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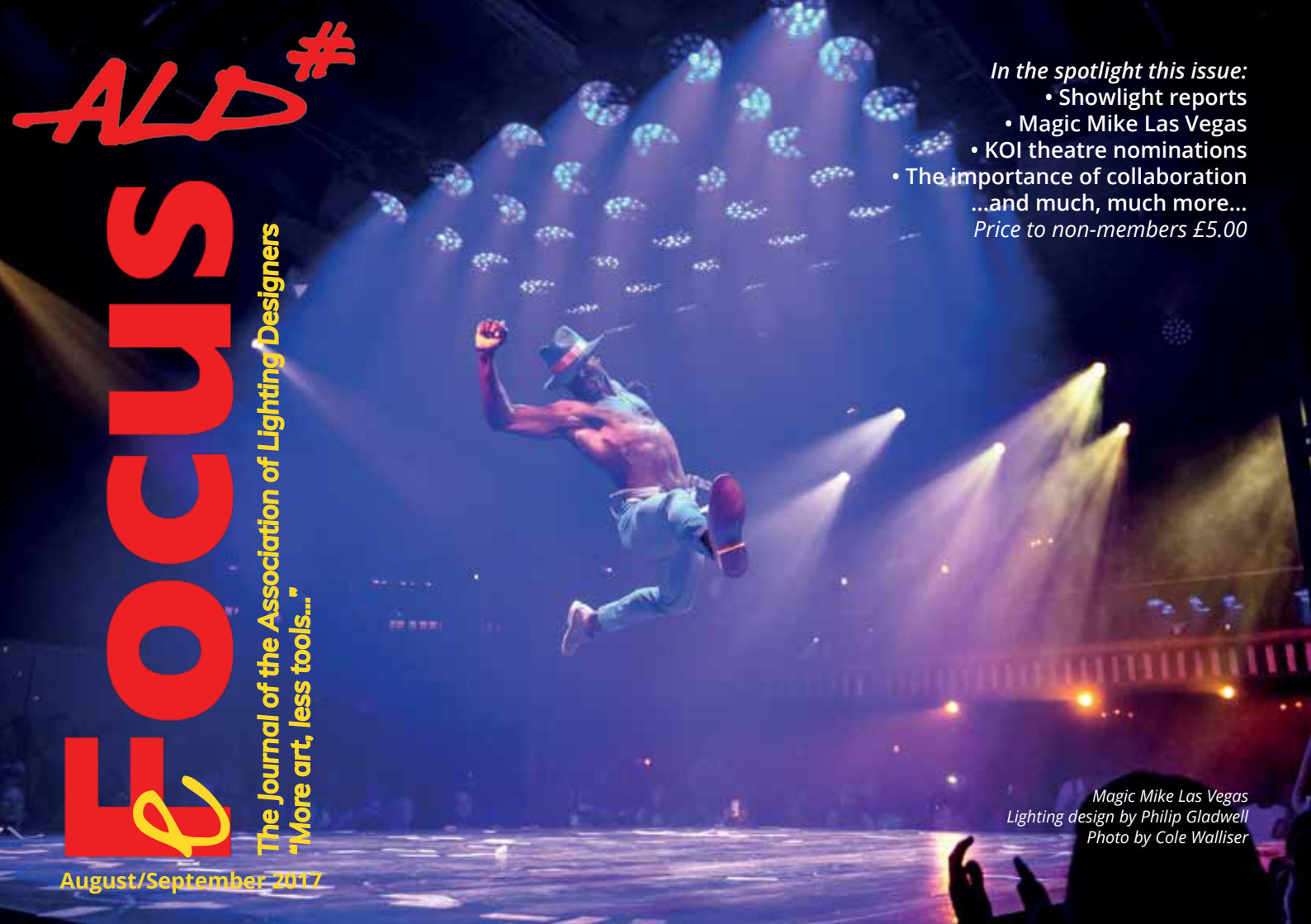
# FOCUS

The Journal of the Association of Lighting Designers  
"More art, less tools..."

August/September 2017

- In the spotlight this issue:*
- Showlight reports
  - Magic Mike Las Vegas
  - KOI theatre nominations
  - The importance of collaboration  
...and much, much more...
- Price to non-members £5.00*

*Magic Mike Las Vegas  
Lighting design by Philip Gladwell  
Photo by Cole Walliser*





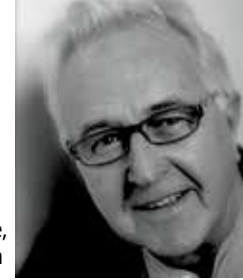
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# From the chair...



Peter Mumford  
ALD chair

I've just been sent the voting papers from United Scenic Artists (Local USA 829) to ratify its new LORT agreement. LORT is the League of Resident Theaters and the largest professional theatre association of its kind in America representing managements and negotiating contracts. One of the important successes of this most recent negotiation with LORT is improving the status and pay of assistant LDs. The fact that the American union recognises and represents this role and identifies the status of assistants brings home to me our failure to do so in the UK. The minimum current rate is just over \$1,000 per week for an assistant. When you work there the question is not "do you want an assistant?"; it's "who do you want?"

The UK theatre industry is recognised as a major global force. It is disproportionately large in relation to the size of our country, and London is seen on par with NY in terms of quality, quantity and output of theatrical product. Our managements, both subsidised and commercial, are happy to see our work travel the world. A large proportion of the shows on (and off) Broadway have come from Britain, so if we can achieve parity in renown and talent why not in areas such as this? We may criticise the control of the unions in the States, but it is that unity that has protected standards and pay in American theatre, maintained job structures, and supported training and education. In Britain there has been a change since the mid-Eighties that has bred a view that

unions are bad, Luddite and restrictive, and consequently they have lost much of their influence and power.

The ALD is not a union, although I hope that our influence and involvement with our unions is improving and will continue to do so. In the meantime, and because we don't have the power to "demand", we must try to influence through unity. We are largely comprised of individuals working in disparate areas rather than side by side. Our thoughts, opinions and inequalities need and can find an outlet for expression under the "roof" of the ALD.

We are producing large numbers of people who want to become lighting designers. But within the actual workplace we have not formally identified the role of assistant lighting designer or the need for this to be an accepted position on all productions. Managements need to be shown the value of this role and build it into budgets. The long-term savings (if a show is to transfer or tour) are clear, and the relief of pressure on the LD gives a definite creative boost. What can we do? Well, all designers can begin asking for an assistant on each show - if we all ask every time we sign a contract it might ring some bells eventually. Imagine if every lighting design project in the country had an assistant on board (and most productions do have an assistant director!) - what a huge number of doors would be opened for our aspiring next generation. So ... let's start asking! 🍷

Peter

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# Opera in London

Mark Jonathan returns to London (at least for a bit...)



I'm back in London after the successful openings of *Il nozze di Figaro* and *Semele* at Garsington Opera. I make it to the meet and greet for *Zazà*, which will open at Opera Holland Park, and check in on rehearsals for *Il turco in Italia*, which is to be my next production at Garsington. Between rehearsals, with some nights off, I am extremely lucky to catch the incredible Robert Lepage in 887 at the Barbican. Mr Lepage gives a tour de force solo performance combined with the incredible design and groundbreaking use of technology that his company Ex Machina always brings to its productions. I am also lucky enough to get to the opening of Glyndebourne's world premiere of the

opera *Hamlet*, brilliantly lit by Jon Clark. I'm soon back at Garsington for the production rehearsals of *Turco*. The schedule is tight but everything goes well and I'm delighted to have Dan Haggerty programming. While I've been away he has programmed *Pelléas et Mélisande*, lit by Malcolm Rippeth. On days off I watch rehearsals for *Zazà* in London. I blink and we have opened *Turco*, which is a big success, and musically and dramatically is a perfect complement to

the other operas in the Garsington season. Summer opera festivals have really taken off with the new Grange Park Opera, now installed in a brand new opera house at West Horsley, while the Grange Festival continues at the old Grange Opera House. Meanwhile, Glyndebourne, Holland Park, Garsington, Longborough and Buxton continue to thrive – all, as far as I know, without a government grant. I count that as thirty different productions, and

*Zazà*  
Opera Holland Park  
Director: Marie Lambert  
Designer: Alyson Cummins  
Costume designer: Camille Assaf  
Lighting director: Mark Jonathan  
Photographer: Robert Workman





*Pelléas et Mélisande*  
Garsington Opera  
Director: Michael Boyd  
Designer: Tom Piper  
Lighting designer: Malcolm Rippeth  
Photographer: Clive Barda

there are other companies around the country with Wexford in Ireland still to come. It seems that there are enough sponsors and audience to go round. In a controversial article, the Telegraph's opera critic Rupert Christiansen argues that "subsidised" opera at ENO has lost its way in comparison to the leaner management at Holland Park. While I don't necessarily disagree I am concerned that urging the Arts Council to remove the rest of its funding from ENO will do nothing for the fortunes of those who benefit from employment there.

Holland Park usually has at least one opera in its rep that is rarely performed and *Zazà* is one such opera. Composed by Ruggero Leoncavallo (of *Pagliacci* fame), *Zazà* tells the story of a music hall singer who has a serious affair only to find that the man has a wife and daughter. It's an opera of two parts: the first scene needs an epic stage to allow for scenes at the stage door, in Zaza's dressing room, backstage and "on stage" with a large chorus of actors, clowns, stage technicians and audience with an offstage band, while acts two, three and four are much more intimate.

I was intrigued to get a questionnaire from a theatre I had worked at last year. In order to make their Arts Council application they wanted to know certain personal details of everyone who had worked for them including gender, ethnicity, disability and sexual orientation. The company claims that it needs the information to fulfill the Arts Council's procedures. I called the Arts Council, which denied any quota system. Many thanks to Robbie Butler, our new Equity rep, for clarifying the situation. See page 9 for more information. Call me old fashioned, but do I really need to reveal my sexual orientation?

Have seven years already passed under the leadership of our current chair, Peter Mumford? The ALD has gone from strength to strength under his guidance. As you will now know Peter has decided to step down, and we owe him a great debt of gratitude for the conscientious care he has taken of the Association. I'm pleased that the ALD has matured and perhaps grown some sharper teeth. I think it has demonstrated its commitment to being progressive and becoming a recognised voice for the performance lighting industry. Under Peter we have seen the reinvention of the ALD website, the Association has become a

# Opera in London

Mark Jonathan

limited company, the Lumière and other bursary schemes have been developed, and we continue to represent lighting designers on Equity committees along with general development of our capability to support our members.

In acknowledging Peter's great contribution I am delighted that Jo (Johanna) Town has agreed to take up the baton as the chair of

the Association from January 2018. Jo has a wealth of experience in lighting. Having demonstrated her great skill on the shop floor as an outstanding lighting manager at the Royal Court until 2008, where she was already renowned as a lighting designer, she went freelance and has developed a large portfolio of work in all scales and genres of performance lighting. For the

ALD she has sat on the Exec for many years, latterly as the professional rep, and we both sat together on the Equity committee. I think the Executive's vote to elect Jo is a very fine decision, and I have no doubt that Jo will bring new and exciting aspects to the ALD. While I'm talking about the Association please bear in mind that we rely on our members to be involved and effectively run

the Association. So, if you are interested in being involved just contact Ian at the office or chat to a member of the Exec. I am delighted that in the last few years we have seen more members getting involved in different ways and in doing so the Association has gained diversity, strength and capability. The future looks bright! 🍀

*Il turco in Italia*  
Garsington Opera  
Director: Martin Duncan  
Designer: Francis O'Connor  
Lighting designer: Mark Jonathan  
Photographer: Alice Pennefather



# ZIRCON

## A new concept in LED filter design

Regular lighting filter can often quickly fade when used with LED lights – the Zircon range is different. With a lifespan of up to 200 times longer than standard filters and at more than double the thickness (180 microns), Zircon filters are not only slower to fade, they are durable and easy to use, too.

The four Warm Amber filters correct a range of different colour temperature white LEDs giving them a warmer feel. Three Diffusion filters offer different strengths of diffusion specifically designed for LEDs.



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# New professional rep needed

Johanna Town on how to get involved



Well, this is nearly my last article as your Professional rep. It is a very proud moment for me as a lighting practitioner to be appointed the new chair of the ALD, and I am very much looking forward to taking over from Peter in January 2018. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Peter for all his hard work and innovation as ALD chair over the past seven years. Where has the time gone!

