

SYMPOSIUM



The People in  
Performance  
Lighting

The Association for Lighting  
Production and Design  
[www.thealpd.org.uk](http://www.thealpd.org.uk)  
Summer 2026  
£5.00 / FREE to Members



**NEW ALPD  
WEBSITE**

Association website goes  
live for all members with  
updated features

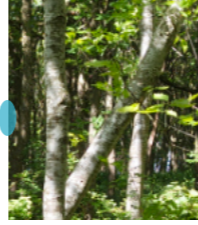
**INSPIRING  
YOUNG PEOPLE**

Technical Youth Theatre  
Symposium by ALPD and  
Chichester Festival Theatre

**PAPERWORK  
AND CAD**

Keeping on top of your  
show and document for  
the future

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**Welcome to the Summer edition of Focus. I hope everyone is enjoying the sunshine when it appears and keeping themselves busy through the summer months.**

We are very excited to announce the launch of the new website w/c 15th June. Please bear with us as I am sure there may be some small teething problems along the way. The website is now far more slimline with a more modern outlook, easier to use on all devices and with an improved back end that will save us time and money. It also has a much better search facility for finding our members specialities.

This issue of Focus looks at paperwork - hardly the most glamorous subject, but an important one nonetheless. How do we protect our copyright? Why does good draftsmanship still matter? As our drawings become increasingly complex and three-dimensional, what responsibility do we carry for the end result, and how can we protect ourselves? These are questions many of us face, whether we're working on a village hall pantomime or a major international production.

As with every issue of Focus, if we've touched on a subject that you'd like to explore further, please do get in touch. Whether it's a letter to the editor, an article, a strongly held opinion, or simply a discussion you'd like to have over a virtual tea break on Zoom, we'd love to hear from you. One of the strengths of the ALPD is the knowledge and experience within our membership, so let's share it.

Trade show and awards season is now well underway. I was sorry to miss PLASA Leeds and the social this year, which by all accounts was a lot of fun. My thanks go to Joe Price, Eleanor Higgins and Jason Addison for delivering an excellent seminar on *What Quantifies Success?* and tackling subjects that many of us wrestle with from time to time: career anxiety, imposter syndrome and the joys (and occasional horrors) of social media in a fast-paced industry.

It was, however, wonderful to catch up with so many people at ABTT. Apologies to everyone I said I'd come back and find later but never managed to—I don't think I stopped talking for the entire day. Thank you also to Nick Moran for his fascinating seminar, *Learning Light: Today, Yesterday and Tomorrow*, which reminded us that while technology may change at breakneck speed, the fundamentals of our craft remain as important as ever.

The week rounded off with another excellent Profile Awards evening. Congratulations to all the nominees, and especially to Bernie Davis on receiving the Lifetime Achievement Award. Bernie has spent a career championing lighting and helping communicate the artistry behind what we do. It was a thoroughly deserved recognition.

In this issue we'll also be looking at the ALPD Young People in Theatre Symposium, held earlier this year. The event has sparked some really interesting conversations across the in-

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



dusty, particularly among regional theatres, and we hope it proves to be the start of something important and long-lasting.

Before I sign off, I'd like to share a recent theatre experience that reminded me just how powerful lighting can be.

I recently saw The Black Comedy at the Orange Tree Theatre, beautifully lit by Elliot Griggs. Now, I'm not a great fan of the dark. In fact, I often joke that becoming a lighting designer was simply my way of ensuring there was always a switch nearby.

The production begins with what felt like five or ten minutes of ABSOLUTE darkness. Not "the audience will adjust in a moment" darkness. Proper darkness. The effect was extraordinary. After a few minutes I found myself genuinely uncomfortable. Closing my eyes made no difference, and eventually I located the infrared camera feed and fixed my gaze on that until some light returned. Yet it was also a remarkable theatrical experience. Deprived of sight, I was forced to listen more intently than I ever normally would. I found myself concentrating on every voice, every movement and every interaction on stage. In the intimacy of the Orange Tree's theatre-in-the-round, the effect was even more powerful.

## A WARM WELCOME TO OUR NEW ALPD MEMBERS

### Non-Profit

Guildhall School of Music and Drama

### Professional

Nadene Wheatley, Coulsdon

James Goodall, Durham

Zakwan Al Fallaha, Dubai

Schreiber AS Alexandre, Lyon

### Affiliate

Finn McGuigan, Todmorden

Haley Yiu, Manchester

Shona M'gadzah, Glasgow

Matthew Gale, Horsham

### Student

Eleanor K Beddell - Garner, Plymouth

Chance Mackenzie, London

Darius K Evans, Scotch Plains, USA

It also served as a reminder of the influence we hold as lighting designers. The way an audience experiences a story can be transformed by the choices we make, that lighting is never just about illumination. It's about guiding an audience's attention, shaping their emotions and help-

Tommy P Bath, Lincoln  
Emily M Tucker, Buckinghamshire  
Joseph Finn, Thames Ditton  
Ethan Michael Baker, Beaconsfield  
Tom E Fletcher, Grantham  
Tom Kirby, London  
Dave Joyce, Bognor Regis  
Caspian Scrivens, Salisbury  
Angus Macdonald, Hawkenbury  
Sam Stacey, Somerset  
Lucas E Shaw, Belfast  
Cameron J Harries, London  
Albert AJ Williamson, Harrogate  
Owen Droudge, Gorebridge  
Codie F Lockyer, London  
Marco Ong, London  
Will Pritchard, Cheltenham  
Hannah Gale, Guildford  
Thea Cook, London  
Ravyn MacDonald, Glasgow  
Phillip Yoon, Seocho, Korea  
Logan J Cortes, Hamilton

ing tell the story—and sometimes the most memorable moments come when we choose not to light at all.

I hope you all enjoy this issue of Focus and have a glorious summer. 🍷

*Jo*

### PLASA AND ABTT

It was good to see so many of you in Leeds or at ABTT. And a big thank you to White Light for hosting us on their stand in Leeds. We will be at PLASA in September and you can collect your new badge from our stand (see Photo)



### CLIMB OVER THE O2 FOR THE THEATRICAL GUILD

The Theatrical Guild are inviting you to join them for our 2026 Fundraising Challenge to "Climb Over the O2".

The Theatrical Guild supports backstage and front of house theatre staff through times of hardship, including members of the ALPD. Details of their charitable services can be found at [www.ttg.org.uk](http://www.ttg.org.uk).

The climb will take place on Friday 25th September. Registration is free and the fundraising target is £200 per person. You must register by 31st July 2026, full details can be found on their website. Climb details can be found at [www.upattheo2.co.uk](http://www.upattheo2.co.uk)

### SAVE THE DATES

Watch out on socials and bulletins for the ALPD - White Light Edinburgh social, 6 August Assembly Gardens, and for the Lighting Lunch (never too early), this year on 14 December in an exciting new venue with a backstage tour to start the day. Watch this space!

### NEW WEBSITE

By the time you read this, the new website will be live. To log in, you no longer need a password. Instead, (and more securely) when you enter your email address, you will be sent a number via that email which allows you to login. When you have a moment, do check out your own webpages and check they are up to date. We regularly receive copies of Focus marked 'gone away' because members have forgotten to update their address. And one of the new facilities is an the opportunity to add dates when you are available for work.

Any queries or problems, please contact Amanda at [office@thealpd.org.uk](mailto:office@thealpd.org.uk). 🍷

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

### DATES 2026

- 9 July Backup Village Fete
- 6 August ALPD social Edinburgh, Assembly Gardens
- 6 - 8 September PLASA Olympia
- 14 December The Lighting Lunch - New Venue!

### DATES 2027

- 2 - 5 Feb ISE Barcelona
- 8 - 17 June Prague Quadrennial

Contact Amanda directly at [office@thealpd.org.uk](mailto:office@thealpd.org.uk)



UPDATE

# PEOPLE & EVENTS

Members news, meetings, awards and obituaries



## OLIVIER AWARD - LIGHTING

The Olivier Awards 2026 returned to the Royal Albert Hall to mark their 50th anniversary on April 12th this year.

For Best Lighting Design the joint winners were ALPD member Aideen Malone (lighting design) and Roland Horvath (video design) for *Into the Woods* at Bridge Theatre (See also Focus Spring for Aideen's insightful article about her

process). Apart from thanking the creative team and the crew at the theatre, Aideen added a special shout out to Associate LD Lucy Adams and programmer Will Frost, and the production electricians and follow spot operators.

"I never imagined I would get an award for lighting design!" added Roland Horvath. "I'm very happy to have it with you Aideen - I guess it takes two." This could be understood on the background of ongoing demands to recognise Video Design with its own award.

The other nominees were: Robbie Butler for *Punch* at Young Vic and Apollo Theatres. Jon Clark for *Evita* at The London Palladium and Joshua Pharo for *Kenrex* at The Other Palace. Congratulations to all - who also happen to be ALPD members!

[officiallondontheatre.com/olivier-awards](http://officiallondontheatre.com/olivier-awards)

## TONY AWARDS - LIGHTING

Congratulations to UK Lighting Designer Jack Knowles, who won the Tony Award for best lighting design of a play for the Broadway revival of *Death of a Salesman*, his second in a row.



Jack commented: "It's such an honour to be here, and just to work in New York again with such an amazing team. My shout out to the designers and creatives on the show - absolutely amazing! We love the work, and we don't do it for the accolades, we do it for the people we work with."

Jack took the opportunity, as reported by *The Stage*, to call for more associate designer roles in UK productions and to follow closer the Broadway model, for better development of creative talent at home. *Death of a Salesman* also won Tonys for best revival of a play, best direction (Joe Mantello), best performance by an actress (Laurie Metcalf), best scenic design (Chloe Lamford) and best sound design (Kai Harada).

## TONY AWARDS - LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT

ALPD President Rick Fisher writes: In addition to our congratulations to Jack Knowles, we share with the lighting community that lighting designer Jules Fisher (no relation I should add) has been awarded a lifetime achievement award by the Tonys (to add to his 9).

"I'd like to thank the committee for recognising what I do," Fisher said at his acceptance speech. "It's hard to talk about light. You can't see it. So how do you write about it? It's difficult. In fact, it's a problem when I do a show and explain to the producer why this is going to cost so much." He added: "I basically haven't worked a day in my life. I'm having fun," and continued to thank his family, his wife, and his professional partner Peggy Eisenhauer.

Jules Fisher is considered the "gold standard" of the artform, conceiving and designing concurrently for Broadway, film, the music industry, and digital animation. In a Broadway career spanning more than 60 years, he has designed more than a hundred plays and musicals and has been honored with nine Tony Awards and 25 nominations. Among his celebrated Broadway designs are the original versions of *Hair*, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, *Angels in*

*America*, and *The Iceman Cometh*.

Film lighting designs have been seen on *Dreamgirls* with director Bill Condon, on Rob Marshall's Best Picture winner *Chicago*, and Richard Linklater's *School of Rock*, among other projects. His musical lighting scenes have been conceived for CG environments in *Beauty and the Beast* and *Aladdin*, but also for live acts like David Bowie, Kiss, Whitney Houston and The Rolling Stones.

In addition to entertainment, Fisher is a founder of the architectural lighting design firm Fisher Marantz Stone. Perhaps most notably they have created the now iconic "Tribute in Light" at the World Trade Center Memorial.

Fisher holds a bachelor's degree in Drama from Carnegie Mellon University, as well as a 2013 Honorary Doctorate. His hobby and vice are a lifelong interest in "magic", leading him to consult for many of the top magicians including the late Ricky Jay, David Blaine, Harry Blackstone Jr. What better cause to wonder and amaze? 🎩





### NEW SHOWLIGHT SPEAKERS ONLINE VIDEOS

Like a reverse advent calendar the Showlight organisation keeps releasing Speaker Videos from the 2025 event in Dijon, France.

New additions are Roger Simonsz and Peter Macdonald, displaying the diversity of Showlight's speaker topics: This time Cinematography, a genre that was well represented in 2025 with presentations from the highest number of film and television LDs to date

Roger Simonsz BSC: Schrödinger's dimmer; controlling the uncontrollable. A graduate, and now fellow, of Rose Bruford college, Roger has been part of Showlight since 2005. Of his presentation on working with light outdoors, he says "It's very difficult in film to do the kind of slow lighting changes we do so easily in

theatre. Using examples from Engrenages/ Spiral as well as Piper we will explore how to achieve control on location, in daylight, while cueing the sun, with the help of Schrödinger's dimmer."

