almost never to the end user's benefit. This separated branding of it seems newer. Lighting designers long joked that you needed a Martin fixture if you wanted a fire or water effect to

ripple in the "correct" direction, because Martin held the patent on the only sensible way to alter an animation wheel's rota-

tion axis. Most designers I know share a simple view: we want tools that work well, and we care very little about who owns which trademark or the clever name it's been given. So, if I'm to believe the web copy and I want good frost I'll specify Robe, but if I want great animation, I'll specify Martin... and so on ad nauseam.

I'm not knocking the premise of intellectual property per se. It's important for us as artists too, because it has provided a framework in common law for lighting designers to own their work, which by its very nature is fickle, momentary and intangible. But when IP wars make our tools worse, isn't it time for more joined-up thinking?

We shouldn't forget that our entire industry rests on open or royalty-free standards: DMX512, Art-Net, sACN are the three most transformative developments in modern lighting control. And it's not just us: from the polio vaccine to HTTP, blockchain and USB, technology leaps forward when innovation is liberated. Surely there's a better way to share lighting innovations for the greater good of the craft, not just for the benefit of shareholders.

Vari-Lite were the first to patent the moving light itself after the release of the VL1 in 1981. They pioneered the very idea that the light source might move, rather than moving colours or mirrors in a static

beam. The irony of this year's show is thus too good to resist: today, Vari-Lite may be the only company beginning the journey

towards a future where the moving light has no moving parts at all. You can find out more about their patents on their website.



**Lighting Designer Jason Ahn introduced his talk about Neuroaesthetic Lighting Design.** (photo above) He has also published a book on the matter, available from Routledge Publishing. In it he suggests interesting questions about the scientific principles which rule how we perceive lighting design, and proposes that as designers we can follow rules about "What makes good lighting". Photo: Arnim Fries

**A very busy three days also for the ALPD stand, as always manned by Amanda Laidler.** (photo below) As in the past years, the associations presence at the ALPD was sought after: Students, lighting designers and technicians picked up merchandise, past Focus editions and good advice. It also provided a quiet haven for many on the side of the hectic trade stands, to socialise and say hello. Photo: Arnim Friess



**The renewed effort of corporations, institutions and traders to attract the next generation to work in the lighting, sound and associated industries was clearly visible.** (photo above) The daily events at the careers and networking hub were busy, and sometimes overwhelmed with attendance, like this 'speed-dating' style event with young people seeking information from future employers, professionals and members of industry initiatives. Look out for a special report in the next Focus magazine, out in March 2026. Photo: Arnim Friess

**"Become a Financially Savvy Freelancer" is a new initiative (photo right) by Backup Tech and a special seminar introduced PLASA visitors to next year's changes in tax and law.**

Moderated by Lee Dennison from Backup Tech (right), the UK's registered technical entertainment charity, Suzi Green and Paul Jones discussed the new challenges facing not just freelancers, but also businesses including sole traders, self-employed individuals and VAT-registered businesses under the new *Making Tax Digital* (MTD) rules.

"There is a culture of 'being bad with money' - an attitude which seems to be wide spread in the industry," said Jones.

Digital records of income and expenses will need to be kept using a MTD-compatible software (like Xero, Quickbooks, Sage), and updates need to be submitted quarterly, not just annually. Additionally, a year-end declaration to confirm the total income and claim any reliefs

They also covered points like 'Setting up shop', 'Staying out of trouble' and claimed that 'Financial Wellbeing is the new Rock'n'Roll'.

See also Rob Halliday's article in Focus Summer 2025.

Photo: Arnim Friess



**Download the guide "Become a Financially Savvy Freelancer" <https://www.backuptech.uk/download-areas/publicity-and-campaign/>**



# Wild, whacky and wonderful


It wouldn't be PLASA without some eyepopping displays and products



Robe's showcase has again been a magnet for visitors. Packing their current line-up of lights into an entertaining story, the *Lights of the Round Table* battled haze and fire with the help of a robot-arm. If giant neon butterflies were your thing - Chris Jones from Darkstar had you covered. Meanwhile at Classic Gear, Neil Rice (right) and Nigel Bailey from *The Odd Light Show* resurrec-

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ted the psychedelic, manual and analogue lighting from the hazy 70's, complete with wheel and food-colour drips onto overhead projectors. Over at Pixmob, visitors could collect a recycled armband to re-stage their own little Coldplay audience participation at home. Photos: Arnim Friess 

**The young girl darts forward. And back. Waves her arms and gives a delightful twirl. The crowd around us seem all to be trapped in a giant game of ping pong, with viewers being the balls.**

In front of us a large rondelle-shaped wall is shimmering icily, the surface crystallises in parts, other bits become fluid, to the sound of drones and bass. "What is it doing now?" twirling girl asks her mum. Well, yes, what? You have to consult a display nearby. Or look at the app. It's digital ice, melting when we get too close, freezing again when we move away. An artwork to remind us about the icecaps, in case you needed reminding.