Peter's introduction of the ALD to all lighting practitioners has not only expanded the organisation but also opened our doors to new ideas and good practice from all areas of the industry, and I welcome these changes. I hope to continue encouraging everyone in our industry to join the ALD, and that way we can stand strong – together.

The lighting industry offers an amazing career for a designer or technician in theatre, concert lighting or video, all the way through to our corporate industry where we have some amazing people inventing and supplying us with equipment that helps to make our work exciting and innovating year on year. We have all come into this industry because we were drawn to light. Let's share our ideas, dreams and aspirations to promote fantastic careers in all their guises.

Peter also introduced working groups. These have opened the organisation up to many more individuals becoming involved – individuals working on projects that are important to them, without having to necessarily be fully involved in the running of the ALD. They are beavering away in the background, bringing important issues to the front, be it the promoting of young designers or stirring up equality in the right direction or just getting that amazing new website working and keeping it working in an innovating fashion. It has made for a new association that people want to be part of and are also very much aware of – we are becoming a force to be reckoned with.

I know Peter will continue to head up the Lumière scheme. In the last two years we have launched two great pilot schemes with great success, and I hope we can secure some outside funding this year so that in 2018 we can really move forward and launch a full-time scheme for two candidates a year.

Thank you, Peter, for your "chairship", and I personally look forward to your continued advice through the coming years.

I am not planning to talk about my plans for the future right now, but I do want to discuss the upcoming vacancy of the professional lighting designer rep who will work alongside Stuart Porter in the role of professional lighting practitioners rep.

The role is simply what you would like to make it. We have the "liteline" contact where designers may come for advice, and there is the role of sharing information in the industry and the role of promoting lighting when and where possible.

Maybe you enjoy meeting for a drink and a chat, or maybe planning discussions is your thing. Maybe you like to write and can promote us this way through the industry. Or do you just like to talk? You might be more like me – I just like to



# Equity update

Robbie Butler clarifies equal opportunities

light and hope I can help when needed by others.

I have evolved the job into something different to when Mark Jonathan was the Professional rep, and he changed the role from the person before him – each to their own personality and flow. So what would you like to offer?

If you're interested in becoming more involved in the ALD, and if this is a role you feel you might like and would like to discuss further, please get in touch with either the office ([office@ald.org.uk](mailto:office@ald.org.uk)) or me ([johanna.town@ald.org.uk](mailto:johanna.town@ald.org.uk)). 🌸

I am thrilled to say that I will be representing the interests of lighting designers on the Equity Directors and Designers Committee.

My reason for getting involved in this grew out of a demanding fringe show that paid its creatives very little but did much more to support its cast. This was all very disenchanting, especially as the production was fully adhering to the Equity Fringe Agreement.

I joined to do something about this gap in Equity's policies and will let you know of any progress in the next issue of *Focus*. In recent weeks questions about equal opportunity and monitoring forms have been raised with the ALD. It's been recommended that members should be made aware of what the obligations of you as an individual, and the company that hires you, are.

The function of an equal opportunities monitoring serves to protect individuals from unlawful discrimination based on what are called "protected characteristics".

These include age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion/belief or lack of religion/belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The collection of this kind of information is a positive thing and benefits everyone through all stages of employment from

the recruitment process onwards, so you are encouraged to fill these forms in when asked.

However, it is optional and should not be used in employment decisions. Because you are being asked about protected characteristics there will always be a "prefer not to say" option. It is illegal for an employer to force you to disclose any information concerning a protected characteristic.

There are two ways in which this information can be collected: anonymously or confidentially. On an anonymous form, you will not be asked for your name; on a confidential form, you will. There are strict laws regarding how the information contained in these forms may be stored and those who will have access to them. This can be found out from your employer's equal opportunities policy.

For more information regarding equal opportunity monitoring, have a look at:

[www.gov.uk/employer-preventing-discrimination/recruitment](http://www.gov.uk/employer-preventing-discrimination/recruitment)

[www.eoc.org.uk](http://www.eoc.org.uk)

[www.equity.org.uk/campaigns/play-fair/monitoring/](http://www.equity.org.uk/campaigns/play-fair/monitoring/) 🌸



# Office Oracle

News and information from **Ian** and the ALD office

## **Changes on Executive Committee**

We have had a few changes on the Executive Committee following the AGM earlier this year.

Sean Gleason has decided to step down as a member due to pressure of work and having now finished handing over to the new student working group. We would like to thank Sean for his work as student rep over the years, but particularly for his organising of the Michael Northen bursaries every year.

Joining the Exec as co-opted members are Lucy Carter and Paul Smith. Lucy should need little introduction as she is a multi-award-winning lighting designer who has worked extensively in dance. Paul has been an ALD member for many years and his work splits fairly evenly between theatre and concert touring.

He is particularly interested in developing the membership amongst those working creatively in the concert world. If you have some ideas about this he can be contacted at [paul.smith@ald.org.uk](mailto:paul.smith@ald.org.uk).

Also joining the team is our new representative on the Directors and Designers' Committee at Equity, Robbie Butler. He is the main point of contact if you are a designer and have any questions about your union and its services: [equity@ald.org.uk](mailto:equity@ald.org.uk).

To see the full and current list of the committee visit [www.ald.org.uk/about/executive-committee](http://www.ald.org.uk/about/executive-committee).

## **The ALD and Equity**

We have recently had a meeting with the management team at Equity with regards to the forthcoming re-negotiation of the Society of London Theatre and UK Theatre designers' agreements. Also present was the Society of British Theatre Designers, and we have agreed to form a working group to discuss the forthcoming claim before it is taken forward by Equity's negotiators.

We feel this is a positive step in order to change and improve agreements that we feel have not reflected the work of lighting designers in modern theatre for a long time. As we go forward into the autumn we will be asking professional members a number of questions about how we proceed. But we have a tight turnaround time, so quick responses will be much appreciated!

## **Central London facility for ALD members**

PRG XL Video has a new central London location this year, which includes two meeting rooms, and plenty of hot desking space. If you need to arrange a meeting near Leicester Square/Covent Garden, or need a hot desk space with Wi-Fi between meetings, why not visit them?

Please book meeting rooms in advance by emailing Claire Gilligan at [clairegilligan@prg.com](mailto:clairegilligan@prg.com) or call 0207 632 1500.

For hot desks, feel free to drop in!

The office is directly opposite Leicester Square tube (Cranbourn Street exit): PRG XL Video, 1st Floor, 77 St Martin's Lane, London WC2N 4AA.

## **ALD members' meetings this autumn**

We have a rush of show visits coming up for ALD members in the next month or so. In all cases, we are limited on numbers and there are also ticket offers for each. Please sign up using the links below or contact [meetings@ald.org.uk](mailto:meetings@ald.org.uk) directly.

Thursday 17 August  
Bat Out of Hell  
London Coliseum  
<https://aldboohvisit.eventbrite.co.uk>

Tuesday 29 August  
Jesus Christ Superstar  
Regents Park Open Air Theatre  
<https://aldjscvisit.eventbrite.co.uk>

Friday 29 September  
42nd Street  
Theatre Royal Drury Lane  
<https://ald42stvisit.eventbrite.co.uk>

By far the easiest way to stay up to date with our events between editions of *Focus* is to ensure you are receiving our email bulletins (details below). If you have a project or event that may be of interest to our members, contact the meetings team on the email listed above.

### **Do we have your correct contact details?!**

During this period of the year we often receive copies of *Focus* returned to us as "Unknown at this address" or "Addressee gone away". These are often (but not

exclusively) for our students and recent graduates as they change address at the end of the academic year.

Please ensure that you update your information on the website directly via the "Contact Details and Preferences" page or contact [membership@ald.org.uk](mailto:membership@ald.org.uk). An incorrect address can result in your not receiving membership renewal notices and places the continuation of your membership at risk.

The new website also requires each member to have an email address to be able to operate it to its full potential, so please ensure that your current or preferred address is on our system. If you are reading this and you have never registered an email address with us but wish to access the members side of the website and/or receive our email bulletins, please contact us as soon as possible so we can update your details.

### **ALD communications**

To receive email bulletins from us, you will have to opt in, and then specify which ones you want to receive: ALD News, Jobs Bulletins and/or Company News.

Please check your personal settings on the website. These can be found on the "Contact Details and Preferences" page, which is accessible from the "My ALD" page after you have logged in to our site.

We still use Mail Chimp to distribute email bulletins, and this automatically syncs with the settings on the ALD website. We do receive occasional bounce notifications, so please check whether your current contact details are correct. You should also check your spam filters and junk folders in case emails are re-directed to there, and add [mailshots@ald.org.uk](mailto:mailshots@ald.org.uk) to your address book to ensure you are more likely to receive them.

In addition to selecting which email bulletins you receive, you can also now select your postal communication preferences in a similar manner for the following items: ALD Members' Directory; ALD membership renewals; company members mailings; *Focus* magazine; and industry magazine subscriptions (L&SI, ET Now).

We have previously received notes from members asking to opt out of various posted items which we were not able to do on a mix and match process other than through separating out company mailings. So it is now possible for instance to receive a hard copy of *Focus*, but not receive a Members' Directory if you wish to.

### **Members' combined insurance scheme**

Many thanks to all those who have signed up to this public liability and professional indemnity insurance policy available for Professional and Affiliate members.

This will give you up to £10million of public liability and products insurance

# Office Oracle

Ian Saunders

cover if you work as a freelancer, as well as £1 million of professional indemnity cover. It is organised by the same company that runs the BECTU and Equity policies, but is much closer to the policy the Association of Sound Designers has been running for its members for the last couple of years. You should have received an insert of the policy summary with this issue of *Focus*.

We have been asked to clarify that although the Executive has decided that the first year of the scheme will be subsidised, costing an extra £15 per member signing up during 2017, if you currently carry your own individual public liability insurance policy, even the full price of this product will save you money. If you are currently using the BECTU scheme, it is much more on a par with that in terms of additional cost above your membership subscriptions.

However, the ALD has committed significant funds just to be able to set up and run the scheme each year, and so the Executive will aim to keep it priced as competitively as it can be as more people sign up to receive it and it impacts on the Association's financial position.



*Showlight bursary winners (left to right):  
Ric Mountjoy, Sherry Coenen and Sandy McRobbie.  
Read their reports on pages 18 to 30.  
Photo by Ian Saunders*

## New ILP president

Congratulations to Alan Jaques, the new president of the Institution of Lighting Professionals (ILP). Alan began his year-long term of office on June 14 at the ILP's Professional Lighting Summit in Glasgow. Alan has emphasised how important it is that the ILP, and the lighting profession as a whole, does more to communicate the value and importance of lighting design and engineering to the general public and industry practitioners, as well as raising

awareness of lighting as a career within schools. We wish him all the best.

## BPM Pro Trade Show

ALD members have been invited to the annual BPM Pro trade show that takes place at the NEC in Birmingham on Sunday 22 and Monday 23 October. To register for your tickets, just use the trade registration code TRADE2017 on the website when applying for tickets at [www.bpmpro.online](http://www.bpmpro.online). 📌

# The 9x%

## Addressing diversity and everyday “-isms” in our industry

It took me a long time to realise that class was an issue for me as part of my career in theatre. I grew up in a small town where there was no private school, and the catchment area for both my schools (primary and secondary) dissected the richest and poorest neighbourhoods in the area. So I spent my school years rubbing along with people from across the class spectrum, and I never really noticed the difference between us all.

The rep theatre in my town is relatively well known throughout the UK, and its history means that it is of international interest too. Which meant that it's a respected place to work, and so "going into theatre" was a viable work option for those of us who did well in drama at school and then moved on to theatre studies and performing arts at sixth form. Our school was particularly strong in music too, and I've now got mates who are known internationally in their (very different) areas of music and whose lives seem pretty far removed from our small-town beginnings.

I haven't always been aware of the times that class has affected my career until

I've looked back on it later and seen just how clearly I just didn't quite fit in with the Eton/Oxford confidence of the rest of the production team (this is a specific example, but there have been a fair few similar ones over the years). At the time, those productions just felt uneasy. Often that feeling was accompanied by other people's lack of trust in my work, while completely trusting the decisions of those that they considered their peers.

I was on tour once in the USA, and I remember one of the cast saying over dinner, "It's just such a relief to be working with a theatre company where everyone is working class." I hadn't considered it until that day, but it opened my eyes to something I'm aware of more and more. This next statement speaks only of my experience, in my career, but when I have witnessed the kind of bullying that has been referred to in the last two 9X% articles, it has tended to come from the team members with privileged backgrounds. And they have tended to get away with it.