Peter Macdonald BSC, DGA, DGGB: A Life in Cinema with Peter Macdonald. Showlight felt privileged to host multi award-winning industry veteran, Peter Macdonald, who brought Showlight 2025 to a close with an informal chat in which he shared memories and anecdotes from his life in cinema spanning more than 70 years. Peter worked with director Sir Laurence Olivier on four films as camera operator and got his break on the 1958 film *A Night to Remember* with cinematographer Geoffrey Unsworth, with whom he collaborated for the next 25 years on *Cabaret*, *Superman I & II*, *A Bridge Too Far*, *Cromwell*, *Excalibur* and evolved into a second unit director for *Batman 1 & 4*, *Empire Strikes Back*, the first four *Harry Potters*, *Guardians of the Galaxy*, *Wolverine* and *The Bourne Ultimatum*.

These videos are part of a series of periodic releases, with more Speaker presentation videos going live as Showlight moves towards the next edition.

[www.showlight.org/videos](http://www.showlight.org/videos)



### FREELANCERS MAKE THEATRE WORK - SURVEY RESULTS

Founded in 2020 as a direct response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the UK wide grassroots organisation has published what will be, for the time being, their last report on the 200,000+ self-employed and freelance workers who make up 70% of the UK theatre workforce. Available from their website, and compiled by a team including analysts from the University of Essex, the report makes sober reading: "Findings show that freelancers' pay and working conditions are not getting better - in fact, they are getting worse," with data suggesting "that 44% of respondents earned less than the 2024 UK National Living Wage".

"There is a pervasive view that freelancers in the arts choose this lifestyle 'for the love of it', with no access to maternity pay, sick pay or a workplace pension."

[Freelancersmaketheatrework.com](http://Freelancersmaketheatrework.com)



### Backup Tech – The Village Fete, returns on Thursday 9th July at its new location, Whilton Mill Karting Circuit, Daventry.

Backup Chair, Lee Dennison, says: "A new location, a fresh new look and feel, even more ways to get involved, and there is still time to secure your place and be part of what is shaping up to be an even bigger, bolder and better event."

This summer, the fete takes over Whilton Mill Karting Circuit, Daventry – a nationally recognised motorsport venue offering the space, facilities, and atmosphere to deliver the biggest Village Fete yet. For the first time, attendees will have access to a three-hour karting challenge on a UK National Karting Circuit, expanded capacity and improved facilities, more activities and ways to get involved, and overnight camping that turns the event into a true industry gathering.

"This year we're introducing both team and individual entries for The Sporting Pass Challenge, which is a chance to test your inner gamekeeper with axe throwing and clay pigeon shooting," says Backup Chair, Lee Dennison. "It's perfect

for those with a sharp eye, a steady hand, and perhaps just a hint of landed gentry in the bloodline - tweed is optional but encouraged."

There will also be familiar favourites including a newly revamped 5 Star Cases Flight Case Challenge, the ever-competitive Veg Off, the always-impressive Bake Off, Best Dressed Villager and, back by popular demand, the DJ Off.

"This is not just another industry event," Lee adds. "It's a chance for industry friends to get together, enjoy a genuinely fun day out, support an important cause, and be part of something people will be talking about long after the Fete is over."

At last year's event, over £50000 were raised for Backup's program of medical grants, wellbeing support and hardship funds.

For tickets and more information: [www.backuptech.uk/backup-village-fete-2026](http://www.backuptech.uk/backup-village-fete-2026).

Backup also continues its campaign to educate freelancers about the new government rules for 'Making Tax Digital'. The webinar can be accessed at [www.backuptech.uk/download-areas/publicity-and-campaign](http://www.backuptech.uk/download-areas/publicity-and-campaign)

**24/7 Wellbeing Helpline 0800 464 7068 [www.backuptech.uk](http://www.backuptech.uk)**

## THE VILLAGE FETE



## ABTT THEATRE SHOW

In June, the ABTT Theatre Show returned to Alexandra Palace. After battling biblical weather and clambering the steep peaks of Muswell Hill, I made it into Alexandra Palace's monumental hall last Wednesday morning where 160 exhibitors, as well as speakers and attendees had gathered for the first day of the ABTT show. Industry titans like White Light and Tait exhibited next to smaller innovators like Mushroom Lighting, which impressed with profiles no longer than a pinky finger complete with shutters and top hats. There were fast flowing rivers of thick low fog and towering geysers of CO2 shot from cannons that reached the dome of the Palace, presented by Just FX, an Aladdin's cave of goodies spread out by Flints' (complete with Dirty Down Snot and Gore) and of course, some pretty snazzy lights, including the gorgeous Svobopatt by Robe made in tribute to Svoboda's iconic original.

Beyond the gear, there were unexpected perks. I squeezed in an ad hoc hearing test administered by RB Health and Safety and received some brilliant help from the team at the ETC stand who managed to fix a file problem for me on the spot when I took my laptop to them – nothing like being in the room with the people with all the

answers when you need a hand with programming woes. It was also good to see working parents represented by Pipa, Parents and Carers in Performing arts and a dedicated room for babies and parents.

The Coffee Chat Stage (pictured) hosted a conversation with Bryan Raven, sustainability champion and ex Chief of White Light and Tait's Ted Moore, whose relationship and careers span over 30 years. They met working on the inaugural *Miss Saigon* in 1989, a show which bankrolled White Light for some years and launched Ted's career in automation. In an interesting parallel with another talk at the show about Learning Lighting, they spoke of the importance of mentorship in shaping career trajectories and development (More in the autumn



Focus).

As can only be expected when two theatre vets get together, the anecdotes flew freely. I particularly liked hearing Ted's reaction to getting *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* off the ground on opening night: "Bloody hell we pulled that off", a slogan that feels like it should be emblazoned the back of every designer and technicians' t-shirt for all time. **Sammy Kissin** 🍷

## OBITUARIES



### JON CADBURY

ALPD Chair Johanna Town writes: "I am very sorry to hear the sad news of the passing of Jon Cadbury, and our thoughts are with his family at this sad time.

Jon was a devoted Lighting practitioner from theatre to live events and managed some of the world's greatest live events including the 2012 Olympics. Jon's early career took him to Chichester Festival Theatre, The Round House and Rainbow Theatre. Before moving to the supply industries, as Zenith lighting, VariLite and PRG where his passion, knowledge and commitment left a lasting mark on his clients and productions.

I was lucky enough to do several shows with Jon as my account manager over the years at PRG, he was always so supportive

and collaborative in making the show work and finding the right kit for the job. Over the years Jon and PRG had often seemed to me to be there for large shows and rock and roll, but Jon always put me at my ease and made me feel that every show was important no matter how big or how small.

He had a rare and beautiful quality that made us one feel special, he always knew what you were up to when we met and when I became Chair of the ALPD he welcomed my appointment as an important time for the association and the industry. I would like to thank him again for his support, Jon you were a true gentleman of our industry and will be truly missed by many."

### ANDERS LARSSON

For many in the ALPD Anders Larsson was the connection to all things lighting in Scandinavia, especially Scandlight. The Swedish Illuminator Association shares this: It is with great sadness that we announce that our chairman Anders Larsson has quickly passed away.

For many of us, Anders was more than a colleague - he was a friend, a driving force and an obvious center of our association. Since the start, he has carried the vision of strengthening the role of the luminaries in

Sweden, and his engagement has shaped everything we do to this day.

As a teacher at Stockholm's Art College, he constantly met new generations of students with curiosity, sharpness and warmth.

Anders was also an important link between Sweden and the outside world, through our international network and collaborations with, among others, STTF and OISTAT. But just as significant was his will to gather us around the light, in



conversation, in museums, in lecture rooms or on travels. His life was characterized by a strong commitment to his work and to those of us who were around him. Our thoughts are with his closest friends and all the people whose lives he touched. 🍷

EQUITY

## “Stop AI stealing the show!”

Equity’s campaign to protect the rights of performers and creators is gathering pace.

Follow the link below for more information, how to contact your MP, to use the AI toolkit and to help better understand how AI might negatively affect our workflow.

If you feel there are ways in which AI will take a job and earnings away from you, please get in touch via [zoespurrlighting@gmail.com](mailto:zoespurrlighting@gmail.com).

For more information on Equity’s campaigns regarding AI please visit [www.equity.org.uk/campaigns-policy/stop-ai-stealing-the-show](http://www.equity.org.uk/campaigns-policy/stop-ai-stealing-the-show)



### PLASA LONDON PREVIEW

The gods have listened. For the upcoming PLASA London show, the Olympia venue will shine in a beautiful new dress. The £1.3 billion renewal and building work will be complete, promises the organisation: “From June 2026, Olympia is set to welcome a new wave of



openings, including a curated mix of bars and restaurants under its new rooftop Canopy, the 3,800-capacity British Airways ARC live music and entertainment venue, and new public spaces designed to bring fresh energy to the wider site. As PLASA Show continues to bring the entertainment technology industry together, Olympia’s transformation adds a fresh sense of momentum.” Photo: Olympia-Sky-Garden-Mezz illustration

[www.plasa.org](http://www.plasa.org)



The more intimate, personal little sibling of the London PLASA show succeeded again in drawing the crowds to the Royal Armouries in Leeds.

While London is a hit with big displays and spectacular new demonstrations, Leeds seems to favour networking and connections with its somehow cosier atmosphere. At the end, it’s down to square metres: Nobody gets lost, and eventually everybody meets everybody!

With Focus North being the opener of exhibition season, it was felt that the manufacturers seem to hold back the big announcements and innovations for its London big brother. This might have to do with space. Nevertheless, trends were clearly visible: Profiles get brighter, with more multipurpose features (especially extreme zooms), all LED washes try to incorporate their own unique eye-candy gimmick, and video is everywhere: With seemingly every new West End production being backed by an all singing, all dancing LED screen, hardware in all shapes and sizes mingles more than ever with lighting equipment in search of applications.

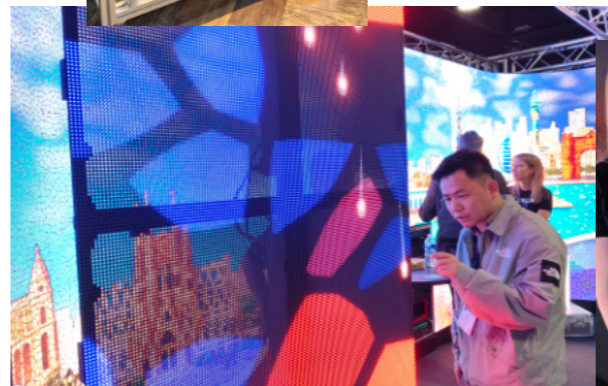
Arnim Friess



Clockwise from bottom centre: Anika Lauth from Lang demonstrating their adjustable curving LED screen, GLP’s small but beautiful demo cart, Royal Armouries entrance, the show floor, rainbow eyecandy from Chauvet and ...



... a PLASA Leeds speciality: Exit through the pub. Photos A.Friess



## How do we cope with career anxiety, imposter syndrome and social media pressures in our modern creative industry?

The idea originated from a conversation with fellow Lighting Designer Kate Bonney, whilst we were working on a Christmas lights trail at Westonbirt Arboretum. Does your 'big career break' need to happen before a certain age? Does working in a small to mid-scale black box bubble stop you dreaming of a ginormous West End project? What does career success actually mean, how does each creative measure theirs? No doubt there are LDs eager to push themselves to the limits, regularly working on large scale productions and gaining critical acclaim. Others might be content with earning a modest income, doing a job they enjoy and perhaps prioritise a balance between professional and social/family commitments.

This got me thinking about things like imposter syndrome and career anxiety, which I have discussed with colleagues in the past. What if, when that big job comes knocking, you feel you are not up to the task? I was curious about what part social media had to play in all of this. Whilst it is wonderful to stay connected in an often isolated industry, could viewing too many spectacular production shots and sub-

sequent award ceremonies trigger mental health issues as people are drawn into the trap of comparing their career to others?

I wanted to explore further and PLASA were keen to add this as a seminar to their programme, with multiple voices contributing different views and experiences. Professional LDs and ALPD members Eleanor Higgins and Jason Addison were keen to be on the panel, and plan structure and content (Kate Bonney sadly had other commitments).

So, in an open and friendly atmosphere, we proposed five questions

and encouraged the audience to chime in throughout. The first question asked the panel which particular achievement in their career made them feel successful. Interestingly, both highlighted experiences of returning to work in places where they had previously undertaken more junior roles. Jason described this as "coming full circle", whilst Elanor pointed out that "life is not linear" and so some of your

proudest achievements may actually be on so-called smaller projects.

The second question asked the panel to talk about when they had experienced imposter syndrome or career anxiety, and useful mechanisms to cope. Elanor recounted how even the great Richard Pilbrow described suffering from imposter syndrome - if he felt it, then surely it shouldn't be exceptional for the rest of us!