Focus is at Lumiere (not to be confused with the ALPD supported apprenticeship programme). Again Durham has given large parts of the inner city, streets, the cathedral, paths along the river and a further out satellite over to Artichoke, the experiential art producers, to install art sculptures, objects and installations, commissioned from international artists. For a long weekend only, Durham transforms into a giant museum for all things light, and after dusk visitors, 120000 this year, throng along routes suggested by maps and apps, and sometimes enforced by the army of volunteers engaged to



keep order. Not always the serene, contemplating experience I had hoped for, but I've been to the Vatican museum, which is worse and the security much more shouty.

For a performance lighting designer, the impact of the artworks is fascinating. There is much difference to cued shows, obviously, and for a start there are no performers. But there are also elements I recognise from our work: Texture, layered

gobos, colour contrast are used as much as directing the viewers gaze.

While the biennial has put Durham onto the map of international contemporary art fans, it has its critics, and locals complain about the inconvenience created by a fest-


## LUMIERE DURHAM

**The UK's largest Lighting Art Festival returns to the university city for the last time**

**By Arnim Friess**

ival the size of Glastonbury in their city. Organisers and sponsors point to the amount of visitors and calculate that it brings in much more than it costs. The discussion has come to a sudden end: only days before the first evening, Durham County Council, now run by Reform, announced that this year's Lumiere

would be its last edition. The council cites a decision by the previous Liberal council "and will now be taking the opportunity to reassess how we present light art in the future". Some permanent artworks will remain as reminders.

So here then, for the last time, highlights from the Durham Lumiere Biennale. 

**Left: Point of (No) Return** by Anastasia Isachsen (Norway). Interactive thawing and freezing of ice.

**Right: EVERYONE EVER**, Night-house Studio (USA), projected layers of the cathedral architecture.

[www.lumiere-festival.com](http://www.lumiere-festival.com)





Clockwise from top left: The River, Cédric Le Borgne (France). Solace, Amelia Kosminsky (UK). Rhizome, Bobolito&Co (Belgium). FluoreCycle, Hannah Ayre (UK). As Water Falls, Iregular (Canada). Elysium Garden, Jigantics (UK). Entanglement Is Existential (II), Justin Brice Guariglia (USA).

Photos: Arnim Friess

**Offstage: This is the page where we are looking at ideas away from the stage, and exploration of colour, texture, luminance - whatever makes lighting people tick. Or just plainly odd stuff. We'd love to show your inspirational photos. Please email to editor@thealpd.org.uk**

## AQUANURA

### ALPD administrator Amanda Laidler visits the new spectacular at Efteling

I recently took a short holiday to the Netherlands, including a visit to Efteling with my grandchildren. Efteling is the largest theme park in the Netherlands, and I have been several times over the last 30 years. For me, it's the nicest and most magical of the theme parks I've visited in Europe. It is well landscaped and fairytale themed, but it also has some very exciting rides for those braver than me. I was coaxed onto the new Danse Macabre ride but spent half of it with my eyes tight shut!


But perhaps of most interest to Focus readers is the light show that rounds off the evening. Designed by WET Los Angeles (all former Disney Imagineers) in 2012, Aquanura combined water, fire, music and light into a 14 minute spectacular. The largest show of its kind in Europe, costing €17 million and taking nine months to construct, it features 800 lights and 200 fountains, with some reaching 45 meters height. In recent years, Efteling has worked to become more sustainable with the aim of becoming climate neutral by 2030. It was time to revise the show and so in December 2024 Aquanura Symphonica was opened. The fire effects, which used propane, were removed and four "beacons of light" 8 metres high were added. A new piece of music – Efteling Symphonica – was added. Many of the themes in the piece will be familiar to those who have spent their day in the park (and the sound systems are excellent). 



Photo: Efteling

**PROMOTION!**  
Discount to members for recruiting newcomers:  
**£10 off next year's membership/Affiliate members and £5 for Associate. The new member applicant MUST cite them when applying.**

### NEXT FOCUS DEADLINE: 27 FEB 2025

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