I've actually grown in confidence since I've recognised this, and I've started to

care less about other people's opinions of me. I don't talk about my background and my class much. Whilst I occasionally feel outraged when I hear other members talking about "the kind of people who..." (which basically means me) in rehearsal room or casting discussions, I don't feel it's my job to educate them. 🚫

All submissions to **9X%** are written by anonymous members and curated by Katharine Williams ([katharine.williams@ald.org.uk](mailto:katharine.williams@ald.org.uk)). Email Katharine to submit your own experience.

# Professional Members' shows

## opening in August and September

Taken from the "Diary" page of the ALD website. A full listing of all members' shows can be seen at [www.ald.org.uk/diary](http://www.ald.org.uk/diary). To be listed, you need to enter show credits into your profile after signing in to the Members' area.

### August

**1 Will Burgher** Punk Rock Wyvern Theatre, Swindon / **2 Joshua Gadsby** Lists for the End of the World Summerhall, Edinburgh / **4 Simon Wilkinson** Flight Edinburgh International Festival / **6 Simon Wilkinson** Meet Me At Dawn Edinburgh International Festival / **8 Will Evans** Estron (Alien) Yr Cwt (temporary theatre) Eisteddfod 2017 / **9 Johnathan Rainsforth** Legally Blonde – The Musical Customs House, South Shields / **10 Prema Mehta** A Midsummer Night's Dream The Curve, Leicester / **11 Michael D Harpur** The Majority Dorfman Theatre – Royal National Theatre / **11 Johanna Town** Remarkable Invisible Theatre by the Lake, Keswick / **16 Jason Addison** (lighting programmer) Our Mutual Friend Hull Truck Theatre / **22 Tom Boucher** Richard III Temple Church / **23 James C McFetridge** Singin' in the Rain The Mac, Belfast / **27 Johnathan Rainsforth** End of The Peir The Customs House / **29 Jamie Platt** Gormenghast Parco Corsini, Fucecchio, Italy / **29 Johanna Town** Fox on the Fairway Queen's Theatre Hornchurch

### September

**1 Tim Mascal** Pygmalion The English Theatre, Frankfurt / **2 Richard G Jones** Sister Act / **6 Tim Mascal** The Real Thing Cambridge Arts Theatre / **7 Declan Randall** ISHQ – The Musical Sadlers Wells Theatre / **8 Malcolm Rippeth** Boudica Shakespeare's Globe / **15 Prema Mehta** Of Kith and Kin Sheffield Theatres and The Bush / **15 Ben Pickersgill** (associate lighting designer) The Little Greats Leeds Grand Theatre / **18 Sam Waddington** 35mm: A Musical Exhibition The Other Palace / **20 Mark Jonathan** Aladdin The Lowry, Birmingham Hippodrome, Sadler's Wells, Theatre Royal Plymouth / **20 Jamie Platt** Le Grand Mort Trafalgar Studios 2 / **25 Jason Addison** Sidney's Shed Boston West Academy / **25 Joshua Gadsby** A Dangerous Woman Birmingham Rep / **26 James C McFetridge** The Secret Diary of Adrian Mole The Mac, Belfast / **27 Charlie Morgan Jones** The Tempest Greenwich Theatre / **28 Malcolm Rippeth** The Tin Drum Liverpool Everyman / **29 Bernd Purkrabek** Tiefand Théâtre du Capitole, Toulouse

# Contact us

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# New members

Welcome!

## **Professional Member**

**Sam Floyd, Whitley Bay**

**Dan Flynn, Essex**

**Carlos Guzman, London**

**Lucy Hansom, London\***

**Ceri James, Camarthen**

**Dave Lascaut, Staffordshire**

**Andrea Moser, Hamburg**

**Bernd Purkrabek, Berlin\***

**Emilio Rey, Austria**

**George Townsend, London**

## **Affiliate Member**

**Marcin Gryt, Poland**

## **Associate Member**

**Robert Bridges. Loughborough**

\* Re-joining the association

# Diary dates 2017

- 17 August** Members' visit to *Bat Out of Hell*  
London Coliseum
- 29 August** Members' visit to *Jesus Christ Superstar*  
Regents Park, London
- 17–19 September** PLASA Show, Olympia, London\*
- 17 September** 10th Knight of Illumination awards, Hammersmith
- 29 September** Members' visit to *42nd Street*  
Theatre Royal Drury Lane
- 29 September** Members' social evening†  
Sponsored by GLP 
- 22–23 October** BPM Pro Show, NEC Birmingham
- 27 October** Members' social evening†  
Sponsored by Martin Professional 
- 3 November** TheatreCraft 2017, Waldorf Hilton, London\*
- 24 November** Members' social evening†  
Sponsored by SLX 

Keep up to date with ALD events via the online diary: [www.ald.org.uk/diary](http://www.ald.org.uk/diary)

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

† The monthly members' social evening is at The Coach & Horses, 42 Wellington St, London WC2E 7BD.

# PLASA London

PLASA Show's fortieth anniversary, 17–19 September



PLASA Show will mark its fortieth anniversary this September, with a show that celebrates the evolution of the entertainment technology industry, and an exciting future for the PLASA Show, following last year's successful move to London Olympia. Anyone involved in the industry is now invited to sign up for the show, with free registration open online.

This year's expanded show will accommodate over 200 leading audio, lighting, AV, rigging and stage technology brands. The renowned education programme will also be extended, with three dedicated seminar theatres hosting seminars, workshops and panel sessions featuring some of the industry's leading designers, engineers, production and venue teams.

The first phase of seminars announced for the Lighting, Staging and Rigging Theatre includes a session with award-winning video and projection designer Nina Dunn, titled "Video as Light". Dunn will be joined by guests to discuss the dynamic techniques for using video design to support theatrical lighting.

Richard Pilbrow, leading theatre design consultant, stage lighting designer and

author, will host a panel session titled "Women Backstage ... a New Theatre?", which will look at the rise of women's contribution to the world of theatre. Pilbrow will be joined by an impressive panel line-up, including Anne Minors, theatre consultant; Lisa Burger, executive director at the National Theatre of Great Britain; Rae Smith, designer; Dawn Chiang, lighting designer and theatre consultant; and Anne Valentino, senior controls product manager, ETC.

During the show, visitors can take part in hands-on product training. Avolites will be running regular sessions on the brand-new features of the Titan software v10.1. Attendees will be able to try the new features using a range of consoles, as well as pick up some useful programming tips and skills.

PLASA Show 2017 will return to London Olympia on 17–19 September 2017. Free registration is open until the end of August. For more information and to register please visit [www.plasashow.com](http://www.plasashow.com). 🍁



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# Arrivederci Showlight

**Sandy McRobbie** reviews the papers at this year's Showlight

Showlight 2017 couldn't have come to a more appropriate place. Florence, in Tuscan Italy, understands light, and indeed supports a light festival. We had an ideal venue in the Palazzo dei Congressi, architecture and history firmly in the premier division and some balmy spring sunshine. An opening reception with an extensive buffet complemented by local wines (which, being a lighting-based event, mysteriously kept running out) was provided for thirsty delegates who had travelled from afar! The Showlight papers committee again managed to put

together a programme of papers, events and exhibits that touched on virtually every aspect of our craft.

The opening act on Sunday morning was **Declan Randall's** "A Rose Window by Any Other Name". He detailed the process behind the South African staging of *Sister Act* – a major stage musical adaptation of the film, on which he was responsible for the set, lighting and projection design. Gothic arches, stained glass and multiple quick location changes abounded. Both his advance WYSIWYGs and a time-lapse video of the entire fit-up and teching of the show illustrated his points well.

Next, **Al Gurdon**, who designed the lighting for a production of *Grease Live!* for US network Fox, talked about his aims, techniques and potential concerns in lighting a hybrid TV/stage musical theatre. The visual tone required that it was obviously "live", but Al decided to avoid large "flashy" rigs, opting to "make the theatrical work



*Sandy has been in the lighting and production business for over 40 years. Fortunate to have had wide-ranging experience, he's as happy in a theatre or outdoors at a festival or on location. He's currently undertaking some lighting lecturing at Perth College.*

to heighten reality or occasionally replace it". The challenges of forty-four cameras, three sound stages and a three-hour live transmission slot were considerable. A high wind on the day had forced the derig of all the side panels on the stages – these had been acting as daylight flags, and required last minute lighting changes.

Effective gallery lighting using LEDs was considered by **Henk van der Geest** discussing his relighting of Amsterdam's Van Gogh Museum. With the brief being "no incandescent sources", and despite a previous personal preference for using halogen, Henk set about researching the situation with LED exhibit lighting. With the curators constantly trying to reduce the lumen level to prevent damage to the collection, it was important that the units used had excellent colour rendering and quality. Many white LED units use the blue and yellow phosphor emitters, but too high a blue level risked affecting the pictures.

**James Simpson** of the Royal Opera House (ROH) pondered "How do you know you've got a bad production?" The ROH has done considerable work on enabling pre-visualisation prior to the precious stage tech time to address unforeseen issues, which is

*Showlight chairman John Allen welcomes delegates  
Photo by David Clarke, courtesy of Showlight*



Henk van der Geest on lighting the Van Gogh Museum  
Photo by David Clarke, courtesy of Showlight



essential in the ROH because of its rep style of operation. The initial use of WYSIWYG has now developed into photorealistic, real-time visualisations, which are being further adapted into augmented reality (AR), walk-through scenic locations and production illustrations. James commented that audience use of AR will grow to be a £100billion industry and speculated about whether this would detract from live attendance at a performance.

At the other end of the scale was a production of *Sweeney Todd*, lit by **Amy Mae Smith**, which was staged in a Tooting pie shop for an audience of thirty-two. With a limited budget plus safety issues, as the venue was used as a cafe all day, compromises had to be made. LED units were deemed to be both too modern and

also too expensive. Backlighting was largely using candles; side and front using old birdies. These narrow beams helped to reduce the feeling of claustrophobia in the space. Amy ended by answering a few queries from Ken Billington who had lit the original Broadway production!

Italian LD **Marco Filibeck** chronicled

some of the changes in Italian opera and ballet lighting. See Ric's article on page 28 for an in-depth account of Marco's paper.

The 2016 Olympics closing ceremony in Brazil was described as "the greatest busk on earth" by **Durham Marengi**. He described his role as 90% political, 10% lighting. As the football tournament was being held until the day before the ceremony, most equipment had to be pre-installed and focused, with much of the plotting, plus the projection mapping, done off site. "Faith and criminal optimism" were the principal attributes required by the entire LX crew! Explaining the lower light levels required to view the projected imagery apparently took a bit of explaining to the local TV directors. A storm grounding the aerial shot helicopter and damaging equipment didn't help matters.

The next generation of light sources was put in focus by **Andreas Huber** of Osram. Whilst the laser-phosphor diode is still more costly than the LED, the emerging phaser technology considerably increases the luminance possible, almost on par with the discharge sources currently used for long-throw units. These small, tight and extremely high power sources will have applications in projection, followspots, automotive and also medicine.

**Colin Ball** of DPP is an architectural LD who tackled the Westminster Hall relighting project. The building is eight hundred years old and has the largest vaulted ceiling in the UK; this was further complicated by a client request that minimal equipment be visible! It was discovered that the "original" chandeliers were in fact only 200 years old and that the bricked-up upper windows had provided much of the interior illumination. An LED panel was designed to mimic this, and approval is awaited for the installation to go ahead. Colin observed that architecture could be described as the relationship between light and materials.

The history and the passion of German lighting provider ARRI was thoroughly covered by **Markus Zeiler**. ARRI was established to service the emerging film industry in Munich by August Arnold and Robert Richter. Two of their landmark developments were the faceted reflector in 1924, and the use of the HMI sources in the 1960s.

# Arrivederci Showlight

Sandy McRobbie

Kelli Zezulka in the “Language of Light” talked about the communication process between lighting and production professionals. Even if they speak the same verbal language, the point might not be getting across. Lighting designers need to have a duality of language – i.e. the artistic vs the technical – when talking to a director or the rigging crew. Misunderstandings can easily arise if the communication isn't there.