Jason reflected on some of his experiences where he had "got inside his own head", particularly when working with other specialists such as programmers or electricians, where he

sometimes felt like an imposter and his knowledge in certain areas was lacking. Both advised practising calmness under pressure, with Elanor raising the swan analogy whereby we are swimming gracefully on the surface, whilst deep down we are frantically paddling to stay afloat. Jason suggested going for a walk outside of the space, taking some deep breaths and trusting the process. Elanor concluded

# WHAT QUANTIFIES CAREER SUCCESS?

**ALPD PLASA Leeds Seminar poses existential questions**  
By Joe Price



From left Jason Addison, Elanor Higgins, Joe Price. Photos A.Friess

how she had found life working as a female lighting practitioner at the start of her career compared to now, and that the fact she had enjoyed a long and stable career made it easier for her to disregard anxious thoughts.

Question number three raised the topic of how to find balance between career commitments and social and family life. Elanor discussed how she and her partner had always had an understanding that evening and weekend work "was the norm" but that she was "still trying to work on the balance!" Jason cited similar struggles and pointed out that it is difficult not to prioritise work at certain times given the nature of production schedules. This



we should strive to find better solutions for.

Social media was then raised in question four as we queried how it impacted perceptions of career success, as well as tools to ensure it does not negatively impact mental health and wellbeing in our industry. Both noted that social media posts nearly always show the good parts of a job, rather than all the difficulties people

led to further conversations about the immense challenges of finding cover for LDs and other freelancers when personal difficulties arise, an industry-wide issue that

will have encountered to reach the final product. Elanor discussed SHOMO (fear of missing out on working on a show) and highlighted that our contracts often now require us to post content in order to help promote the show. She then recommended maintaining a good overall life perspective and to avoid panicking during the quieter patches of work and instead just enjoy the down time. Jason had some excellent advice: focus more on what you are doing rather than scrolling through the work of others and suggested looking back through your own feed and photo library to remember the journey you have been on.

The final question was simply 'What does career success mean to you?' and we all agreed that finding an equilibrium between doing work that you enjoy, which provides enough income for you to be comfortable, whilst also enjoying a healthy work-life balance was the key to feeling like your career was successful.

We had attendees from drama schools, lighting manufacturers and hire companies as well as students and freelancers so this is clearly a topic that spans the entire industry's interests. We received some lovely feedback and it would be great to continue this conversation in the future. 🍷

**Held at the end of the ABTT Theatre Show at Alexandra Palace, the 2026 Profile Awards took place in the venue's extraordinary 1875 Theatre.**

On the surface, the awards recognise excellence in lighting, but the gathering also served as a reminder that they have become something much more significant: a unique opportunity for the lighting community to come together, applaud achievement, encourage new talent and reflect on the breadth of work being created across theatre, television and live events.

## MORE THAN A LIST OF WINNERS

**Reflections on the 2026 Profile Awards**  
By David Howe

The theatre itself, wonderfully atmospheric and often described as being in a state of "arrested decay", provided a fitting backdrop for an evening dedicated to visual storytelling. Guests gathered for a pre-awards reception before taking their seats beneath the venue's historic architecture. During his welcome, Durham Marengi reflected on the remarkable history of the building, including the hidden spaces that remained

concealed from public view for many years.

As designers, we do not often get to be in the same space as each other at the same time.

That was perhaps one of the most enjoyable aspects of the evening. Conversations flowed between theatre lighting designers, television lighting directors, programmers, production electricians, manufacturers, suppliers, students and educators. More than 200 people gathered, not to sell products or promote services, but to spend time with colleagues and acknowledge the work being created across theatre, television and live events.

Talking to people throughout the evening, it was striking to see such a heady mix of creative, production, technical and supplier representatives. Yet despite the experience gathered in the room, people were still making new connections, sharing ideas and discovering common ground.

That sense of community is perhaps one of the most important aspects of the Pro-

file Awards. Our profession has trade shows, exhibitions, product demonstrations and conferences throughout the year, but very few occasions where the sole purpose is to recognise lighting and the people who create it. Without the vision and determination of Durham and Jennie Marengi, there would be no equivalent annual gathering of this scale dedicated specifically to theatre and television lighting.

Over the years, Durham and Jennie have built something that reflects the entire lighting profession. Newcomers beginning professional careers, established practitioners producing outstanding work, behind-the-scenes contributors helping ambitious creative ideas become reality, and industry figures whose influence spans decades all found a place within the evening's programme.

Even the trophy itself reflects that heritage. The award presented to recipients is a Patt 23M – for younger readers, a miniature version of the classic 1953 Patt 23 profile lantern – a fitting symbol for an event devoted entirely to lighting.

The Student Virtual Lighting Design Award, a particular passion project of Durham's, demonstrates how the awards continue to look forward as well as back. Students were challenged to create and



**Alexandra Palace. Host Durham Marengi. All Event Photos: David Stewart**

programme a concert lighting sequence within a virtual Royal Albert Hall environment, using many of the same visualisation and programming techniques now employed across theatre, television and live events. This year's winner, **James Levy**, (below, with Corletta Opuku from CAST) was recognised for both technical skill and imagination. Alongside this, the New-



comer Award highlighted emerging talent, with **Lili Warden** receiving recognition for her rapidly developing career and commitment to learning through observation, assisting and practical experience.

Looking beyond the recipients themselves, the awards also offer a rare opportunity to hear how lighting is viewed and discussed by others.

The theatre section provided a fascinat-

ing insight into how lighting is viewed by those outside the profession. The judging panel, chaired by critic David Benedict, sees hundreds of productions every year. In his introduction, he spoke passionately about excellence, arguing that audiences are drawn not by relevance but by exceptional work. Importantly, he also highlighted how the awards have increased critical awareness of lighting design over the years, encouraging reviewers to discuss an artform that can sometimes be overlooked.

One observation from the judges' remarks was that the judging season effectively runs between each ceremony. In other words, the work being created now is already being seen, discussed and considered. For designers, programmers and production teams, that is both encouraging and slightly sobering: the visibility of our work often begins long before any shortlist is announced.

Importantly, the judges are asked to consider the lighting on its own terms. As David Benedict observed, they may dislike other aspects of a production, but if the lighting has stayed with them, that work remains in contention. As he put it, "we can loathe every other aspect of a lousy show – but if we loved the lighting, that's good enough for us."

Reading through the theatre citations afterwards revealed a consistent theme. As David Benedict and his fellow judges described the year's work, they did not focus on equipment or technology. Instead, they spoke of designers "making light an active dance partner", creating "light vividly suspended between night and day", bringing "intelligent and imaginative problem-solving", shaping work through "wit, rhythm and storytelling", and "making lighting the highly expressive third character". In one citation they praised "power, passion and utterly unique propulsion". The language repeatedly focused on what the lighting contributed to the storytelling rather than how it was technically achieved.

Another striking aspect of the theatre nominations was the sheer breadth of work represented. Across the theatre awards, it was not the scale of the production that the judges responded to, but the creativity behind the work. David Benedict and his fellow judges praised **Chris Davey's** *Crime and Punishment* (right, top) for "using everything from hand-held flashlights and angle-poise lamps to build intensity and dynamism" in a small-scale touring production, whilst **Jon Clark's** *Evita* (right, below) was recognised for bringing "power, passion and utterly unique propulsion" to the London Palladium stage. For students



Photo Andrew Billington



Photo Marc Brenner

and emerging designers in particular, it was a valuable reminder that great lighting is not defined by budget, fixture count or scale. What mattered throughout the citations was imagination, storytelling and the ability to use light in service of the production.

The television section, adjudicated by the STLD panel chaired by Stuart Gain, highlighted work ranging from *Strictly Come*

*Dancing* and *MasterChef: The Professionals* to *The Capture* and the 2026 Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony. Whilst the productions themselves could hardly be more diverse, the common thread was the creative and technical teamwork required to deliver them successfully.

For theatre practitioners, the television section offered a useful reminder of how many creative and technical challenges are shared between the two disciplines. It was also noticeable how many programmers, associates and production names now appear across both worlds, moving between theatre, television, live events and broadcast work with increasing ease.

Collaboration emerged as one of the defining themes of the night. Acceptance speeches consistently acknowledged associates, programmers, gaffers, production electricians, operators and wider creative teams. Great lighting may often be associated with an individual designer or lighting director, but the awards served as a powerful reminder that the best work is almost always the product of talented people working together.

The relationship between theatre and television also ran clearly through the evening. **Bruno Poet** and his team were recognised for the *Winter Olympics Opening Ceremony*, yet Bruno's career comfort-

ably spans theatre, opera, live events and broadcast work. Across both sections there were numerous examples of practitioners moving between disciplines, bringing skills and experiences from one area into another.

That connection was perhaps best embodied by **Bernie Davis**, recipient of the Richard Pilbrow Lifetime Recognition Award (below right, with Theo Farrington of TP). Bernie has long been respected within both television and theatre circles, not only for his work on some of the



world's most significant live broadcasts, but also for championing the translation of theatrical lighting designs to screen and television capture. His standing ovation

was one of the evening's most heartfelt moments, reflecting the affection and respect he has earned across multiple generations of practitioners.

Another particularly warm reception greeted **Howard Eaton** (below right, with Pete Marshall of PRG) as he received the Brian Croft Behind the Scenes Award. The award acknowledges those whose work often takes place away from the spotlight it-



self, enabling designers and production teams to realise ambitious creative ideas. Howard's technical ingenuity, problem-solving and willingness to help others have influenced countless productions and individuals over many years.

The Special Merit Award, sponsored by AC Entertainment Technologies, was presented posthumously to **Alan Bermingham** (1937–2025), with his son and daughter collecting the award on his behalf. Bermingham quite literally wrote the book on location lighting, helping generations of students, trainees and professionals understand the practical and technical challenges of lighting for single-camera work. It was another reminder that the Profile Awards honour not only current productions, but also those whose knowledge and influence continue to shape the profession.

Together, the Lifetime Recognition, Behind the Scenes and Special Merit awards felt especially important. They reminded the room that our profession is built not only on visible design work, but also on legacy, invention, mentorship, technical excellence and the quieter contributions that allow ambitious ideas to become possible.

One of the evening's lighter moments came when programmer Laura Choules accepted on behalf of **Paul Pyant**, who was unable to attend as he was in technical rehearsals for another production. Reading

Paul's acceptance speech, she found herself having to thank herself as part of the team, prompting laughter throughout the room and perfectly capturing the supportive spirit of the occasion.

Ambersphere sponsored the Welcome Drinks reception for the third year running. Principal Sponsor Ayrton's support extended beyond the ceremony itself to the bar and post-awards barbecue, helping create opportunities for colleagues from across the profession to meet, reconnect and share the occasion together. Alongside the many category sponsors, their support helped ensure the gathering remained much more than a presentation of trophies.

Looking around the room, it was hard not to conclude that the Profile Awards have become something far more valuable than an annual roll-call of recipients. They bring together students, newcomers, designers, programmers, manufacturers, suppliers and industry pioneers in a way that few other events do. The trophies matter, but so do the conversations, the encouragement, the friendships and the shared appreciation of great work.

That is why the Profile Awards continue to matter. They are, in every sense, much more than a list of winners. 🍷



From Top:  
**Lizzie Powell Citizens**  
photo by Mihaela Bodlovic.

**Paul Pyant Summerfolk**  
photos by Johan Persson

**Briony Berning of Ayrton and Durham Marengi,**  
issuing a cheque of £3000  
to the charity Backup Tech.





## The Profile Awards Theatre Awardees 2026

The Theatre section of The Profile Awards 2026 was judged by eight of the UK's leading theatre, dance and opera critics chaired by David Benedict. Pictures clockwise from top left.:

Outstanding Achievement in Theatre sponsored by Chauvet Professional (with Paul Evans):  
**Chris Davey** for *Crime and Punishment*, Cast, Doncaster.

Outstanding Achievement in Dance sponsored by Elation (with Graham Hill):  
**Panagiotis Tomaras** for *In A Landscape*, Sadler's Wells.

Outstanding Achievement in Theatre Award sponsored by Encore (with Tom Mowat):  
**Joshua Gadsby** for *Miss Myrtle's Garden*, Bush Theatre.

Outstanding Achievement in Opera sponsored by ETC (with Darren Beckley):  
**Jake Wiltshire** for *Don Giovanni*, Waterperry Opera.

Outstanding Achievement in Theatre sponsored by Vari-Lite:  
**Paul Pyant** for *Summerfolk*, Olivier, National Theatre (not pictured).

Outstanding Achievement in Musical Theatre sponsored by GLP (with Matthew Powell):  
**Aideen Malone** for *Into the Woods*, The Bridge Theatre.

Outstanding Achievement in Opera sponsored by Fix8 Group (with Neil Trennel):  
**Trui Malten** for *Imeneo*, Cambridge Handel Opera Company.