“Film Lighting for Night Exteriors” was very ably presented by **Phil Meheux** BSC,

*Phil Meheux talks about lighting tricky James Bond sequences  
Photo by David Clarke, courtesy of Showlight*

an award-winning cinematographer. He used *Zorro* and *Casino Royale* to illustrate techniques used to cope with large-scale, outdoor shoots at night. The use of the innovative ring of LEDs around the camera lens (aka the kiss light) was important, as was the backlit panels incorporated into the set for back and side lighting. Having no overhead or adjacent structures is often a rigging issue. For soft lighting the scenes, a jibbed-out crane-suspended platform with under-hanging balloon diffuser units

works well without causing equipment shadows. Similarly, mobile telescopic lift mounted units are invaluable, although harder to keep out of shot.

**David Duffy's** “Bringing Puppetry to Life at the Little Angel Theatre” was appropriately subtitled “playing with the edge of light”. In order to conceal puppeteers and marionette strings, lighting tends to be from the top and sides to produce narrow planes on the performance area or

playboard. The six-metre proscenium has a full complement of pinspots and mini-profiles. Puppeteers are good at finding their light, and, if they're lit in dim saturated colours, can add depth to the scene as they almost become set.

The magic art of mirror stretching featured in **Rob Halliday's** presentation “Warm Velvety Darkness to Spinning Dichroic Discs”. *Tree of Codes* involved touring large circular polycarbonate dichroic mirrors that rotated! This produced different colours dependent on viewing either the mirrored reflection or the original projected light. The seven-colour shadows produced were similar to those of the ETC Lustr 2s in the rig. All this mirroring required the stage maskers to be covered on both sides!

**Aldo Visentin** has been Maestro Andrea Bocelli's lighting designer for a number of years. With no artist input due to Bocelli's blindness, he's left with a blank canvas, but freedom brings responsibility. In the USA and the UK he can tour a rig, but elsewhere advance work has to be done with the local venues and rental companies. Aldo has thus had experience of many different manufacturers' products! Many of the non-conventional venues used also required architectural elements to be lit.

The live demonstration of an infrared camera tracking projection system by **Frieder Weiss** was fascinating. His system is known as Kalypso, and he described productions where he has used video as





a live medium, integrated into the set, lighting and choreography. The current slight latency/delay of the system can be problematic, but can often be incorporated into the effect desired.

"Lighting the Multi Camera TV Situation Comedy" was elegantly explained by **Martin Kempton**. In the black and white days the lighting was "hard" to ensure levels were adequate for the cameras. With the advent of colour and sensitive cameras, most lighting designers switched to "soft" lighting both set and performers. Martin noted that studio LX bars usually resulted in a compromise rigging position whereas pole equipped studios allowed more exact positioning of lumieres. He also encouraged the use of colour and urged us to "uplight the villain"!

changed as he progressed. He credited much to the late Sue Gibson (a director of photography whom he met at Showlight 2005) in his descriptions of filming *Death in Paradise* in the heat and humidity of Guadeloupe. Despite his awareness of the lighting department's preferences he usually shot the close-ups first when the cast was fresh, and then used a 12mm lens for the wide shots, making hiding equipment tricky. Roger is a great believer in letting lighting help you tell the story and that a good location shoots itself, while a bad one shoots itself in the foot.

"That's Great, But Who Will Make It?!" allowed **Robin Barton** of Lamp & Pencil to detail the process behind the conceptual design and build of

**Roger Simonsz** started out in theatre lighting before training as a cameraman, eventually becoming a director of photography and then a director. Thus his talk "It's My Light ... Yes, but It's My Lens!" highlighted how his attitude to techniques and conventions had

bespoke equipment and effects for the presentation industry. A self-confessed "geek", Robin admitted that they had to follow quite strict guidelines to avoid financial loss. "A specification defines the project deliverables" and a client's upfront deposit both seem to keep all parties on track. What does it do, what doesn't it do, what does it interact with, as well as the where, when and how much should all be considered before embarking on a project.

Large-scale landscape as opposed to scenic lighting was discussed by **Isabel Nielsen** in "Laser Explorations – an Extension of the Lighting Designer's Toolkit?" Her work *Ana Morphie* used an area of Dutch countryside about 900m across by 500m deep and featured a specially composed live soundtrack – oh, and little or no budget! Other than a sunrise effect mounted on a concealed forklift truck, most of the lighting was kept close to the ground to help it blend in. The laser was used discreetly across the field of view to avoid it overwhelming the landscape, and it took a fair bit of experimentation to achieve the desired effect. The storms and lightning on the night of the event, whilst just far away enough to be safe for the outdoor audience, looked as if they'd been planned from the start!

Historical technology being put back in use was **Paul Russell's** remit in "How Far Can that Little Candle Throw its Beam?" Specifically referring to the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse attached to

# Arrivederci Showlight

Sandy McRobbie

the Globe Theatre in London, it was a comprehensive guide to the use of candles to light Elizabethan dramas. Most of the information had to be rediscovered as well as resuscitating the old profession of candle technician! Having decided on beeswax as opposed to tallow, the ideal size was settled at 3/4" diameter and 9" length, giving a six- to seven-hour burn. The weekly tally required at the Wanamaker can total 3,000 candles at a

cost of £750. The candle arrays are raised and lowered according to the scene. Current health and safety requires steel-cored hemp rope – just in case! Many tricks of the trade have emerged as the project has progressed. Elizabethan ruffs, for instance, are very good at reflecting light onto the actors' faces. The human eye is very good at smoothing out levels, but filming for TV is still quite problematic.

When Finnish lighting and set designer

**Mikki Kunttu** was asked to pitch for *Swan Lake* at the Royal Danish Ballet in 2015, he was already re-evaluating the commercial direction his career was taking. Keen to find his own aesthetic vocabulary he devised a heavy duty but intricate set,

lighting and projection scheme which was costed at over twice the original budget! Royal Danish Ballet didn't want a "classic" production and decided to re-jig finances and go ahead. Working to "optimistic schedules from hell" the ballet featured moving legs and borders, partly opaque to enhance gobo projections, giving them an almost Art Deco look. An overhead LED forest and tracking nine-metre side towers competed the set, with the overhead lighting rig being flown high. The video projections were used to animate the set movements between scenes.

The **Programmers Panel** of Stuart Porter, Brad Schiller and Ross Williams was chaired by Bernie Davis. There was a lively discussion about the various degrees of involvement the programmer has with the final design. Lighting designers were largely placed in three broad categories: they see the programmer as a collaborator; they do an "I'll be back" and leave the programmer to get on with it while they politic; or they would really rather be programming the show themselves! Sometimes it's circumstances that dictate these personalities.

"The Importance of Collaboration" saw **Luc Peumans** discussing his design role in the large-scale site-specific Belgian production *14-18*, which ran for over 200 performances. A musical set during the First World War, it involved moving the 1,900-seat audience bleacher as well as ten large laser-controlled set trucks. Luc had originally wanted loads

Frider Weiss' live demonstration  
Photo by David Clarke, courtesy of Showlight

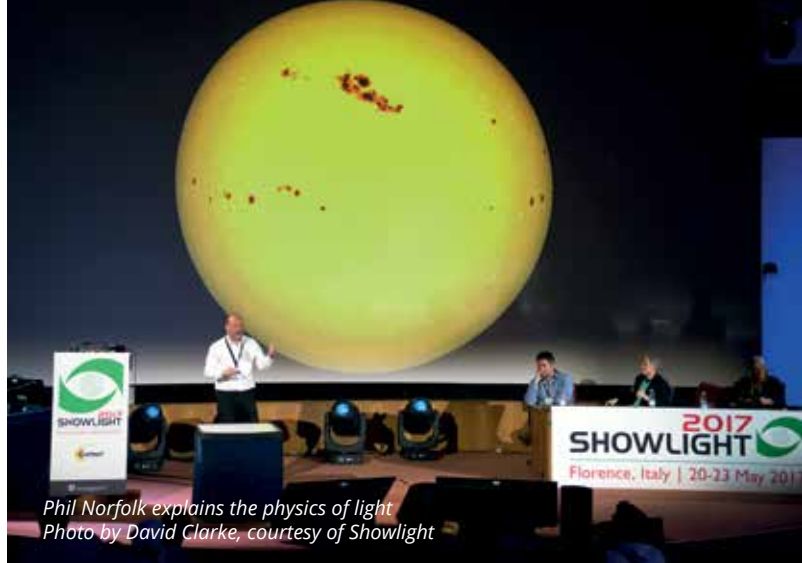


of old DHA digital light curtains to define the moving areas but, due to a shortage of still-working units, ended up with a huge number of old VL5s that were languishing in a warehouse! With nine mapped projectors, thirty smoke machines and many LED practicals on the trucks all wirelessly controlled, there was a lot of detail as well as the arena-scaled washes to programme quickly. This wouldn't have been possible without interdisciplinary collaboration between all the departments.

Florentine LD **Vinicio Cheli** gave us a brief trip through Italian theatre lighting technology since 1980 in "Lights On – Where the Old School Meets the Future". He considered the impact of the early Pani HMI PCs and Fresnels on the large-scale sets of Herzog and Zefferelli. The use of both Telescans and Vari-Lites had required separate control systems and crews, but the added range of effects possible justified the inconvenience.

"Night Safari in Singapore Revisited" allowed **Simon Corder** to compare the original 1994 brief for a darktime zoo with what new technology, combined with site experience, would allow twenty years later. The look was largely moonlight and firelight, and the early cold-start discharge lamps used had been backed up by Par 38s for safety, in case of power failure. HPL or RGBW LEDs were used as replacements, simplifying mains supplies and control. Crew safety was simple on this install – stay away from the animals!

**Jeff Ravitz** has been lighting Bruce Springsteen and The E Street Band since 1984 and gave a comprehensive review of the techniques he's used and the changes over the intervening thirty-three years. These transitions largely mirrored the rapid technological and practical advances made in our craft. The Eighties rig consisted of a lot of parcans, some ellipsoidals and eight colour scrollers complemented by nine followspots. No bold colours were used on these spots, and Bruce's keylight was off-centred to give a Rembrandt effect. Overall, this is quite a "toppy" effect, with the colours from the rear and sides. Then along came moving lights followed by large video screens. Each gig now required broadcast lighting that looked good both in the close-up, magnified shot on the screens and also to the arena audience. With the crowd now usually also being seated behind the stage, background definition using the set or backcloths wasn't possible. An upstage raised runway plus the band's backline were often gently highlighted to help on-



*Phil Norfolk explains the physics of light  
Photo by David Clarke, courtesy of Showlight*

screen composition. Only recently has Bruce allowed some light smoke and haze to help beam definition.

"Photons and Why We Should Love Them" allowed **Phil Norfolk** to pontificate on the not-so-basic physics surrounding light. He was aided and abetted by a bunch of lemons, a pinch of chaos, and a gratuitous picture of Einstein (who had to be involved, seeing as we were discussing physics). The introduction of some limoncello later in his talk didn't really help to clarify matters!

In conclusion, chairman John Allen invited the hardworking 2017 committee members on stage to accept the gratitude of the near 400 delegates. Another memorable Showlight was unfortunately over – roll on 2021. 🍀

# Work hard, play hard

Sherry Coenen looks at the other side of Showlight

As Showlight is as much about the socialising as the papers it was fitting that we kicked off with a drinks reception – even more so when it started to rain and all the people queuing to register had to become instant friends as umbrellas were shared. Everyone became very well acquainted as the concept of personal space disappeared in the squash to get into the building. Once inside it was lovely to bump into people I'd not seen in ages and have a quick catch up or make

dinner plans before we were all ushered to the front of the room where John Allen, chairman of Showlight 2017, welcomed delegates to the opening reception. We were given a brief talk about what to expect in the coming days and had few words from the Firenze council about the city and the Florence Festival of Light which happens every December. Then it was back to John for a bit more housekeeping including our rather early call time for the start of the show Sunday morning

On Sunday morning we made our way down a small side street through the unassuming entry building and into the lovely garden that led to our home for the next three days. First stop was upstairs

which was set up with the Neal Preston exhibition: In the Eye of the Rock 'n' Roll Hurricane from the Lightpower Collection. It's made up of a selection of seventy photos he has taken during his forty-year career and proceeds from the sales go to Behind the Scenes and Backup – charities that support technicians in times of need. Downstairs, the exhibitors were putting the final touches on their stands (special mention to Simon Barrett of GLP who had his luggage – and thus all his demo kit – lost ... leading to his stand bearing a sign admonishing his airline). After a brief wander to decide which stands to revisit at lunch, some strong coffee and a few "good morning"s it was time to take our seats for the first day of papers.