Outstanding Achievement in Musical Theatre sponsored by AED UK (with Patrick Stride):  
**Jon Clark** for *Evita*, London Palladium.

Outstanding New Talent in Theatre sponsored by MA Lighting (with Stephen Baird-Smith):  
**Clancy Flynn** for *Slant*, Sadler's Wells.

Outstanding Year in Theatre sponsored by SLX:  
**Lizzie Powell** for *The Flying Dutchman*, Welsh National Opera; *The Seagull*, Royal Lyceum, Edinburgh; *Waiting for Godot*, Citizens' Theatre, Glasgow (not pictured).

[www.profileawards.com](http://www.profileawards.com)

THE PROFILE AWARDS 2026

**On 24th February 2026, technical theatre education enthusiasts gathered in the Royal Opera House's Linbury Theatre. The afternoon was co-hosted by Chichester Festival Theatre (CFT) and the ALPD, to draw back the curtain on inspiring young people.**

CFT shared their model for youth technical theatre training, which has been inspiring young technicians, stage managers, and creatives for 18 years. While eyeing the pre-show slideshow, I was surprised to see just how many CFYT alumni I knew or have had the pleasure of working with. Graduates from this programme can be seen working all across the industry and the country. It's about time we heard how their programme has been quietly, consistently driving talent into the industry!

The panel consisted of: Sally Garner-Gibbons (Apprenticeships Manager and Technical Youth Theatre Co-Ordinator, CFT), Emma Chapman (Lighting Designer, ALPD), Matthew Hawksworth (Head of Children & Young People's Programme, CFT), Georgia Dacey (CFYT Alumnus, Freelance Stage Manager), Joe Jenner (CFYT Alumnus, Freelance Production Manager), and myself - Josie Ireland (Chair of ALPD Student Working Group).

The event aimed to offer a glimpse into CFT's technical youth theatre training model, the challenges they overcame to get to this point and the distinct positive impact it continues to have. Sally and Emma devised this event after realising that the barrier likely preventing other venues from hosting similar programmes is

## TECHNICAL YOUTH THEATRE SYMPOSIUM

**Chichester Festival Theatre and ALPD shared model to inspire young people**

**By Josie Ireland**

the unknown - the risk. With candid details and open sharing, they want to make the programme more accessible for venues who have tried or been wanting to create their own educational project.

Emma and Sally opened the event with impassioned speeches about the importance of introducing young people to technical theatre. This was supported by alumni testimonials praising how such a

creative, welcoming community impacted them as teenagers, and has continued to have a positive effect in their lives. The informal CYFT alumni network is a safe & supportive space, offering advice and sharing memories. Past members also frequently go back to CFT to work on their shows, or offer workshops to the current cohort, strengthening the web of support and fostered skill.

Matthew explained the logistical details and required admin with just as much passion, especially while delivering the findings from CFT's 2023 Social Impact Report. The key survey results had CFYT participants reporting higher confidence, social skills, and an overall positive impact on their mental health, echoed by their parents' responses. It's a fantastic read; to read this report yourself, visit CFT's

website: [www.cft.org.uk/social-impact](http://www.cft.org.uk/social-impact)

In my role in the ALPD Students Working Group, I was excited to bring my perspective. I hear first hand from current university students about how they got their start in theatre. Almost unanimously, students credit their current practice to an inspiring teacher or watching a particularly



excellent production. As a former bursary student, having barely been to the theatre as a child, I owe my career and livelihood to my school's technical theatre club.

Providing opportunities for young people of all backgrounds has never been more important, in light of recent arts funding cuts, especially considering the proportion of UK residents who experience a financial barrier to arts & culture. CFYT, among others, offers bursary positions to local residents, while some programmes offer sliding scale payment schemes.

The floor was then opened for guests to ask questions, raise what's worked about their initiatives, or share the challenges they've had trying to get one up and running. The beauty of the whole event was in the sharing of trial-and-error results. From the CFT staff to the audience contributions, the room shared their experiences, and the many different shapes programmes could take. People compared thoughts on variables such as intake sizes, GCSE logistics, and getting creative with limited available equipment.

We heard from venue representatives in the audience who run half term clubs, or summer courses, or who are ready to open a technical youth theatre if only the funding would come through. This is an

age-old issue, though particularly prevalent at the moment. Producers and Participation Leads have found it difficult to convince their management that a programme like this is a worthwhile investment. 'Investment' being the best word for it, as you do not see immediate returns. The growth of a community takes time and continued backing, however the pool of skilled, passionate and loyal freelancers you slowly develop is unrivalled. Providing educational opportunities in areas of sparse arts provisions can also open the door to new funding streams.

What the funding bodies can't deny is that there's clearly a real appetite for schemes like this. One provider said that their course with 25 spots ultimately



**Left to right: Matthew Hawksworth, Josie Ireland, Emma Chapman, Joe Jenner, Georgia Dacey, Sally Garner-Gibbons**  
**Photos: Nick Moran**

garnered 700 applications. Though this brings the strain of application admin, it is proof that the demand is out there. "If you build it, they will come" as the old saying goes.

Furthermore, the audience was unanimous in expressing the importance of programmes like this, especially in this isolating era of social media and phone use. I am queer, neurodivergent, and Gen-Z; isolation came naturally as I was growing up. It was through my school's theatre that I found people who spoke a similar language, and we grew together through creativity and collaboration. So much of this opportunity is also in the programme's leader: someone who is passionate about inspiring young people and confident in pointing them onward towards their next steps. Sally spoke about this: When she started CFYT she was a Stage Manager and CSM; she wasn't confident in teaching lighting and sound. But she did understand how to lead young people and create a safe space to learn and try new things. This attitude and ability are the only essentials for your programme leader.

If any readers are wanting to lead their own technical youth theatre, do reach out to Sally or the ALPD. After 18 years of weekly sessions, Sally has a veritable encyclopedia of activities that can be done

with minimal materials. Meanwhile, the ALPD and its members can help facilitate or can teach you what you need to know to run your own lighting workshops. I would also like to give a shout-out to the ABTT's School Theatre Support Committee (STSC), who are a network of technicians that work in schools regularly and through ad hoc theatre workshops. They also created the Performance Support Award, an industry-informed curriculum that gives students a recognised technical theatre qualification alongside or in the absence of a Drama GCSE/A-Level. Any ABTT members out there who would like to offer their services, do reach out to the STSC for more information. Furthermore, if any readers who are also parents/carers know of a school or AmDram group without formal tech support, they can help!

Also offering support on school shows is Learning Stages, who I had the pleasure of speaking to at the symposium's mixer. They offer technical theatre & production management support in schools, spending as much time as possible in state schools or other institutions who don't have the infrastructure to support shows alone. There are several other programmes offering show-running services across the country - these are all doing vital work in



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showcasing offstage careers to young people. Also garnering a lot of praise at the event were INNIT, providing therapy-informed theatre experience in Salford, and Backstage Niche, who support people from global majority backgrounds to find backstage careers, as well as guiding them as they enter the industry. Meanwhile, The Lowry's Backstage Company offers a year-long intensive through half-term workshops and venue placements, an in-venue model that works differently from CFT's but with similarly great results. They also employ a strategy of giving 'permission to play', a key element in working with people who might be hesitant to explore creativity or new activities, which is also utilised in immersive and interactive events.

One key takeaway from the symposium is that, despite the amount of programmes already doing great work around the UK, there still aren't enough. Though groups for young performers exist in almost every town and city, we should be offering similar provisions for young people who do not want to be on stage. Venues who host both performing and technical groups have attested that the additional admin of adding a new branch is absolutely worth it.

While debriefing with Emma, we felt quite overwhelmed at the mission ahead

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of us. Thousands of students and young people could benefit from exposure to offstage theatre roles - it teaches valuable skills of collaboration and creativity, as well as signposting viable careers to people who perhaps didn't know they existed. When thinking about where to go from here, it feels a little like David and Goliath. Therefore, we have broken down next steps that, much like the symposium, should make our mission more accessible.

We therefore have three requests to make of our Focus readers:

**Are you interested in hosting your own youth technical theatre programme, or have you already started one?** Let us know! We would love to bring interested parties together on a video call to demystify the process even further. If you attended the symposium, Sally will be reaching out to ask if you'd like to be on a mailing list for discussions like these.

**Are you a venue renovating your inventory and not sure where to donate your old or unused fixtures and equipment?** Let us know! You can be matched with schools, amdram groups, and youth theatres who might benefit.

**Are you passionate about providing arts education, but not in a position to**

**practically provide?** Please complete the ABTT Upskilling Survey! This survey will be used to inform discussions with the government and training providers about necessary changes to training for offstage theatre roles. See the ABTT website for more details (you do not need to be a ABTT member to complete the survey): [www.abtt.org.uk/future-of-technical-theatre-training](http://www.abtt.org.uk/future-of-technical-theatre-training)



If you're interested in being on the technical youth theatre mailing list, or would like to discuss the ins and outs of youth technical theatre training, do email Sally. She is a fount of knowledge and generosity.

**Sally Garner-Gibbons:**  
[sallyann.gg@cft.org.uk](mailto:sallyann.gg@cft.org.uk)

The reminder we all need is that providing just one young person with a sense of community, a creative outlet, or a potential career is a job well done. We desperately need to keep this conversation going. Many thanks to the team at the Royal Opera House for accommodating us, and a huge thanks to Sally and Emma for inspiring such a brilliant event! 🍷

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**In these times we are expecting behind each technical product a global chain of components and labour, and lighting instruments are no exception. Technology gets shifted between countries, sometimes continents, to where material is stocked or assembly costs are low.**

So when Robe opened its door to offices and production facilities in the Czech Republic, inviting in a large group of lighting designers, ALPD members and production folk from the UK, one of the first questions was: Where are all the parts of a Robe lighting fixture made? "Well, here!" comes the slightly puzzled answer from Jiri, our guide. And so proved the whirlwind tour, led by David Catterall of Robe UK, through workshops, assembly halls, stock warehouses and test rooms. It turns out, it is possible to design, manufacture, pack and distribute a product in Europe for a competitive world market. Arriving from the UK, a country which seems to have generally lost its ability to make stuff, this came as an eyeopener.

## FROM START TO FINISH

**Members of the ALPD, the lighting and production community visit Robe factory**  
By Arnim Friess

At Robe, you can literally see sheets of metal and bags of plastic pellets entering one side, and (fully recyclable, plant based ink printed) boxes with finished lights leaving the other end.

Robe's Dioflex subsidiary takes care of making the inhouse designed PCBs, with current machines able to print up to 40,000 components per hour. Testing is equally automated, handling hundreds of parameters at a time; all under the watchful eye of roving expert engineers.

The injection moulded lamp housings, lenses, fittings, modules, down to the gobos and dichroic glasses are made and assembled by a workforce which seems to occupy a good slice of the regional population. Jiri stated that "the local unemployment rate is 0.2%," and there are programs for further qualifications, gym and staff events, and, as we can attest, an excellent canteen to feed the shifts of hundreds.

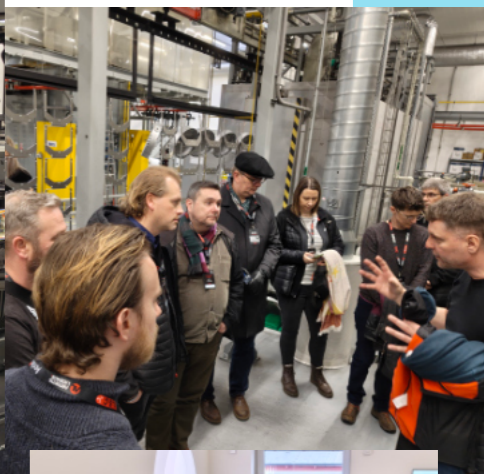
In the next warehouse, climatized and dustproof-sealed, cleaning and coating adds an extra 5% brightness to a lens, and added protection against condensation in-

dures against those extreme conditions, be it +50 degrees outside in Dubai, or -50 at the Winter Olympics.

In the outdoor test area, all high ingress protection rated instruments (IP 65) are subjected to the sometimes punishing local weather, as testing continues up to 2.5 years. And if this wasn't enough, there are indoor chambers with water sprayers, pressure and shake tests, and saltwater jets - ideal for those units joining a cruise on high seas. All test results are published on the website.

Every single step gets documented, scanned, photographed, for every single unit, until the last step of putting it into a box, including a full life cycle analysis for each product. A new spare parts warehouse can hold 2500 pallets. We had a chance to step inside, but once it's operational, nobody can enter while robots whizz around at 4 meters per second. Modern factory production needs to be optimised at each level, decisions made what to automate and what to do by hand. Shifts and production lines need to be flexible, optimised for the steps of assembling each product. It's clear Robe plans to be competitive for a long time to come.