After a full day of talks we were sent back to our accommodation to dress for dinner, which was being hosted by the exhibitors at various restaurants around town. John made sure we knew what a trial it was for him and the Showlight team to have had to personally scout each location and sample our menus for the evening! When registering for Showlight we were given a list of all the hosted tables and asked

Sherry Coenen has a BFA in lighting design from the University of Miami. Since graduating she has been a regular on the London Fringe scene, most recently These Trees are Made of Blood at the Arcola. [www.ald.org.uk/sherrycoenen](http://www.ald.org.uk/sherrycoenen)



Delegates gather at the welcome reception  
Photo by David Clarke, courtesy of Showlight





*The Florence branch of the Coach and Horses  
Photo by Ian Saunders*

to select the three we would most like to attend. I cannot speak for anyone else but I had a lovely evening at the Lee Filters table. The food was fabulous as promised and the company superb – we got some rather perturbed looks from the wait staff when we were so busy chatting we didn't actually manage to order our meal until an hour after we arrived. As I mentioned at the start this social aspect is what makes Showlight so great and differentiates it from all the other tradeshow one normally attends. I got to pick the brain of a TV lighting designer for tricks to use on an upcoming indie film, and I met a student to whom I have since offered some production electrics work – not to mention getting

changing LED. Though we did all agree that (sorry, ETC Lustr2) there is nothing on the market that can match a tungsten fixture in a rich saturate such as L789 or L327. Once we closed out the restaurant it was either home to get some rest before another packed day or – if you followed the ALD Twitter feed, you'll have seen this – off to the Firenze branch of Brewdog (re-christened The Coach and Horses) for some late-night networking drinks.

After the libations of the first night, day two was thankfully only a half day of papers. There is so much information to take in that the pace can be quite relentless. I'm sure I'm not the only one who had full notebooks and some rather

to plug for a Rosco 33 equivalent. We also had interesting chats about where the filter industry is headed with the relentless march of colour-

serious finger cramps. Thankfully all that practice of noting shows during previews means I can at least take discernible notes at speed – and you really don't want to miss anything during these talks.

After a quick lunch we were back to the socialising. The afternoon session was the city tours. Again, during the run up to Showlight we were presented with a list of possible trips and asked to select three options. I had really wanted the tour that took in both the theatre and the new opera house, but as that was a minibus tour and I am fleet of foot it made more sense for me to take a walking tour. And it was brilliant. I had come to Florence a few days before Showlight began and so had wandered quite a lot of the city, but hadn't known what I was seeing. Our guide was a wealth of information and told us all about the buildings and sculptures we had been walking past for the last several days. We went to a perfumery and then took a roundabout route to the Pergola Theatre. We arrived at the theatre while a lighting fit-up was happening. After a tour of the auditorium and a bit of a talk about the history of the founding members and venue construction we were finally allowed

# Work hard, play hard

Sherry Coenen

onto the stage. The stage is incredibly deep compared to any I have been on previously – especially in relation to the width. This is because the theatre was designed in the days when an opera would have hundreds of people onstage at any given time so they needed a lot more room. The fly system was also unlike anything I have come across before. Near as I could tell there was no counterweight. All of the movers were being rigged on truss with motors, but the bars with just a few statics were just tied onto the dangling lines and hauled up to height. Noticing there were no women onstage we asked if there were any female technicians at the venue and were told sadly there weren't. Leaving the team to their rig we headed into the basement. That is where they are currently collecting and storing old lighting equipment in the hopes of creating a theatre museum. It was certainly the first (and likely the only) time I will ever see a Carrera marble clad rack.

With the theatre tour complete we were released and after a quick gelato stop headed back to our accommodation to prepare for our evening dinner. Having heard about the extravaganza put on at the last Showlight expectations were high and thankfully surpassed.

Coming down a cobbled alley and entering through an unassuming door in a wall you suddenly emerged into a beautiful summer garden with box hedges, roses and a couple of splashing fountains. Waiters mingled, distributing drinks and canapes, while we were serenaded by the masked members of a Siena opera company. When the time came for us to be rounded up for dinner we followed the processing singers into what the chairman described in his speech as “the greenhouse at the end of the garden”. But what a greenhouse it was, hung with fabrics and lit beautifully. We entered to a sea of white tables with pillar candelabra flames all a-flicker. There were a few speeches and the first course was served. Much hilarity ensued at the end of the course when we learned that people with dots on their place names had to move up or down a table depending on their dot colour taking all their

glasses and napkins with them (four glasses made quite the handful). Thankfully I was a “stayer” so was able to sit tight and await my new tablemates. It was a great idea and meant that we all got to meet a lot more of the other attendees than we would have staying static. Everyone had great things to say about the papers so far, and there were some strong opinions about which were the best talks (Amy Mae's piece on *Sweeney Todd* seemed to be in the lead). The food, the company and the entertainment were so fabulous when the chairman came onstage



*The garden reception before the conference dinner  
Photo by Ric Mountjoy*



*Backstage at the Pergola Theatre  
Photo by Dave Clarke, courtesy of Showlight*

*The exterior of the Opera di Firenze  
Photo by Julie Harper, courtesy of Showlight*



to announce taxis would be available until midnight it was a shock to discover that was a mere fifteen minutes away!

Not surprisingly a large contingent gathered at “The Coach and Horses”. It is very much worth attending these impromptu gatherings as again the Showlight magic was in effect and I was able to secure a demo of some digital festoon for my next show.

As a side note it was pointed out at dinner that there is a huge disparity in the number of male to female speakers (and indeed delegates). Out of the seventy papers submitted only five were from women. The chairman has said it will be his mission for the next four years to make sure more of us are in attendance but

for that to happen we need to meet him halfway by applying to speak.

Tuesday morning’s attendance was a bit thin on the ground – probably due to the thoroughly enjoyable evening prior. By the morning break we were back to full capacity and the notion of having to leave this gathering of other lighting aficionados was beginning to dawn.

But, this being Showlight, there was one last social event to see us off – gelato in the garden. It’s hard to fully explain what an amazing experience Showlight is. We are so often isolated as very few productions need multiple lighting designers and unless you have time to see your peers’ work you can get stuck in a stylistic rut and even lose sight of why we do this crazy job.

Being surrounded by so many other people who also love lighting is so inspiring and allows to you look at your own work in a new light (ack, pun).

Like the reviewer who writes about a wonderful restaurant and then can’t get a table I’m in two minds about telling you all to put a big star over 2021 to make sure you get a ticket. However, if I’m being fair you do really want to go. Apply for the ALD bursary. Write a paper to get invited as a speaker. Be sure that no matter what happens you can go. Give up one coffee a week starting tomorrow. That way, in four years you will have squirreled away the fee. Now I just have to make sure I get there first. 🍷

# The three ages of opera lighting

Ric Mountjoy summarises Marco Filibeck's Showlight paper

It seemed appropriate to focus on a paper presented by an Italian speaker as Showlight took place this year in Florence, with the kind support of Claypaky. Marco Filibeck used case studies of productions he has known to detail the three "ages" of lighting design for opera as he saw them. Marco has worked for a long time at Teatro alla Scala in Milan and, speaking to the conference through a translator, succinctly summarised the evolution of the discipline.

## ***Aida (1965), directed and designed by Franco Zeffirelli***

In early lit opera productions, the role of the lighting designer was minimal. In the absence of lavish scenic pieces built in three dimensions, the scenery was largely represented on two-dimensional cloths. These provided the perspective of the scene, continuation of the playing space and often also included the "lighting" of the scene, with angle, direction and sometimes apparent source all provided by the scenic artist in the painting.

The role of the lighting designer was just to make the cloths visible, with soft, diffuse, apparently directionless light (often a bar of floods), and light the foreground setting

and costumes without adding artistic value. The only real challenge was lighting the stage foreground so that it appeared to be in the same place as the background and maintained the logic of a singly lit scene.

This style of lighting obviously still lives on in many classic (often Russian) ballet productions – some of the Bolshoi's cloths are state works of art, many too tall and wide to be displayed in full in the largest UK theatres.

## ***Le Nozze di Figaro (1981), directed by Giorgio Strehler, design by Ezio Frigierio***

By 1981, lighting was playing a more significant role in productions. Sets had gained significantly in size and depth, providing more for a lighting designer to



*Aida (1965): In Zeffirelli's production both the background columns and the beams of light crossing them are painted static on the cloth rather than produced by theatre lighting.*

work with, though often the set dictated how the scenes must be lit.

Each act of this production was dominated by windows in the scenery and a grand vaulted ceiling piece covering the whole depth and width of the playing space. This combination demanded that the primary direction of illumination be from the windows, but also provided the production motif – the room being lit with directional beams in a warm pastel palette

*Le Nozze di Figaro* (1981): Act I The Bedroom – less than half of the stage depth used; a midstage wall contains the action in a small room.



from stage right runs through each act and each location.

As Strehler insisted the light had to be naturalistic and studied, there were few cues or changes, as the “truth” of the lighting remained constant throughout the scene. In research I haven’t been able to find a lighting designer credited for the production at all: despite the evolution of the lighting, the lighting designer didn’t necessarily yet exist as a specialist. The artistic look could be dictated by the set designer and realised by house electricians; Marco said often the most senior was chosen for the role. Filibeck’s own career followed this path, starting at Teatro Comunale in Bologna and later working at La Scala under Vannio Vanni – who may have lit this production.

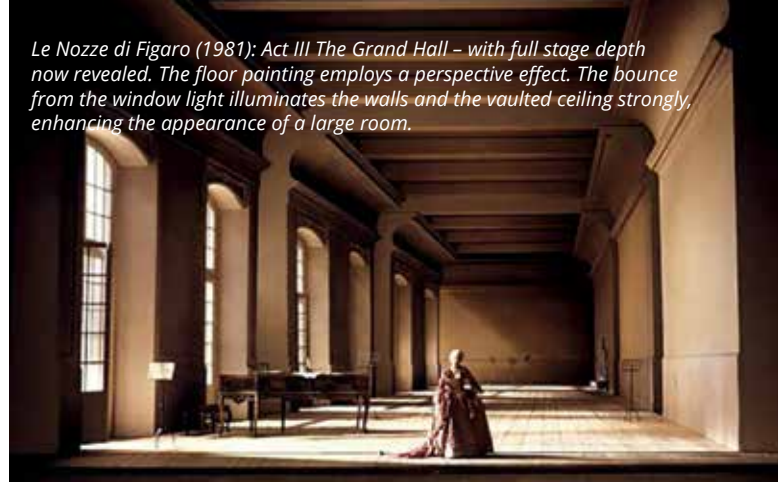
This painterly aesthetic is still very much in evidence in opera today, partly because

some of the classic productions of the time are still in rep, but also as some of the creative lighting designers of the time are still busy working. Filibeck cites Jean Kalman as an influence and “master” (another term borrowed from fine art), and much of Jean’s work as seen in the UK at the Royal Opera House and English National Opera demonstrates his painterly eye for light.

***Il Prigioniero* (2013), Opera Lyon, directed by Alex Ollè (La Fura del Baus), set by Alfons Flores, lighting by Marco Filibeck**

Marco’s final example was an opera he lit in 2013, a more modern work written in 1949. The action was set in a Spanish prison in the sixteenth century. But in this staging The Prisoner is relocated to a prison of his own mind, making full use of

*Le Nozze di Figaro* (1981): Act III The Grand Hall – with full stage depth now revealed. The floor painting employs a perspective effect. The bounce from the window light illuminates the walls and the vaulted ceiling strongly, enhancing the appearance of a large room.



modern expressive light not employed in the first two examples. As well it needed to be, as the set could at best be described as challenging to light.

The design consisted of a circular revolve, echoed by a ceiling piece of matching dimensions directly above, surrounding a vertically cylindrical centre gauze. A wraparound plastic BP screen followed the line of the revolve upstage. As Marco explained, light from the front would not have been attractive (especially on the gauze and BP), and the ceiling piece was an obvious obstacle too.

However, by making a virtue of the difficult stage, arranging for the ceiling piece to be translucent, and with the very careful location of 25 arc movers above it, the whole opera could be lit steeply from above, through the ceiling.