Final stop of a memorable day: The show-room, showing off all products in a glossy spectacle. 🍷



**Clockwise from top left: Visitors welcome , profiles assembly, paint-shop, testing each unit, injection molds, David Catterall demonstrating the exchangeable LED module in the show-room. Photos A. Friess**



**Focus** So, what are you working on at the moment?

**Sam** I'm currently working on my final show of the year - and my final show at university - which is very exciting. It's a production called *Nell Gwyn*, about King Charles II and his reign in the 1600s. It's a comedy that was in the West End around 2019 and won an Olivier Award for Best Comedy. I'm co-lighting designing it, which has been a really interesting experience.

**Focus** Can you paint a picture of the space you're working in?

**Sam** It's a small venue in Bristol called the Tobacco Factory - very low ceiling, but really lovely. Quite enclosed. As an audience member, you always feel as though you're part of the action.

**Focus** Going back a little - how did you get into lighting design? What gave you the bug?

**Sam** I got into theatre generally through my family. They've always been involved in amateur groups, and several of them have worked professionally in the industry for many years and still do. I really learnt from

them. I fell into lighting design when I was around fifteen or sixteen - I just loved being in a theatre, playing around with the rig, and learning through doing. Every mistake taught you something new. When

## INTRODUCING...



... new ALPD member  
**Sam Stacey, Lighting Design Student, Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, in this new Focus series**

I came to university, I began to specialise more and more in design, really honing in on what I wanted to get out of a show.

**Focus** What gave you the final push - the moment you decided this was the profession you wanted to pursue?

**Sam** I think it's the way you can sculpt a show and help draw focus. You're an invisible force - nobody thinks about you until they're on their way home, or in the pub after the show, when they start to reflect and think: 'Hang on, how did we not notice that scene change?' That idea -

of creating and sculpting light in such a way that the audience simply doesn't notice the mechanics — that's what drew me to it.

**Focus** Do you remember a particular show that crystallised those ideas for you?

**Sam** *Les Misérables* has always been one of my favourite shows. The music, the set design, the lighting - from the moment that first bar plays and you enter the barricades, you feel entirely part of the world. The way it's been designed is extraordinary. For me, looking at work at that scale and then trying to achieve the same effect on a tiny budget in a small studio has always been the challenge. These productions have the very best of everything - how do I create something comparable when I've got next to nothing? That's how I've always tried to approach things.

**Focus** You're currently at Bristol Old Vic Theatre School. Which year are you in?

**Sam** I'm in my third year and about to graduate. I finish in July, then I'm heading into the professional world - hoping to find work or, more realistically to begin with, to get on as an assistant or to shadow established designers. I really want to spend time understanding how other people work rather than overreaching. I'd

rather shadow people and genuinely understand how they make things happen at a larger scale, before I try to do it myself.

**Focus** Is there a particular lighting designer you have in mind for that?

**Sam** Not one specifically, no. I think every lighting designer is different, and every designer has their own way of creating a show. From my perspective, I'd really benefit from shadowing multiple people. If you shadow just one person for a prolonged period, you're learning how they do it - you're not getting a broader understanding of the craft. I want to gather perspectives from as many designers as possible.

**Focus** Do you feel the school has given you the right framework for doing what you want to do?

**Sam** I think the school has given me a safe environment in which to make mistakes and learn from them. Going to a theatre school to study design is something a lot of people don't do - many

designers just fall into the career. I didn't want to go about it that way. I wanted the chance to try something, have it not work, and understand why. The university has always been clear: you're here to make mistakes, to try new things, and to learn from both. You can't afford to do that as freely once you're being paid — when you're building a career and your living depends on it, a mistake that looks

**A Christmas Carol, a Bristol Old Vic Theatre School production. Photo Craig Fuller**



horrible can have serious consequences.

**Focus** So you'd recommend going through an educational environment before working professionally?

**Sam** To some extent, yes. Though the industry is changing - there are fewer and fewer opportunities to experiment freely, partly because most shows now use intelligent fixtures and moving lights. I was speaking to a lighting designer called Ali Hunter about how, when she was at university, she challenged herself to use as few lights as possible - the most minimal design she could manage - in order to create something beautiful. I really admired that approach, and it's something I've been trying to apply to my final show: using as little light as possible and seeing what can be achieved.

**Focus** I noticed the *A Christmas Carol* production on your website - that looks like a professional show.

**Sam** It wasn't, actually. The school puts on large-scale shows each term for the acting course, and *A Christmas Carol* was the big production of that term. I was asked to design it for the university, which I was very fortunate to do. I've also been supported through the *SLX lighting programme* for emerging lighting students, and that support made a real

difference to what I was able to achieve in my final year.

**Focus** We featured the *SLX lighting programme* in the spring edition. Could you describe the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School course for us?

**Sam** It's the Production Arts course, which covers every area of theatre production. In the final year, students specialise in where they want to go. I actually spent a fair amount of time persuading the university to let me begin specialising a little earlier than usual. Alongside my studies, I've been working on my craft independently - trying out software, learning new things, speaking to as many people as I can. I've been very fortunate that the university has been supportive in allowing me to build an early foothold in the industry while still studying.

**Focus** How does a typical week look for you at this stage? How much is practical work and how much is academic?

**Sam** In the final year, it's mostly practical. The school essentially treats you as a professional from third year onwards. This year alone I've worked on five shows across two terms. Just last week I designed the lighting for a double bill as part of what we call our Directors' Festival — a showcase for the MA Directing students to



The LD up a ladder in *The Vaults* (Photo private), and *A Christmas Carol*, a Bristol Old Vic Theatre School production. Photos: Craig Fuller

experience working in a professional context. We work closely with those students and try to realise what they're reaching for. The student collaboration at this school was, honestly, one of the main reasons I chose to come here. The tutors will support you, but they don't interfere unless they really need to.

**Focus** Looking forward - if you could have a wish list for the next couple of years, what would it include?

**Sam** I'm quite clear-eyed about the path ahead. I know I'm not going to become a lighting designer overnight, and I'm prepared to work hard for it. I want to spend time shadowing designers - understanding how they work in the tech process, what their prep looks like during the rehearsal period, how they identify moments where the lighting must change and where it shouldn't. Then, hopefully, some of those designers might take me on as an assistant in a more formal capacity.

I'm not in a rush to be the designer. I learn best by experiencing things rather than by being the one making all the decisions from the outset. I want to spend real time as an associate or assistant lighting designer first.

**Focus** Thank you, Sam - some really thoughtful reflections there. And the production photos of *A Christmas Carol* reflect the professional ambition.

**Sam** We were very fortunate to have

Craig Fuller shoot the production photos - he's a very well-established photographer in the industry. It makes such a difference having someone of his calibre capturing the work.

**Focus** We wish you the best of luck for your future career!

**If you are a new to the ALPD or have recently joined, we would love to tell all the other members about you and your work. Email [editor@thealpd.org.uk](mailto:editor@thealpd.org.uk)**

**“My interest in lighting started at the age of 11 whilst in a production of the ‘Pirates of Penzance’ at school. I was fascinated by the large lighting panel of switches and rheostats in the stage right wing. I went on to light many of the school productions and for several local amateur dramatic societies.**

I managed to get a work placement at my local theatre, the Queens Theatre in Hornchurch. For several years, I managed to stay connected to the theatre and worked on load ins and load outs. I left school and went on a two year YTS scheme at Paddington College studying theatre electrics. My first year was spent at the Royal Court Theatre Upstairs. It was a great learning ground, building sets, setting up the sound and lighting systems.

They even let me design the lighting for two of their rehearsed readings. I also was involved in various roles in the main house productions. My second year placement was on the musical *Time* at the Dominion Theatre. It was a very high-tech production and featured the first use of Vari-Lite fixtures on a theatre show in the UK. Of course I was very keen to learn everything



## MY FIRST JOB

**Andrew Voller remembers his journey from local QTH to Hair in Vienna via the first Vari-Lites on a West End show**

Royal Drury Lane on the original production of *Miss Saigon*. I returned to Vari-Lite in the early 90's and later moved up to be their Training Manager. During this time, I started to program shows in different disciplines. At the time, there were not many programmers working in theatre. I was lucky to get to work with many great designers, Chris Ellis, Rick Fisher, Hugh Vanstone, Andrew Bridge, Howard Harrison

about them. When *Time* closed, I managed to get a job as a workshop technician for Vari-Lite Europe Ltd. During my time at Vari-Lite I continued to keep my theatre connections as a deputy in the Westend as a follow spot operator, stage electrician or board operator. I took a break from Vari-Lite to work as an electrician at the Theatre

and Patrick Woodroffe. For some of the designers I would help them transition from hand drawn lighting plans to CAD lighting plans. On several productions I doubled as an associate lighting designer as well as being the moving light programmer.

My own journey into lighting design was from my experience as a moving light programmer and associate lighting designer. I had worked with Hugh Vanstone on the musical *Tanz Der Vampire* in Vienna. The producers had asked Hugh to light their next production, which was going to be *Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical*. Hugh asked me to be his associate and programmer for the show. Due to issues with dates, Hugh was unable to commit to the production, so the producer asked if he knew someone he would recommend. Hugh suggested to the producer, perhaps to give me a try. The producer put me in touch with the director, Kim Duddy. We got on well and I was appointed the lighting designer for the show. It was one of Kim's early shows as a director, though she had worked as a choreographer and dancer for many years.

The creative process with Kim and Martin, the set designer, was great fun as we explored ideas in the set model. The set design was essentially an open playground

for the cast. The wings and borders were aluminium frames infilled with a pale wood panel (it did feel a bit 'Ikea'). The frames continued across the back of the stage where the wooden panels could slide open on different levels where the cast could appear. Behind the upstage frame was a cyclorama. Knowing that the director came from a choreographer background, the dance lighting was going to be very important. I built the design around an extensive cross light system including a Vari-Lite VL6 on each boom. Overhead, there was a top light cover of PAR cans with scrollers and 20 MAC2000 Profile fixtures (which were brand new back then). Upstage behind the cyclorama, there were the usual cyc floods as well a 6 MAC2000 Profiles with custom gobos to rear project on the cyclorama. Front of house were some MAC500 profiles and Super Scan Mk 1s. Two Pani HMI 1.2k projectors were rigged on the circle front for snow and a coloured liquid oil effect wheel. The director wanted live cameras as well as limited video projection. A video projector was rigged in the centre of the circle. For 2001, video in theatre productions was still quite a novelty.

With this being my first big design, I would have a lighting programmer (in fact two). It was going to be odd not pushing the buttons myself. We had a Whole Hog 2 running the moving lights programmed by Gustav Vychron and an AVAB Viking console running the conventional lights. I managed to stop worrying about what the programmers were doing. I came to realise that there