# The three ages of opera lighting

Ric Mountjoy

With custom gobos the whole circle shape of the “treadmill” revolve could be produced. The necessary appearance of the shaped hot spots on the ceiling formed a stylish motif for the production, especially as the ceiling shapes focused sharp edged produced a usefully diffused joined-up version at stage level.

The motorised revolve was used to particular effect in a sequence where doors flew clockwise around the circular path towards the Prisoner downstage centre. Each obstacle negotiated revealed another door in never-ending continuation, sometimes with multiple alternate versions of the Prisoner present too.

A final expressionistic example from the show is a moment where the Prisoner believes a door has been left open for his escape, yet on approaching it is shown to just have been an illusion. The appearance of the door left ajar, as indicated by the yellow light coming around and through it, is another creation of his mind and an important plot point entirely realised by the lighting. This shows clearly the lighting designer’s current role, having moved from general illumination, through directionality creating lifelike realism; our lighting is employed now more than just to make visible, but to convey emotion and meaning while contributing to the



*Ric Mountjoy lights primarily theatre and opera. He worked for ten years for English National Opera before going freelance as a lighting designer and is probably best known for The Play that Goes Wrong. [www.ricmountjoy.com](http://www.ricmountjoy.com)*

stylish stage pictures that live long in the memory.

Obviously, we now take for granted the use of light as a dynamic and expressive entity. In Marco’s talk both the establishment of the role of lighting designer and the increasing contribution made by lighting to the presentation of opera in the last fifty years can be seen. Whether this is due to changing artistic taste, the development and availability of lighting instruments that make this possible, or the evolution of the craft of lighting design, we can all be glad to be working at a time when our lighting can contribute so much to the production. 🍷























*Il Prigioniero (2013): The full 360° of the revolve at stage level is lit through a ceiling from six arc movers.*



*Il Prigioniero (2013): The open door illusion.*



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# The award for best lighting...

As KOI celebrates ten years, we look at the history of lighting awards

This year, the Knight of Illumination (KOI) awards celebrates its tenth anniversary and, as part of the run-up to the show this September, *Focus* takes a look behind the scenes at the founding and history of KOI as well as other industry lighting awards.

Rather fittingly, as the only awards event to hand out hand-wrought, full-length medieval broadsword to its winners, KOI had its beginnings amongst the antique weaponry collections of the Royal Armouries museum in Leeds. In 2007, the dockside venue was hosting the AC North event, later to become the popular PLASA Focus Leeds trade show. The 2017 KOI awards will be held on 17 September at the Eventim Apollo in Hammersmith.

Attending the event was lighting designer Durham Marengi and his wife Jennie. Durham recalls, "We had for a long time been aware of the lack of recognition for the work of lighting designers. We wanted to create a credible awards programme that would benefit not just mainstream designers but designers at all points of their career and across a diverse range of projects and disciplines."

The Marengis took the idea to Enrico Caironi, then commercial director for Italian lighting manufacturer Claypaky. Enthused,

Caironi and Claypaky worked with the Marengis to formulate the Knight of Illumination concept, the name inspired both by the noble spirit of lighting design and the medieval surrounds of Claypaky's headquarters in Bergamo, Italy.

The first edition of KOI was hosted by ABTT during its annual award dinner in June 2008 at Westminster's Assembly Hall in Church House. More than 200 industry professionals attended the event. Ensuring the awards would have a credible and independent judging process, the Marengis approached long-standing British lighting design institutions, the Association of Lighting Designers (ALD) and the Society of Television Lighting Designers (STLD) to assist with coordination.

With the awards divided into three main categories – television, theatre and rock – an independent panel of judges was recruited to oversee each category's nomination process. The ALD took responsibility for the theatre category, getting on board well-known theatre critic David Benedict. "When I was first approached I was a full-time arts critic and had recently been the arts editor of the *Observer*," says Benedict. "I'd been an actor, a director and even, way back when,

a board operator! I was able to offer a dual perspective. The opportunity to promote and encourage the work of lighting designers was immediately appealing to me."

Benedict remains chair and continues to oversee the development of the theatre awards judging panel. The theatre category differs from the other two in that the awards are not up for public nomination. Instead, nominations are selected from the hundreds of shows seen by the team of critics across the year. This year's theatre judging panel is listed on page 34.

KOI now awards fifteen swords across three categories: theatre, television, and concert touring and events. Since 2013 the awards have also included video designers. An extra award is presented each year to an individual who has had an extensive and notably significant career within the industry. After the sad passing of Caironi in 2011, the Lifetime Recognition achievement was renamed in his honour.

Pan-industry sponsorship is key to the continued success of the awards. Today the awards as well as the event itself are sponsored by manufacturers, rental companies and service providers.

Coming on board for the first time as Spotlight Sponsors this year are ADB,



Photo © The Fifth Estate

Altman Lighting, GLP German Lighting Products, Green Hippo and SLX. They will be joining the 2016 returning Spotlight Sponsors: ETC, d3 Technologies, Hawthorn, HSL, Light Initiative, PRG XL Video, Robert Juliat, MA Lighting and Philips Vari-Lite.

Pio Nahum, CEO of Claypacky says: "We think back to the event Claypacky started with Durham and Jennie a decade ago, and we are immensely proud of how it has developed into a successful pan-industry event. It has provided an ideal platform for awarding the hard work and stunning creative talent of the professionals operating in the lighting and video design world."

Lighting designers are gaining recognition outside the industry-specific environment of KOI as well. The Olivier awards were established in 1976 and are presented by the Society of London Theatre in recognition of achievements in commercial British theatre. The first Olivier award for lighting design was awarded in 1991 to Jean Kalman for his work on *Richard III* and *White Chameleon*. Multiple

winners of the Olivier award include lighting designers Mark Henderson, Rick Fisher, Paule Constable and Hugh Vanstone. In addition to providing the rig for the televised awards event, White Light has also sponsored the award itself for many years. Managing director of ALD corporate member White Light Bryan Raven commented, "To play such a vital role in what is undoubtedly the biggest night for the theatre industry is a huge privilege. It also provides a great opportunity to celebrate the profession of lighting designer to the wider world with the press and TV coverage." The most recent winner of the award is Neil Austin for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. Neil appeared in the edited highlights package on ITV with his reference to the production electricians on the show, also known as the "Jurassic Sparks"!

Lighting designers working outside London commercial theatre are recognised through the Off-West End awards (known as the "Offies") and the UK Theatre awards (previously the TMA awards). The Offies recognise and celebrate the excellence, innovation and ingenuity of independent theatres across London. White Light also sponsors the Offie for best lighting design, which this year was won by David Plater for *Deathwatch* at The Print Room. Lighting designer David Howe is patron saint of the award and describes his role as "effectively that of a professional mentor to the shortlisted nominees or winners. The Offie nominations are open to everyone, and for

emerging lighting designers sometimes a chat about the industry is useful as they establish themselves. Often established designers are also nominated, which shows to the wider theatre community how flexible and diverse lighting designers are." The focus of the UK Theatre awards is regional theatre across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. The 2017 awards will take place at London's historic Guildhall, on Sunday 15 October. White Light also sponsors the UK Theatre awards; last year the award for best design went to Lez Brotherston for *Flowers for Mrs Harris* and *Show Boat*, both Sheffield Theatres productions. Lighting designers to win the award include Paul Keogan for *The Hudsucker Proxy* (2015), Charles Balfour for *The Accrington Pals* (2013) and Natasha Chivers for *Happy Days* (2011).

The last major UK lighting design award is unique in that it is the only award in which the audience decides the winners. The Whatsonstage awards shortlists are drawn up with the help of thousands of theatregoers who log on to nominate their favourites across all awards categories. The shortlists are announced at a launch event in early December, when voting opens and runs until the end of January. ALD corporate member PRG XL Video sponsors the event and White Light once again sponsors the award for best lighting design, which was awarded to Neil Austin for *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*. 🌸

Many thanks to Georgia Rushton-Read at The Fifth Estate for her help in compiling this article.

# Knight of Illumination nominations

This year's nominations in the theatre category



*ETC Theatre Award for Dance  
Echoes  
Aakash Odedra Company  
Choreographer: Aditi Mangaldas  
Lighting designer: Fabiana Piccioli  
Photographer: Tim Theo Deceuninck*



*Hawthorn Theatre Award for Projection Design  
8 Minutes  
Alexander Whitley Dance Company  
Sadler's Wells  
Projection designer: Tal Rosner  
Photographer: Johan Persson*

## This year's judges:

David Benedict, chair (BBC/The Arts Desk)

### Dance:

Jonathan Gray (The Dancing Times)

Neil Norman (Daily Express)

### Opera:

Alexandra Coghlan (The Spectator)

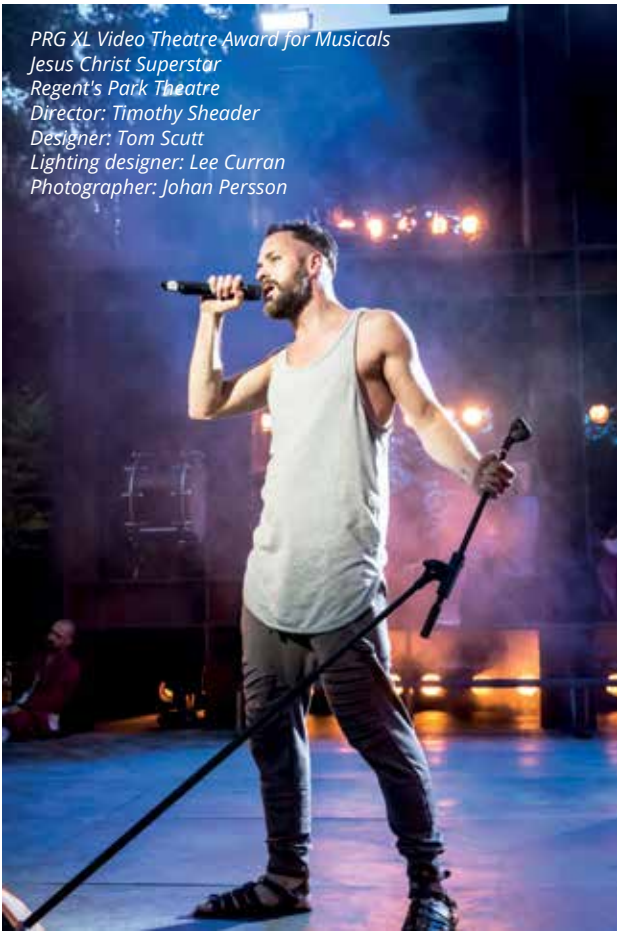
Mark Valencia (Whatsonstage)

### Musicals and plays:

Natasha Tripney (The Stage)

Matt Trueman (Variety)

PRG XL Video Theatre Award for Musicals  
Jesus Christ Superstar  
Regent's Park Theatre  
Director: Timothy Sheader  
Designer: Tom Scutt  
Lighting designer: Lee Curran  
Photographer: Johan Persson



ADB Theatre Award for Plays  
The Children  
Royal Court Theatre  
Designer: Miriam Buether  
Lighting designer: Peter Mumford  
Photographer: Johan Persson



Hawthorn Theatre Award for Projection Design  
City of Glass  
Lyric Hammersmith  
Director: Leo Warner  
Designer: Jenny Melville  
Lighting designer: Matt Daw  
Projection designer: Lysander Ashton  
Photographer: Leo Warner

August/September 2017 – “More art, less tools...”

# Knight of Illumination nominations

*ETC Theatre Award for Dance*  
*Casanova*  
*Northern Ballet*  
*Choreographer: Kenneth Tindall*  
*Designer: Christopher Oram*  
*Lighting designer: Alastair West*  
*Photographer: Caroline Holden*



*PRG XL Video Theatre Award for Musicals*  
*Fiddler on the Roof*  
*Chichester Festival Theatre*  
*Director: Daniel Evans*  
*Designer: Lez Brotherston*  
*Lighting designer: David Hersey*  
*Photographer: Johan Persson*





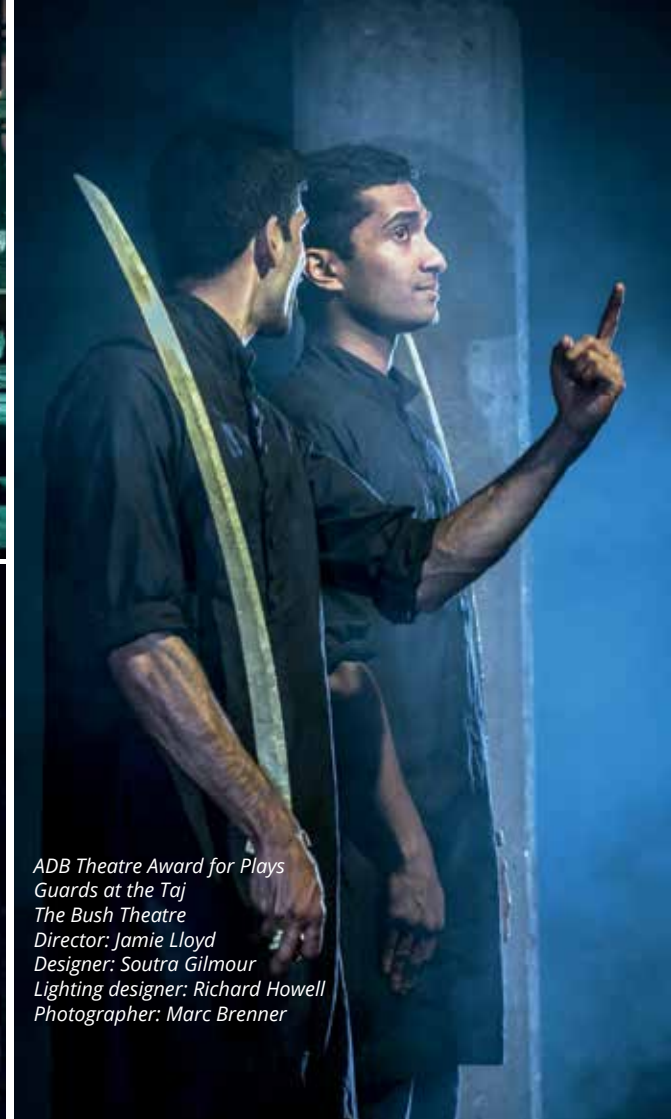
*ADB Theatre Award for Plays*  
*Amadeus*  
*National Theatre*  
*Director: Michael Longhurst*  
*Designer: Chloe Lamford*  
*Lighting designer: Jon Clark*  
*Photographer: Marc Brenner*

*Robert Juliat Theatre Award for Opera*  
*Così fan tutte*  
*Royal Opera House*  
*Director: Jan Philipp Gloger*  
*Set designer: Ben Baur*  
*Costume designer: Karin Jud*  
*Lighting designer: Bernd Purkrabek*  
*Photographer: Stephen Cummiskey*

COSI  
FAN  
TUTTI



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*ADB Theatre Award for Plays*  
*Guards at the Taj*  
*The Bush Theatre*  
*Director: Jamie Lloyd*  
*Designer: Soutra Gilmour*  
*Lighting designer: Richard Howell*  
*Photographer: Marc Brenner*

# Knight of Illumination nominations



*Robert Juliat Theatre Award for Opera  
Queen of Spades  
Opera Holland Park  
Director: Rodula Gaitanou  
Designer: Cordelia Chisholm  
Lighting designer: Simon Corder  
Photographer: Robert Workman*



*PRG XL Video Theatre Award for Musicals  
Removal Men  
The Yard Theatre  
Director: Jay Miller  
Designer: Bethany Wells  
Lighting and projection designer: Joshua Pharo  
Photographer: Caleb Wissun-Bhide*

*ETC Theatre Award for Dance  
Flight Pattern  
Royal Opera House  
Choreographer: Crystal Pite  
Set designer: Jay Gower Taylor  
Costume designer: Nancy Bryant  
Lighting designer: Tom Visser  
Photographer: Tristram Kenton*



*Robert Juliat Theatre Award for Opera  
Hamlet  
Glyndebourne  
Director: Neil Armfield  
Set designer: Ralph Myers  
Costume designer: Alice Babidge  
Lighting designer: Jon Clark  
Photographer: Richard Hubert Smith*



*Hawthorn Theatre Award for Projection Design  
Hansel and Gretel  
Opera North  
Director: Edward Dick  
Set designer: Giles Cadle  
Costume designer: Christina Cunningham  
Lighting designer: Matt Haskins  
Projection designer: Ian William Galloway  
Photographer: Robert Workman*



# Creative collaboration

Andrew Ellis on the importance of working partnerships

Twelve years ago, in my final year of training at Central School of Speech and Drama, I was struggling to come up with a subject for my dissertation. I knew that I wanted to work in dance and musical theatre, so I was focusing on those areas, but constantly drawing blanks when it came to something I could write about with passion and experience. And then, reflecting back on some of my experiences during training, and some of the creative processes I had seen outside of college,

it came to me: the relationship between the lighting designer and the director or choreographer. How creative people interface with each other and how each party satisfies their own desires whilst still serving “the greater good” of the production has always fascinated me.

I looked at some of my own experiences with directors either telling me they wanted it such-and-such a way, essentially “just because”, or at the opposite end, not taking an interest at all as lighting “was a mystery to them”, or that they’d just rather I “do what I do”, and then I looked at collaborative partnerships such as that between Michael Hulls and Russell Maliphant, where the process is wholly interactive from the beginning and based upon years of collaboration, trust and creative

understanding. I interviewed some fascinating people, some of whom I have gone on to work with in my professional career, exceeded my word count easily and got a decent mark. Obviously this was something I care about.

Fast forward two years after graduating and I found myself working as a programmer for lighting designer Adam Caree at a performing arts college in central London called Urdang Academy. At the time, they had just moved into new premises and with a reasonably small crop of students they were putting on their first third-year showcase in the new building. The rig was made up of in-house conventionals and some borrowed movers and scrollers, kindly lent by Sadler’s Wells, which is just a few paces down Rosebery Avenue. Adam was working with the then head of productions, a charismatic Australian former West End performer called Paul Hack, to light the show. From the beginning I was fascinated by their interaction. For someone with no training in lighting or even professional experience working in any capacity other than as a performer, Paul had very strong opinions about what he wanted to see

*Choreographers: Paul Hack,  
Lynsey Sanders and Matthew Cole  
Bloomsbury Theatre, 2013  
Photographer: Matthew Lee*





*Choreographers: Paul Hack and Lynsey Sanders  
Bloomsbury Theatre, 2014  
Photographer: Mikkel Svak*

and, more importantly, how those looks should be created. Yes, the rig was small, mostly floor mounted, with some booms and cyc lighting, but he knew the setup inside out, and would frequently suggest “try something with this unit over here”, “maybe slow that transition down by five seconds”, “what would happen if we did this instead”. And it was clear that this wasn’t a case of him stepping on Adam’s toes or throttling creativity – the process seemed amiable, understanding and fun.

Within eighteen months, I was designing for the college. As the number of students grew, budgets increased, and we were able to start hiring lights, and though we still mounted the shows in the college’s own building we went from Mac 500s sitting on the floor to VL1000s on a truss structure within a matter of years.

And throughout this time, Paul (now artistic director of the college) and I also developed a relationship of trust and collaboration. As the amount of kit increased, so did Paul’s knowledge of what it could do. He

still made an effort to understand the rig and what it could do and would continue to offer suggestions.

Within another year, the college began mounting its productions at external venues – first the Shaw Theatre, then the Bloomsbury, and finally, for the past three years, at Hackney Empire. I would design a rig that was completely flexible – good for all forms of dance and the musical theatre sections that formed the show. This was usually entirely moving heads over stage, with colour-changing units (initially scrollers, latterly LED) on the booms. And each year I ensured that in addition to a rig that could tick all the necessary boxes for the production, there was also a “toy” – a flashy bit of eye candy that we could use for the opening and/or finale. Paul would usually have me reserve these for numbers he’d created!

New challenges were realised on these external productions. When working in-house at the college, time wasn’t really an issue. The only cost implication in taking longer over tech was in the hire of your kit. At external theatres, every extra day was thousands of pounds in venue hire. So expectations and costs went up and the sophistication of the rig increased, but the amount of time for tech went down. The get-in day was lost and the amount of time to tech each number went down, sometimes to as little as forty-five minutes for a five-minute dance number which could have upwards of fifty cues. Paul would act as an interface between the choreographers of the pieces and me. With his deeper knowledge of what was possible, he could help translate their requests, sometimes vague and speculative, into something that I could create using what was available.

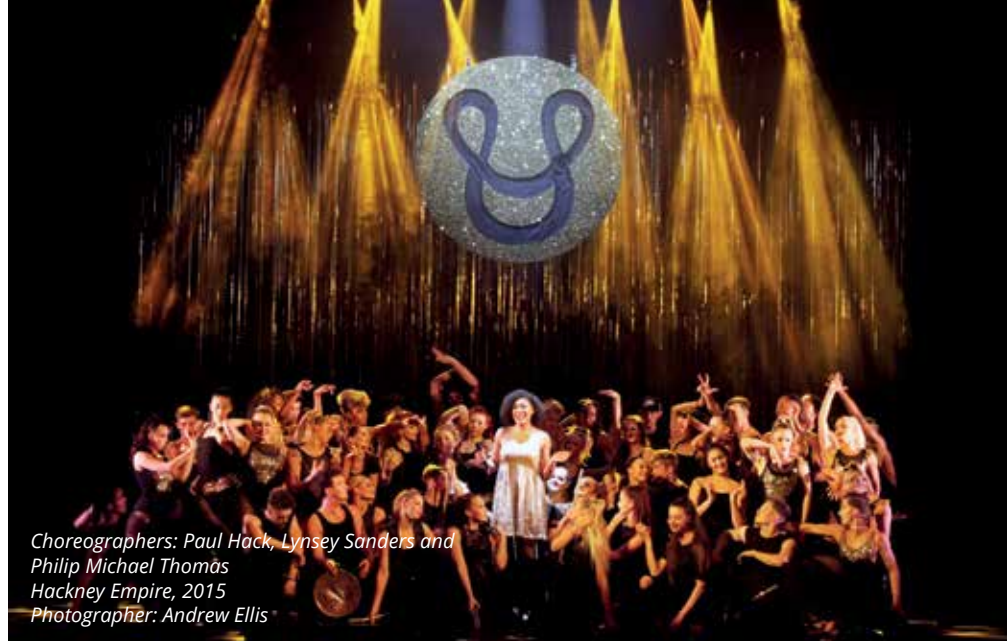
Sometimes I’d show him something and he’d instantly hate it. I’d put a light on to fix a problem and his instant reaction of disgust would have to be calmed by my assurance to “just hang on a second”, until I had positioned the moving light, softened the edge, added 30% CTO and dropped the

# Creative collaboration

Andrew Ellis

intensity down to 15%, at which point I'd be rewarded with an "OK, I'll buy that" from him. Other times, I'd start to build a state and there would be an instant response of excitement and expectation from him, and he'd either sit back a little and let me finish, or chip in with the occasional "now what would happen if we added this?"

There were rough patches too, of course. Inevitably on the tightened schedules, when we had to start tech on the evening of the fit-up day, everyone was tired, we were still ironing out the snags in the rig, creative energy was depleted, and tempers were fractious. This year at Hackney Empire I was using so much stuff within a very tight budget, I'd maxed out the four universes on the in-house Gio so had to add in a second desk, a four-universe Ion, which had to be programmed separately and then triggered by the Gio. Greg Herriott, my programmer, was in charge of the Gio, while I put cues into the Ion, all the while trying to also think creatively and translate Paul's ideas into button presses and instructions for Greg. By the end of the evening tech session we were both convinced we had lost it, that everything we'd made was awful and that there was



*Choreographers: Paul Hack, Lynsey Sanders and Philip Michael Thomas  
Hackney Empire, 2015  
Photographer: Andrew Ellis*

no hope of getting this show ready in time. But the following morning, we ironed out the kinks in getting the desks talking to each other, we understood our rig and its capabilities better, our methods became faster and more efficient, and by the end of tech we were not only ahead of schedule, but once again felt like we had bettered our performance on previous shows.

College showcases are an odd beast. It's hard to work creatively and innovatively in such short timeframes and with such limited budgets and still produce

something that one can be proud of. The design has to be eminently flexible, systematic, quick to use, yet capable of the occasional coup-de-théâtre or "wow" moment. It has to be able to produce occasional subtlety as well as the flash-and-trash. And while you always find yourself wishing that for a particular number or section you'd had a better, more specific tool, you need to still be able to make it work with what you have and be pleased with your outcome.