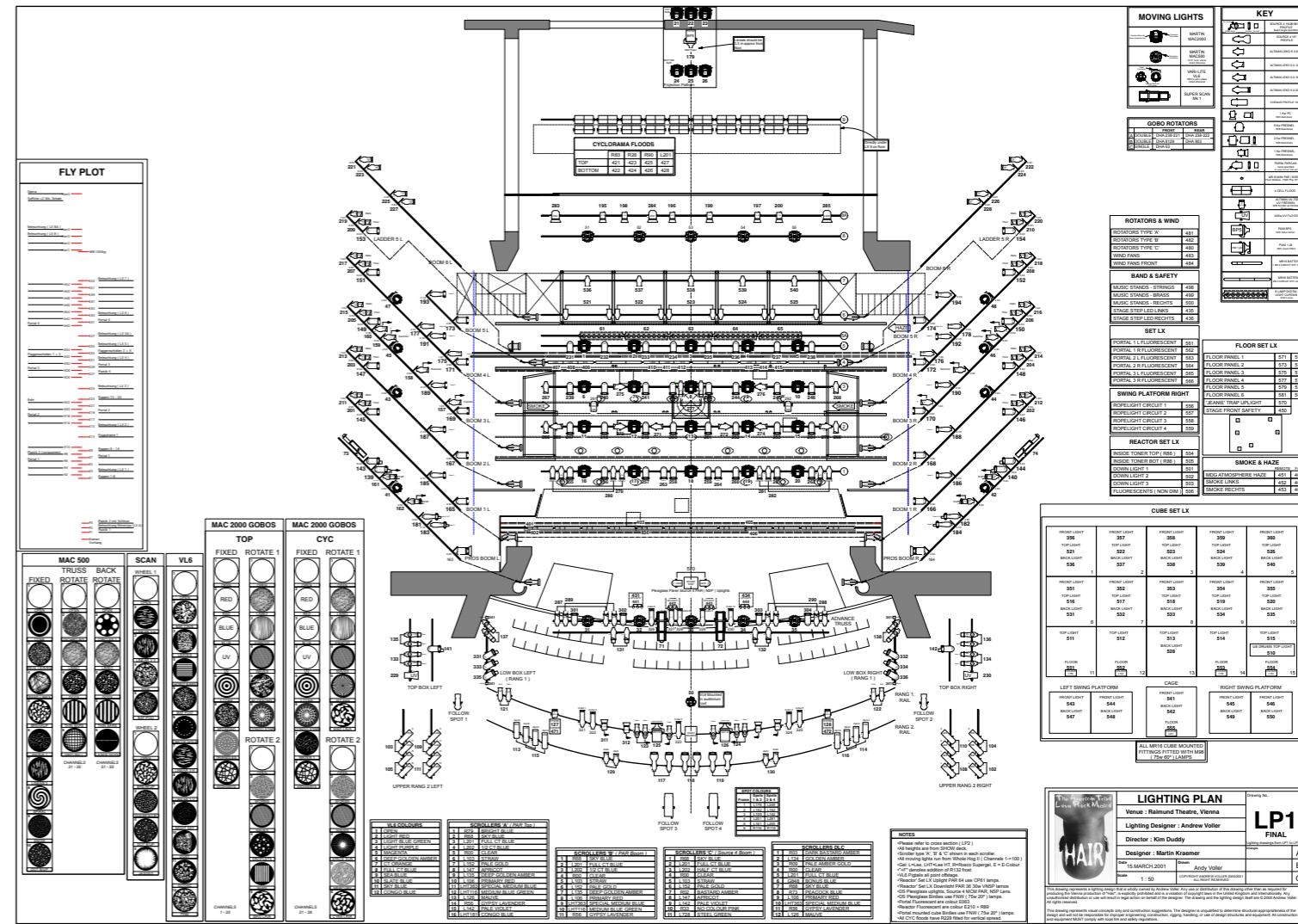
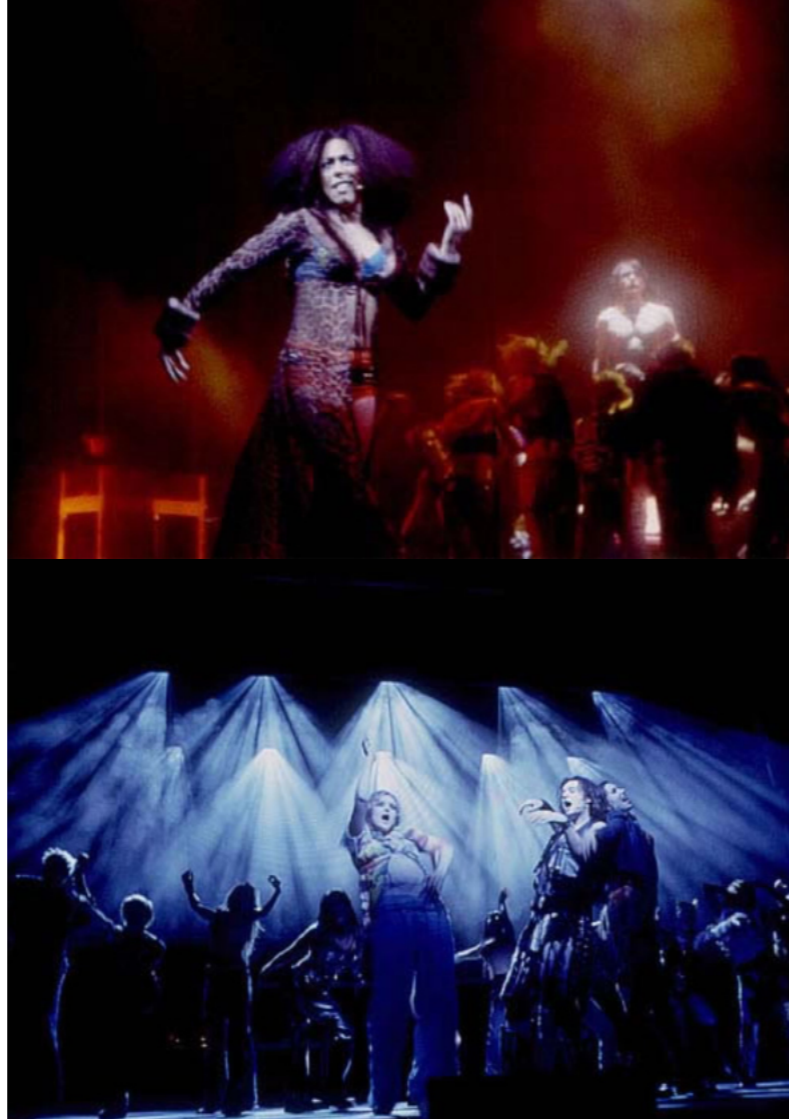
is a real difference between just designing, and programming and designing. Not having to think about the programming allowed me to focus on the design itself. Not sitting behind the console also makes you appear more approachable by the other members of the creative team. If the creative team see you busy tapping away on the console, they are less likely to want to disturb you. Having come from programming, I am generally very specific about what I want, especially when it comes to effects. I try to describe it visually (lots of wiggling fingers and waving of hands) and try to not tell the programmer how it should be programmed.

After the production of *Hair*, I was asked to design the lighting for many productions around Europe. It shows that just one opportunity can often be the catalyst to further design work. Lighting your first large scale musical is a nerve racking experience. I felt that the many years working alongside other lighting designers as a programmer or associate stood me in good stead. I think my own design style and approach have been influenced by the designers I have worked with. I think working alongside other designers is the best way to learn the craft of lighting design."

Website: [www.avld.com](http://www.avld.com)

**Hair: The American Tribal Love-Rock Musical. Photos Jim Rakete. For a larger view of the lighting plan, open the digital Focus on the members website.**

**If you would like to share your first job as designer, programmer or production electrician please get in touch editor@thealpd.org.uk**



**"Your lighting truss is on fire!" is a sentence not high on the wish-list of any lighting designer. But for Lucy Carter it was only one of the tasks her design had to solve for *The Hunger Games On Stage* in the new, purpose built Troubadour Canary Wharf Theatre.**

Based In the heart of the UK's financial centre, I couldn't quite shake an impression of 'Panem', the franchises shiny capital, as several dozen ALPD members made their way through high rise insurance headquarters, stockbroker offices and glass and steel fronts baring logos of hedge funds and banks. We followed the invitation of Lighting Designer Lucy Carter to a very special ALPD talk, to see how the latest telling, after the books and films, of the dystopian story of teenagers forced to fight for survival, had been realised by a crack creative and production team.

"Come on in", says Lucy as we step from the relatively small box office area into the venue - and than a collective 'wow' is all anyone can manage. The show is staged in the round, in an arena. The sheer scale is breathtaking, and like a Tardis feels so much bigger inside than you expected from the outside. It is clear that the audience is not watching a show - they are in-

side a huge spectacle (which includes part of the auditorium, numbered as districts, moving between traverse and in the round.) The space, on its own, is the first star you encounter before any actor enters.

After this first impression we are led underground in groups. Every available space is filled with props, set pieces, quick change



## THIS LD IS ON FIRE

**ALPD talk and backstage tour at *The Hunger Games On Stage* with Lighting Designer Lucy Carter**

areas with rows of costumes, racks of tech and supplies, and lifts to pop actors and sets into the arena. Walls and ceiling are stuffed with tubes and cable: Big arrays of carbon dioxide tanks feed fog effects and jets around the arena. Power supplies and data are directed to the over 800 fixtures, supplied by Christie Lites. The rig check for all departments takes two and a half hours.

"My first design came in at around £70 grand - a week," admits Lucy after we have settled into the auditorium seats for the talk proper. "Well, that was obviously deemed impossible. But when the producers came back with a figure under 10K, it was necessary to have a conversation regarding how a performance in-the-round means that one viewer's frontlight becomes another ones back. You start lighting from one side, then multiply the equipment four times. Add to this a grid trim of 12 meters height, ends filled with video - and most of your lighting has to come from the top. This rig also has to provide all the audience lighting - and the producers had seen a show in Holland where the audience moved, so they wanted that - oh and there's a lot of flying of people, set, fire, chariot e.t.c. The performance is all told from the perspective of Katniss, the heroine, with actor turned acrobat Mia Carragher going through multiple stunts."

It became clear that a combination of a large number of very bright but fast fixtures, with very accurate shutters and iris, and a sophisticated performer tracking system would be the logistical base onto which to build the plot. "I wasn't a fan of the performer tracking that I had seen on



ALPD members and crew with Lucy Carter (centre) on the Hunger Games stage. Photos A. Friess

other shows, but associate LD Tom Johnson and Production LX Oliver Thomas of Production.Ltd, and his colleagues, had gained valuable experience on Starlight. It was obvious that conventional follows were not going to work, so we ended up with a Zactrack system which I've been told is now the largest system currently



running anywhere." Every light in the rig can function as a follow spot, and Lucy fully credits Tom Johnson, and Jamie Harley as the dedicated programmer, for the integration of the tracking spots into the show and supporting main EOS programmer David Ayton. "David was brilliant as always because I explain quite non technically what I want," laughs Lucy, "and I wave my hands around and do little

dances - and David just gets me!" And so 22 performers are tracked throughout the show by mainly the 120 Martin MAC Ultra Performance profiles, mostly from the top, while 82 Martin MAC Aura PXL washes bring the colour, and 60 Martin MAC Aura Raven XIPs are arranged each side of the end-centre video, in an arrangement resembling the flood lights of a sports stadium. Was there any pre-visualisation involved, a member wanted to know. Lucy: "We worked with a Depence set up on ideas and testing positions and beam angels etc. It was quite good that we didn't go much further with the pre-programming than that - as nothing was as we had planned when we arrived: It was a new venue and things didn't work out as totally expected in the build." Tom Johnson adds: "Zactrack on this scale is a full-time job for two people - you have to be on

top of it with lots of paperwork, preparing which light has which job on which person at any point of the show - you can't wait for the tech to sort that out." Lucy continues: "We learned lots of clever ways to tweak when they were lagging. Especially when cross-fading from unit to unit as they move through the space." Conversations with the Zactrack team in Austria ironed out

problems, and many software and hardware updates and tweaks were made between Vienna and Canary Wharf, sometimes daily. "Similar support was needed - and received - with lighting, including a two day heartstopper when the blades and shutters in the profiles didn't keep their programmed positions - but Martin and Christie came through," adds Lucy. ETC were also on call and supporting David and Jamie with programming bugs and glitches. It really felt like an industry wide effort and commitment to get this lighting design up and ready.

"I was also quite clear from the start that I wanted to have long lines of FR10 Bars, which Christie lites could supply all 120 metres of. They have proven great to create the world of the Capitol, with sweeping energy and hightech digital looks, along the whole length of the space."

In-between all these impressive numbers and logistics, Lucy stressed that the storytelling though was at the forefront of her design. "It helped that I had worked with director Matthew Dunster for the past two decades, and we started two years before to plan and discuss. Essentially, we wanted three distinct visual environments: District 12, I wanted to feel it emotional, organic, it's their home. It's poor, it's distressed but close to nature, so we are using tungsten



**Clockwise from top left: Mary Crook - Venue Head of the lighting, video and special effects showing the bar set, Zactrack in action, underground lifts and CO2 tanks, Arena (photo Johan Persson) for 1200 seats and London's largest hydraulic stage.**



and natural muted colours and break ups. Then, the opposing capital world was all about control, rich, over designed and opulence taken to excess. Lots of sharp shapes, neon colours, electric - the director wanted 'Tokyo on steroids'. Controlled sharp shapes and clear delineation of space. The third world we needed to create was the Games: This is a digitally, artificially created game world, where anything can happen at the flick of a switch like artificially generated forests, landscapes, lakes for example. As there is minimal set in the show, I needed to use lighting very architecturally and build whole environments."

Lucy continues to explain that the world of the Hunger Games relies heavily on integrating the lighting world with the video design to achieve the story-telling: many meetings with video designer Tal Rosner achieved to harmonise and connect the two design elements together.

"And of course there are the iconic set pieces: We knew we had to deliver the flying chariot-on-fire, a masterpiece in conjunction with the set designer, and illusion designer and electrics company Lamp&Pencil".

One of the largest stunts in the show makes use of the maintenance motors of the lighting trusses: Not only is one actor

climbing up the truss, as one end tips down to the floor. The truss also bursts into flames which chase behind the performer.

Under normal circumstances this would have been a very challenging show to achieve. But circumstances were not normal. "We had our own hunger games to fight with;" explains Lucy. As this was a new building and delays meant that fit up, and then rehearsals, had to be negotiated around ongoing construction work. "When I arrived half the building was missing, but the lighting rig was up! It was all packed in plastic bags to protect the lights from the dust. There was no heating (during November), no green room, no water, and any toilet visit meant a 20 minute round-trip to a neighbouring building site". All this meant that time for plotting lighting, and ultimately the tech was way too short.

"We all as a team have some frustration leaving a design of this scale unfinished and un-perfected. There are many things I wished I could go back to and some things we never even got to try as intended. We are very proud of it, but there's also an element of disappointment when you can't achieve what you wanted to achieve because of factors out of your control," Lucy concluded in a memorable afternoon for the ALPD members. **Recorded by Arnim Friess**



**Clockwise from top left: David Ayton on the lighting console and the 'natural District 12 look', Arena state, flying chariot (screenshot), traps and LED tape, truss on fire, sculpting spaces.**



## THE HUNGER GAMES ON STAGE

**Matthew Dunster**  
Director

**Miriam Buether**  
Set & Auditorium Designer

**Lucy Carter**  
Lighting Designer

**Tal Rosner**  
Video Designer

**Costume Designer**  
Moi Trans

**Chris Fisher**  
Effects and illusion Designer

**Tom Johnson**  
Production LX

**Lloyd Thomas**  
Technical Director

**Mary Crook, after Liam Sayer**  
Head Of LX & Video

**David Ayton**  
EOS programmer

**Oliver Thomas and Jacob Edmunds**  
Production LX

**Jamie Harley**  
Zactrack and 2nd programmer

**Christie Lites**  
Lighting supplier

**As we all know, lighting designers are required to deliver a package of documents as part of their lighting design. This can include equipment lists, patch information, cue lists, and, almost without fail, a set of scale drawings illustrating the lighting rig to be built by the electricians team.**

When I started to create these lighting drawings for my own shows, I used pens, a drawing board, and stencils. Now I use a laptop and a CAD program. Computer-aided Design programs do essentially what I did all those years ago. That is, to overlay recognisable 2D graphics of lighting instruments onto an outline of a set. All of this is contained within a 2D representation of the venue where the show will take place.

However, what the seemingly straightforward output from the CAD program masks is a 3D world of visualisation, data processing, and clash detection that many of our colleagues never, ever use. This is despite the fact that they shell out hundreds, if not thousands, of pounds a year in license fees for the CAD programs that are now part of the tools of the trade.

Lighting Designers use complex tools to create their art. We now have highly sophisticated light sources that can only exist when controlled by state-of-the-art control systems. We all embrace these developments gleefully, and the enthusiasm for all this tech I have seen at trade fairs around the world is great to see

## CAD & DRAUGHTING

**Challenging And Dull? Not so! Mark Doubleday let's the CAD out of the bag.**

(the buzz around the GLP Mad Max instrument was a constant at this year's USITT). However, for some reason, an important part of our process still seems a little unloved by the very users it is designed to help. This is, of course, CAD. Consoles and CAD packages can be complex and dense to learn, but for some reason, many lighting designers are loath to engage fully with the latter to explore its full potential.

When I studied at LAMDA many years ago, every student in my year group was

sent for one term to do an attachment or work experience. The course at LAMDA was underpinned by Theatre Projects, a theatre consultancy firm that, at the time, was based in Covent Garden. The company was started by the inspirational Richard Pilbrow, who also taught some lighting classes at LAMDA. I was incredibly lucky to spend my allotted time in their lighting design office on Long Acre, assisting marvellous designers such as Robert Ornbo and Benny Ball.

My job was to observe, carry bags, make coffee, and crucially, draw plans, and I went everywhere with them, helping out where I could. In the office on the third floor was a large plan cupboard. Hanging in there were a mix of velum and tracing-paper plans for many of the shows the company had worked on since its inception. These included iconic shows from the National Theatre at The Old Vic, productions at The Royal Opera, and West End musicals such as *Singing in the Rain* and *Blitz*. All of them were beautifully drawn using stencils alongside some lovely old-fashioned drawing techniques.

I spent many hours sifting through them, trying to work out how the lighting designs had looked and why the LD had made all those decisions. I also caught the bug for creating the very best lighting plans I could possibly draw, and quickly realised that a lighting plan was a calling card. It is often the first contact that new colleagues have with our work, and a good set of drawings can make a huge impression.

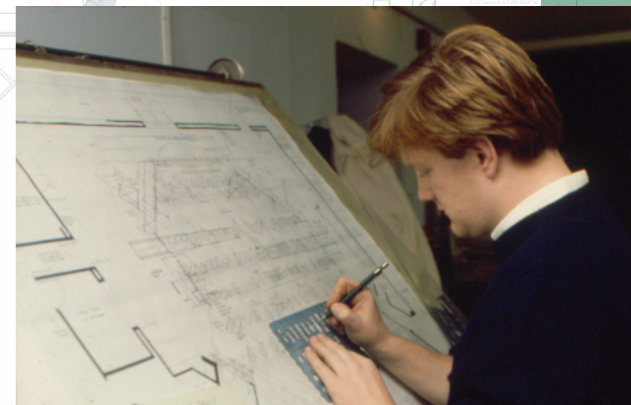
One of the shows that I worked on at Theatre Projects was The Royal Tournament. At the time, this was an iconic televised military tattoo at the now-demolished Earls Court Exhibition Centre. My job that particular year was to draw much of the plan, which consisted of over a thousand par cans, all grouped in sixes. I was young and didn't care about the repetition of drawing the same shape over a thousand times. But it did get me thinking that there must be another way!

CAD was in its infancy and really only the preserve of architects with mainframe computers. Some of us in the office joked that we needed a stencilled roller to quickly do the drawing for us, and yes, there was such a thing as Stamp-a-Lamp, which was a set of rubber stamps and an ink pad that did just that. My first CAD program was called Generic CADD. This was a 2D drawing program, and I needed

a specially adapted desktop computer to run it. It took me ages to learn, but I could see that it was going to be the future.

One of my first tasks was to recreate the lighting stencils that I had in my desk drawer, and within a month or so, I had a full set of CAD "blocks" for all the lights I thought I would ever need. What I had also managed to do was learn how to draw with a computer using many of the simple drawing tools. Slowly, I learned about Line types and Line weights, Paper space, and Scale. 3D wasn't yet available, but I ploughed through as much of the 2D content as I could.

Venues didn't send out CAD files back then. What we got was a paper groundplan and, if we were lucky, a section. So, all of these had to be carefully measured and redrawn in CAD. What this process taught me was how to draw with pinpoint accuracy using a computer. What also came with that was an in-depth knowledge of each venue and set design,



**The author during pre-CAD times. Photo: private**

which I would never have had if I had simply traced over the linework of the venue. This was a valuable lesson to me, as when you draw with accuracy, you discover the idiosyncrasies of a venue or design. You also discover the opportunities.

Jumping ahead many years, we now have CAD programs like Vectorworks, WYSIWYG, AutoCAD, Drafty, and several others. We also have the amazing ability to pre-visualise the light that once we could only see in our mind's eye.

Dedicated software for doing this includes packages such as Depence, Capture, and Augment3D. For obvious reasons, lighting designers have embraced the latter as they provide an immediate connection to the final result and the reason we all do what we do.

For reasons that aren't entirely clear, lighting designers don't necessarily embrace the software that handles the planning. Is it because this stage of the process is not so interesting? Maybe. Or is it because the programs are tricky to learn? Perhaps. Either way, it has definitely got me thinking, especially since the cost of this software tends to be quite high.

Vectorworks, WYSIWYG, and Capture combine the ability to create 2D paperwork, connect a lighting console, and pre-visualize what you have drawn.

Each program excels in different areas. My program of choice is Vectorworks. The reason is that Vectorworks is a complete CAD program, and as a result, the output is highly customisable. This means that I can create the drawings that I want to draw. This includes incorporating techniques I learned as a student at Theatre Projects alongside the ability to show some of the more complex ideas in 3D. However, doing this efficiently does take some learning and time. Despite this, I have chosen to make it a priority in my own professional practice.

Increasingly, lighting designers are required to be multidisciplinary. Many lighting designers are also proficient electricians, console programmers, or both. Personally, I can hang and cable a lighting instrument on a pipe and program some cues on a console, but I am not an expert in either field - certainly not in the way that some of the esteemed colleagues I have worked with over the years are able to do. They are specialists and are highly valued for the work that they do.

I am, however, a Vectorworks specialist, and this is my "other" skill alongside my practice as a lighting designer.

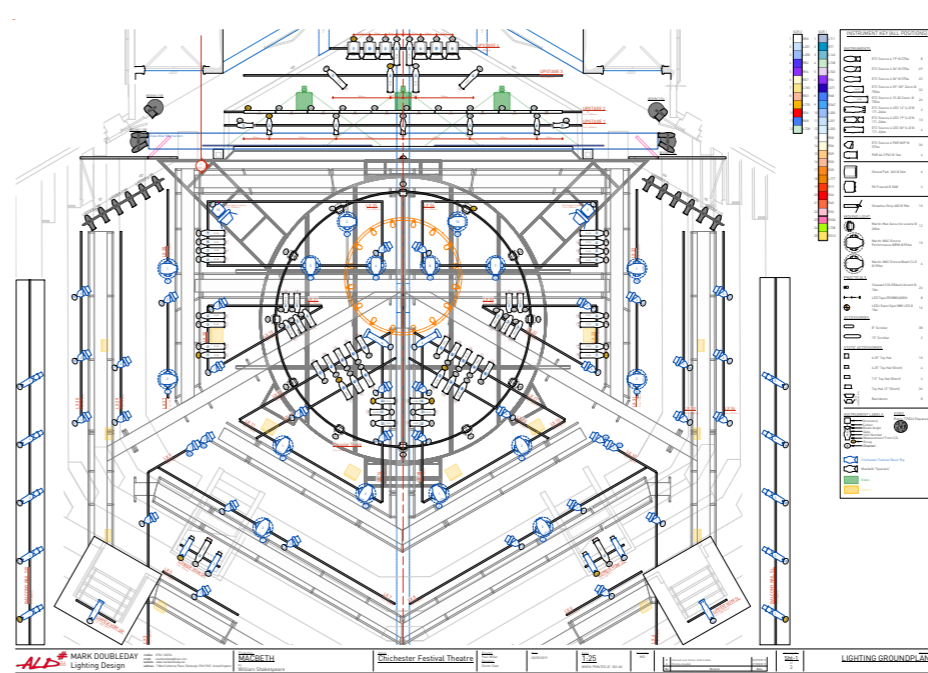
What I hear from many colleagues who use Vectorworks and other CAD packages is that these programs are complicated

and hard to use. Also, why do I need all this stuff that I don't use? They are right. Essentially, what we need is relatively simple, so why is there so much that you need to learn?

AutoCAD and Vectorworks are fully featured CAD programs, and most users are aware of that. I know the feature designers at Vectorworks are also aware that most users are not particularly interested in the finer points of CAD, so they try to create solutions that work for everyone. This is especially true for our sector. But we are a bespoke industry, and not everything is built using standard materials. However, some of it is.

Lighting instruments, Truss, Rigging, and Audio gear are, by and large, catalogue items, and Vectorworks, in particular, has extensive libraries and dedicated tools to handle most scenarios. It can also handle staging and drapes, as long as they are not overly bespoke. However, every show has something that is not standard, and this is where the ability to delve deeper into the nitty-gritty of these programs becomes increasingly necessary. For many of my colleagues, this also becomes a source of frustration!

There is so much more we can do beyond building trusses and hanging equipment. I now routinely make a 3D



**The full scale project of Macbeth at Chichester Festival Theatre can be downloaded at <https://showvector.com/ALPD/>**

model of the set - although some scenic designers provide something usable, many do not. If you can manage a little 3D modelling, it will pay dividends when checking angles and shadows.

Back in 2019, I lit a production of

Macbeth at Chichester, which had a completely glass set. The ability to check reflections was unbelievably helpful, and because I modelled the complete space, I could view the set and auditorium from some of the trickier seats to check lens

reflections from the glass floor and walls. This meant that notes sessions during rehearsals were about responding to the action on stage as opposed to moving instruments around because the lights were blinding the audience. Of course, all of this can be done on paper, but it's so much more informative to interact with a 3D model of the set and lighting rig. You can also load the whole model into a VR headset, which is revelatory!

For a while now, Vectorworks has been able to semi-automate the assignment of control information, and clashes are easy to identify and correct. Similarly, the display of data using spreadsheets and visualisation can be very powerful, and with a little extra knowledge, all sorts of functionality opens up, making a set of drawings more compelling to read. There is also the ability to exchange the data and the 3D models with visualizers such as Depence or Capture, which is becoming an increasingly prevalent part of many lighting designers' process.