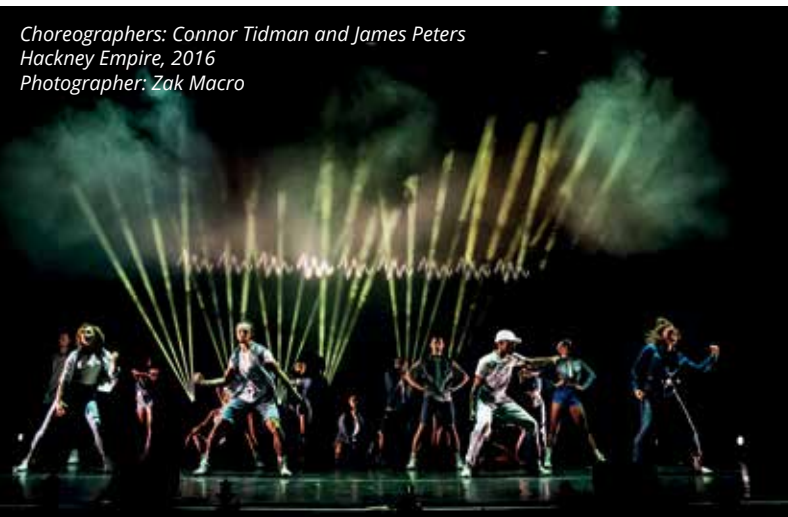
This summer's Urdang show was bittersweet, as although we created a fantastic show, and were celebrating ten years of artistic partnership, Paul is moving on to pastures new. I will really miss my creative partner the next time I'm in tech for the college. Having someone who is both your fiercest critic and most ardent supporter working alongside you, while at times deeply frustrating, also spurs you to create some of your best work. I'll miss not having someone to bounce those new ideas off: "go on, try it!". I'll miss having someone to rein in those other choreographers and help translate their ideas: "listen, just show them the cyc at 50, the shins cutting

through in clear and that backlight thing we did from the first half". And I'll even miss being occasionally told "hate it, cut it, get rid of it!" I'll miss working with a creative who occasionally talks in desk syntax – "Rem dim to just number 15 and build it back up from there" – who even understands the difference between updating to track and updating cue only, something some designers I've programmed for don't even fully grasp! But as Paul put it, we brought out the best in each other, even under intense time pressure, to create something fantastic. We each inspired the other's creative mind. And that, in an artistic collaboration, is all that I can ever hope for. 🍷



*Andrew Ellis designs for dance and musical theatre and also works as a relighter and production manager. Recent designs include Four Seasons for New English Ballet Theatre, Lilith for Chrysalis London, Time & Motion for National Youth Ballet and Urinetown for Trinity Laban; recent relights include Michael Hulls' Vespertine in Atlanta and Nice.*

*Choreographers: Connor Tidman and James Peters  
Hackney Empire, 2016  
Photographer: Zak Macro*



*Choreographers: Paul Hack and Lynsey Sanders  
Hackney Empire, 2017  
Photographer: Andrew Ellis*

# Magic Mike

*Philip Gladwell* lights this iconic show in Las Vegas

You may or may not be familiar with the film franchise *Magic Mike* – well, yes, that’s right, we made the stage show in Las Vegas. Pots of cash, a Hollywood A-listing director – oh, and let’s build the venue for the show.

I should start by saying that it was the most brilliant experience.

How did I get the job? Well, the producers saw a show that I had lit at the Sydney Opera House and a couple of Skype interviews later I was on the team.

When I came to the project there was already a venue design concept by an

incredibly talented Canadian film and TV designer, Rachel O’Toole. The scenic design team was ARDA Studio – Rob Bisinger and Anita La Scala, based in New York – who were also brilliant. ARDA was responsible for all the show elements rather than the look of the venue. There were three choreographers, Alison Faulk, Teresa Espinosa and Luke Broadlick, and one director, Channing Tatum.

The show is basically an extravagant dance show with a really witty narrative to frame it all. There are lots of amazing moments in the show, all set in a beautiful

members’ club environment. The cast members are superb and very talented and were handpicked from around the world.

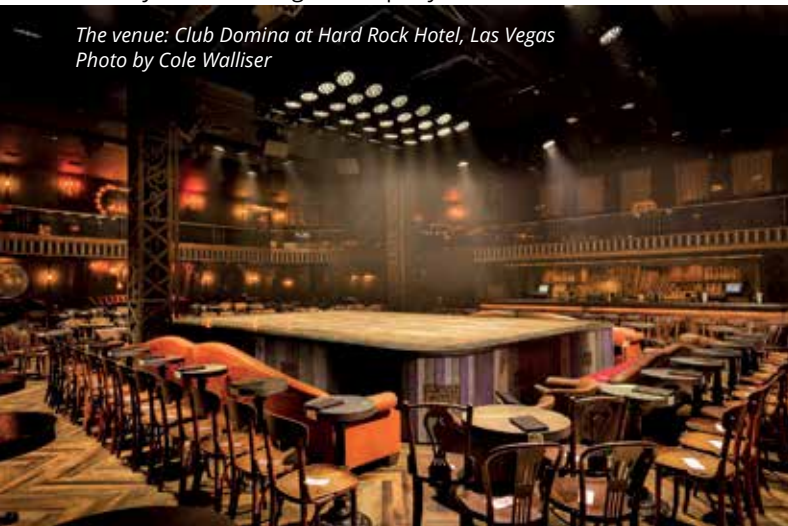
So I went out to Las Vegas and had three days of meetings with the whole creative team and the producers. I learned an awful lot about the project

and realised the commercial nature of the world out there. Despite this, the focus was always on the audience experience and enjoyment. There was a very real respect for the money people spend on tickets and a drive to give them the best possible experience. One of the many liberating things about working in this way was at no point did anyone say “we can’t afford that” – they just needed you to justify its worth. “If it’s worth having or doing then we will.”

We had bi-weekly meetings via conference call, which were two and a half hours each. Often these were 8.00–10.30pm UK time which seemed to work with all the other time zones. This resulted in regular dinners at my desk! It can be tough navigating large time differences and multiple time zones. The team was between five and eight hours behind my working day which meant that at around 5pm I started to get lots of requests for things I needed to turn around before I went to bed, which was often at a counterpoint to what my three year old needed from me!

The email traffic was enormous and the need for extremely detailed drawings (often very quickly and in stupid imperial)

*The venue: Club Domina at Hard Rock Hotel, Las Vegas  
Photo by Cole Walliser*



was far more than I had ever experienced before. I was making decisions about the lighting positions and technical infrastructure along with every domestic fitting of the venue including their bespoke design, as well as all the usual stuff we do as lighting designers.

The space where the show exists is an old nightclub under the casino floor of the Hard Rock Hotel. The club had not been used for five years. Our plan was to gut and reconfigure it into an in-the-round high-end members' club where the show would emerge around you. This meant kind of building the theatre but kind of having to deal with the confines of an existing building, with a lot of mechanical and electrical services remaining untouched. This is much harder than starting from a blank canvas and building whatever you need, wherever you need it. The architects were really on board with the show and we navigated a way through with the contractors, as they were (of course) not finished by the time we needed to start.

The biggest lighting problem for me was the lack of height closely followed by bits



of structure and air handling that were unmovable. The stage is an oblong shape, running opposite to the way the room runs. Having any sense of symmetry was going to be impossible.

We have aerial acts and large flown scenic pieces that all have to descend from an area above our ceiling. We were allowed to use the floor above to construct a room, creating a makeshift fly tower. This aperture is known affectionately as the "Glory Hole". It measures 10' square (that's 3048mm square to you and me)! I decided that I needed to secure a great lighting position directly over the stage

*"Wet Dream"*  
*Magic Mike Las Vegas*  
*Lighting design by Philip Gladwell*  
*Photo by Cole Walliser*

or everything was going to be very shallow and boring. I sketched a grid of tightly packed identical units that could split centre and slide open whenever we needed to fly through the Glory Hole. The amazing production manager Don Gilmore (also NY based) got right on board with the idea and we then entered into designing how that would actually work in the space. PRG manufactured it for us, and they actually did all of the automation on the show.

Apart from the Vipers (which are hidden up in the Glory Hole) the whole rig is LED and practically silent. The show is likely to run for over ten years and so not having to do a lamp change every twelve weeks is a massive bonus. Quite a lot of the lights are pretty near the audience so we didn't want a large amount of fan noise up close.

We used a system called BlackTrax for the followspotting as there was nowhere we could have put a traditional spot. The system is from Cast (the folk that make WYSIWYG) and it mainly works. It struggled a bit in the round but we did get there in the end and it does add a whole dimension

# Magic Mike

Philip Gladwell

to the lighting that simply wasn't possible a few years ago. We use it for some very neat stuff other than followspotting.

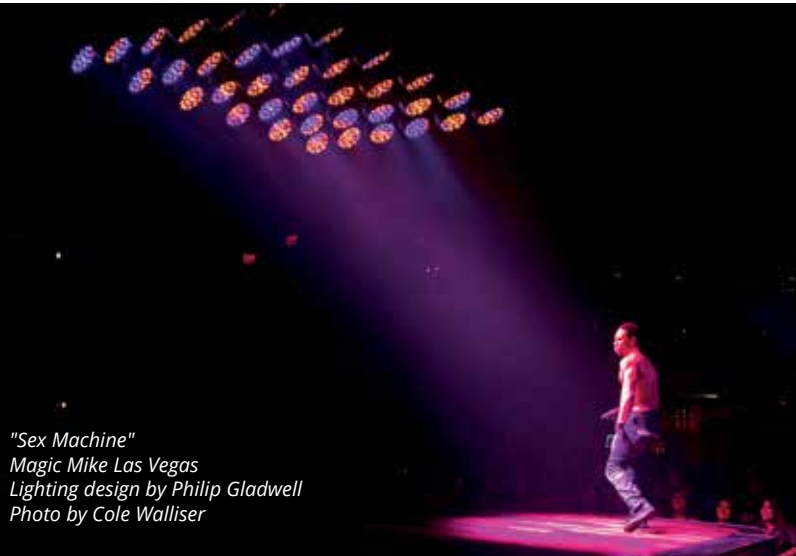
I had the very skilful and jolly Liam Jones out there with me as my programmer. Liam brought a lot more to the show than just his ability on the desk. He worked really hard and even wrote some bespoke software between the Eos and BlackTrax to make an idea work. A top tip for anyone taking on a big job in a foreign country where you don't know anyone on the team

is to insist on a programmer or associate. An ally and comrade when dealing with lots of new people and a heavy work load is invaluable.

Haze in the round can be a problem as it is often hard to site the machines in good places to get it all even. We put two haze machines under the stage and piped the haze around the edge, which did a great job of trickling it into the space without anyone feeling like a kettle was boiling next to them.

The dancers really are above, behind and all around. A section of the show takes place on the main entrance stairs and a bit on the bar as well. The whole space is the performing space not just the stage. The show has a shallow pool that flies in for a section called "Wet Dream" where it rains as a couple does a very sexy and beautiful pas de deux, a bed that rises up from the stage with an audience member on it as an aerial act takes place, and a full drum kit that flies in being

*Magic Mike Las Vegas  
Lighting design by Philip Gladwell  
Photo by Cole Walliser*



*"Sex Machine"  
Magic Mike Las Vegas  
Lighting design by Philip Gladwell  
Photo by Cole Walliser*

*Magic Mike Las Vegas  
Lighting design by Philip Gladwell  
Photo by Erik Kabik*



*Magic Mike Las Vegas  
Lighting design by Philip Gladwell  
Photo by Cole Walliser*

played. There is even an entrance for our MC on a flying unicorn.

We spent six weeks on site living in the hotel we were also working in. It is a long time to be away and a long time without your own kitchen! There is no union to speak of in Las Vegas so the hours are whatever they need to be; during the three-week tech period we often did sixteen-hour days. The staffing structure was similar to what to you would expect to find in a good producing house over here.

It was really exciting to be involved in making such a big show alongside creating the venue for it. The people working on the show came from all

walks of entertainment and such a lot of working practices have now been shared. I missed the red carpet opening night as I had to fly home for the birth of my daughter so two big productions for me at the same time.

*Magic Mike* plays at The Hard Rock Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas twice nightly from Wednesday to Sunday inclusive. 🍷

*Philip has just opened Much Ado About Nothing at The Globe in London and is about to start on the new Hairspray UK tour and Five Guys Named Moe at the Marble Arch Theatre in the West End.*



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