We are time-poor in our venues these days, and lighting has become more complex; expectations have also increased. If we can create and troubleshoot off-site without requiring too much dark time in a venue, that can only be a bonus. Because you can explore a

lighting rig and its effect on a design using CAD software, there is far less need for corrections on-site. The other bonus is that you, the designer, can confidently show up for a focus session, knowing that every light you have asked for will do what you need it to. For me, that has been a serious stress buster.

I hear many frustrations from my colleagues about CAD. Why doesn't it work when I do this? Why doesn't it know that I want to put all my movers on the floor? Most of the time (though not always), this stems from a lack of training and a looming deadline.

During the first few months of the pandemic, I offered free half-hour tutorials to anyone in our industry worldwide who wanted to sign up. I sold out within a week or so and spent some really fascinating months meeting and teaching lighting designers from all over the world. This was, of course, when most people had quite a lot of extra time on their hands, and I was amazed by how much people wanted to learn. Now we are back, there is less time to spend just learning new techniques. But we all have laptops now, and I always say that trains and long flights are great times to open a blank file and work on something that has been bugging you. It's always worth remembering that a CAD

program (like a lighting console) is meant to be a flexible tool, so if there is something that you feel sure the program should do, then some time experimenting will often give you exactly what you need.

I also started writing about Vectorworks, especially for our industry. Initially, I was asked by a company in the US to write some starter guides for their freelancers, but this soon grew into a website.

Just over a year ago, I quietly launched Showvector.com. It is a comprehensive guide for using Vectorworks in the entertainment industry, featuring text, illustrations, and numerous tutorial videos to help users gradually develop their skills. I have incorporated everything I learned from my pandemic sessions, and now the site has over 400 tutorial videos covering hundreds of topics and techniques for creating beautiful drawings.

I would like to urge my friends and colleagues to embrace CAD more and explore all the cool things it can do. So, if you have time, the next time you are working on a design, try exploring one of those menu commands you're not quite sure about or that tool that seems too obscure to bother with and see where it takes you. 🍷

<https://showvector.com>

## COPYRIGHT AND LIABILITY CLAUSE

Student membership rep Josie Ireland posed the question: "I'm currently discussing with students the various notes that LDs have put on their plans, e.g. 'This drawing represents design intent and concept only. The Designer is responsible for the visual aspects of this production and not the safe realisation of the design'. Is there a standard? Nick Moran answers: "While we can't give legal advice, the 'Professional Conduct' document in the resource folder on the ALPD website is a good start. Bottom line is: disclaimers probably don't work as well as people expect them to. In civil cases, insurance companies come to an agreement outside court and in criminal cases, the law is not interested in what you wrote on a plan. Keep it simple, and if you have an agent seek their or professional advice. 🍷"

**When the National Theatre's new Olivier auditorium officially opened in 1976 with a performance of Marlowe's *Tamburlaine The Great*, lighting designer David Hersey had the command over a ginormous rig, saturated for the fast change-overs the potentially three shows a day (!) demanded, and run on 768 channels. Shock.**

Oh, those innocent times. On the latest count (and ignoring that DMX was only invented ten years later), you could run just three of Ayrton's wash and eye-candy fixture MagicRing-R9 (256 channels extended mode). Three! You would have more luck with Ayrton's Profile Huracán, a modest 75 channels. Apart from the foreseeable problems developing for a building's network - that's for engineers - how, as a designer, do you keep track in the era of the exploding channel count? A conversation.

**Focus:** Rob Halliday, how did your records and documentation evolve for the many shows you've worked on?

**Rob:** I've started to think of it as DMX parameters per metre - so, a s4 would be 1, a light with a scroller, 2, an old moving light, about 20, a new one, perhaps 80, led pixel tape, many! The crazy thing is that we're now often paying 'per

parameter' in the console (particularly for big rigs), but often there are lots of channels we don't then actually touch. Plus all of that data is constantly being refreshed, which on big shows is now taxing the networks. It's a flawed model and someone needs to do something about it.

**Focus:** This was all easier to document on the first shows you were working on?

## "If I just could remember ..."

### How to document a show which might come back in ten years - in conversation with Will Evans and Rob Halliday

**Rob:** The traditional approach for conventional lights was manual notation with a grid system, on paper, which led to spreadsheets (See the picture next page, top, for Chess 1988). That was easy because each light only had one parameter, its level, plus perhaps a scroller. Then the moving lights came along, and suddenly each light could do lots of positions and many more parameters! Of course the

theory was there's no need to document, because the light would magically always go back to the right place (and so would any replacement lights). Turned out not to be true! What if you changed fixture types on a later production?

**Focus:** ... or went on tour to many different sized venues, like you do with *An Inspector Calls*, Will Evans?

**Will:** I only half-jokingly describe myself as Archiver-in-Chief on *Inspector*. When I took over as associate from Ian Saunders in 2015, I had already experience as re-lighter of the show. Believe it or not, we still use the original focus notes from around 1995, copies now - this is how it's been done for thirty years, it works. On tour, there's a large lever arch file - think A3, about 15 cm thick - which is the lighting bible for the show. It contains all the focus notes, a copy of the cueing script, and the electrics paperwork. It's a complete instruction manual for how to light *Inspector*, and it started with beautifully handdrawn sketches.

**Rob:** ... as I started documenting: working through the showfile which the lights were used, then sketching each position. That was REALLY tedious, because you were doing the same channels over and over again. In America they employed a 'tracker' - an assistant to write down what

the moving lights were doing as the show was made, particularly on the old VL console that had no way of displaying that information. Nobody in the UK wanted to pay for that, so we started photographing each focus, and each cue, first on film (terrible, expensive), than digital around 2004.

**Will:** Early on I scanned every single sketch as a JPEG - I looked at that folder and thought: if this gets lost, we are screwed. So we archived it digitally, but we never found a better way to do it, quite simply, because you can't photograph side-light. *Inspector* is about eighty percent side-lit. Across the stage the beam lands in the wings - impossible to photograph. The sketches capture the hard cuts, the soft cuts, the weird angles, and there are handwritten notes everywhere: catch the Inspector downstage left in Act Two, watch for this character at this level. This worked well as we only had to deal with a conventional rig when I took over, even with four different stage configurations for different venues.

**Rob:** But with movers we still had to work out the positions the lights were used in. Feels like that should have been something built into the console (-still does, still isn't!). So I started trying to use software to take the showfile (from Strand

then) and process it to give me a list of which positions each light actually used. By coincidence Matt Peel at the RSC was doing much the same thing at much the same time. His was Fast-FocusPro, mine became FocusTrack, first used I think on *Marry Poppins*, autumn 2004. Andy Voller's Moving Light Assistant came a few years later.

**Will:** I started to argue that we needed to change to movers - once the overhead rig was up, any adjustment meant balancing on a precarious high ladder, or on top of the house! With producers, everything comes down to money. I explained that movers would save two to three hours on the get in. Immediately got their attention!

**Focus:** How did this change your documentation?

**Will:** Gradually - we changed the cyc lights first, which was a seven-colour wash with 32 Fresnels at the NT originally, a massive LX 3. Via 12 Lusters, we have arrived at *Diabolos* - after a shoot out - and now we can focus them exactly during sound-check. But the focus is still as for one colour of the original sketch, so we don't need a big showfile analysis for that. The big channel hugger though are ten GLP X4 Bars in full

SCAN	COLOR	PAN	TILT	SCROLL	COLOR	TIME	GROUP	DESCRIPTION	COLOR	TIME
1	6	42	212	26	114/828		1	ALL OVERHEAD		
2	6	190	85	26	114/828		2	ALL TWRS L	5/812	
3	6	68	87	27			3	ALL TWRS RT	5/812	
4				28			4	HT 2	5/812	
5	6	208	194	29			5	ST 2	5/812	
6	6	215	205	30			6	ST 5	5/812	
7	6	152	107	31	114/828		7	ST 9		
8	6	187	67	32	114/828		8	ST L HI SIDE	5/812	
9	6	124	128	33			9	ST R HI SIDE	5/812	
10	6	162	87	34			10	TWRS L HIGH		
11				35	15/812		11	TWRS R HIGH		
12				36	15/812		12	TWRS L LOW		
13	6	99	152	37			13	TWRS R LOW		
14	4	107	157	38			14	CTR X DN		
15	6	128	197	39			15	CTR X UP		
16	6	187	128	40			16	ST L DIAD		
17				41			17	ST R DIAG		
18				42			18	ST L DN SIDE		
19				43			19	ST R DN SIDE		
20	15	110	194	45			20	PROS L/R DN		
21	15	124	188	46	4		21	PROS L/R UP		
22	15	129	174	47			22			
23				49			23			
24				50			24			
48				51			25			
49				52	5/812		26			
53	8		287	54	15		27			
58				55			28			
59				56			29			

mode to light the rain. 89 channels each.

**Rob:** For more complicated shows with moving lights, FocusTrack tried to combine all this together: it would take the showfile, analyse it, figure out which lights were used in which position (and in which colour, gobo etc, which was also useful). It could then control the console to turn each light on in turn, take a picture, and combine all info as a database. You could see a light on its own in a focus, a light with its friends in a focus, then how that was then used in a cue. This has been the way I've documented shows ever since. It's great both for remaking a show 'as is' or when to upgrade fixtures and will be invaluable in October when we swap *Billy Elliot* over to a completely different rig for its new UK tour (see picture bottom left of the *Billy Elliot* FocusTrack for the previous Korea tour).

It does mean that the most efficient way of documenting the show is to wait until it's done, then do it all in one go. The Americans needed convincing (Post opening time on Broadway is very expensive) but it seems to have become standard now.

**Focus:** It's interesting that all three of these softwares were made by Brits ...

**Rob:** ... perhaps because no-one would

pay for that extra tracker person! Next step was VOR, which overlays the cue data from the console onto a video, so you can scroll through, find the right moment, see what's happening then fix it if necessary - it's so simple and so brilliant, for both doing notes during tech and documenting a show for the long term. Of course I still argue that all of this should be built into the console but no-one seems interested in doing that, perhaps because the vast majority of users - all those little shows done a few times then never seen again (or even all the really big shows that are never seen again, eg *Eurovision*)- really don't care, so it's not worth the console people putting the effort in.

**Will:** We brought VOR in for the last tour, mainly for cueing. Errors do creep in over time, a cue gets called three words too early because of something a director said in a rehearsal room. For the summer run at Alexandra Palace in August 2024, we set up a full show network. Our programmer Michael Fox - a genuine tech wizard - had a Mac Mini on the network running VOR and a 4K camera on the circle rail. VOR acts as a hub: it takes the 4K camera feed, the feed from the DSM's console, the audio from QLab and radio mics, and the feed from EOS, and produces a high-definition recording of the

show stamped with every single cue.

For a show with a lot of 'slow-burners' - our longest cue is about three and a half minutes - it's extraordinarily useful. The director could give a note in the hotel bar that evening: 'When the Inspector came downstage, the lights seemed to come up on him slowly.' We'd pull up that night's recording, find the moment, and immediately see that the cue was only fifty percent complete by the time he moved. You could actually show her: he moved too quickly, the light didn't get to him in time. Slightly unpopular with the actors though.

**Rob:** The other thing, as a starting point, is I'm always trying to make the console showfile super clear and self-explanatory - 'show your working' as they used to say in school - so that becomes the first point of reference, so if a light says its on 'Grandma DL - Stars gobo - big - sharp - red' and it comes up in green, you know there's something wrong. Then you can go check in the paperwork as to what it should be doing.

**Will:** In teaching at Mountview, I always tell students: there's no right or wrong way to document a show. The important thing is that it is documented accurately, and that it works for the person relighting it within the time they have. 🍷

**Offstage: This is the page where we are looking at ideas away from the performance space - 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](mailto:editor@thealpd.org.uk)**



Neurological research has shown that looking at repetitive, but subtly different patterns like trees, stippled lighting breaking through leaves and undulating patterns like waves or wheatfields can lower heart rate and blood pressure, reduce stress and anxiety, and reduce cortisol.

A walk in the woods is healthy for many reasons, but the calming influence onto the brain's neural pathways works even on an abstract



level, looking at photos or art, or as a memory with closed eyes. The Fractal Chapel at the University Hospital in Graz has a new design: Panels are broken with fractal patterns, and gobos of the patterns are projected in soft, slowly changing loops.

**Photos: Fractal Chapel, Hospital Graz. Forest, Editors own. (Bonus points if you find the dog). Source with thanks to Dr. S. Friess: <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC8416160/>**

## GOBOS ARE GOOD FOR YOU

**Fractal patterns research shows health benefit**

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