

# LIGHTING

## WHAT ARE THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF LIGHT ON STAGE?

There are four traditional functions to lighting on stage.

### VISIBILITY

As Ceri James suggested, this is the most basic function of lighting on stage. Lighting the stage helps the audience to see the actors clearly. If the audience cannot see what's happening on stage, they will not understand the play.

Lighting can also be used for what is referred to as 'selective visibility'. This is where the Lighting Designer shows the audience only what the Director wants them to see. It will focus their attention onto certain areas of the stage, on performers, props and/or parts of the set. Really, it can be said that a good lighting plan is like a camera in the television world, and it can lead the eyes of the audience to a certain point or emotion on stage just like a camera would zoom in for a close shot.



### MOTIVATION

Part of the job of a Lighting Designer is ensuring that the lights appear naturally for the situation being presented. For example, in a realistic scene at night in a living room, the light should appear as if it's coming from chandeliers or lamps or other parts of the set. The Lighting Designer should also be able to create the sun's rays coming through the window or create the feeling that it's raining and cold outside the window with colour and a percentage of the lighting.

### ATMOSPHERE

Lighting helps to create atmosphere and emotion in a scene, and it can also illuminate the actor or actress and certain objects to assist in this. The atmosphere helps to direct the audience's emotions in order for them to understand the Director's motivation of what the performers are trying to convey or portray with words, actions and so on. Once again, a percentage of the lighting – % and colour will contribute to creating the appropriate atmosphere.

### COMPOSITION

The lighting function is also a part of designing the complete scene. Within the composition, the Lighting Designer seeks to improve the possibilities the Set Designer has provided and what the Director has provided by blocking. In other words, lighting the actors and set in proportion, and where and when as necessary.

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## THE LIGHTING DESIGNER'S EQUIPMENT

When we talk about equipment that the Lighting Designer can use, we must consider what resources are available within schools. Some schools have modern lighting systems; other schools have very limited resources. You will have to work with the lighting systems available to you.

Ideally, here are some of the stage lights you could use.

### FLOODLIGHT

This is the simplest of the stage lights, consisting of a lamp and a reflector in a box, without a lens. The light is suitable to use for lighting sky and curtains.



### FRESNEL

The Fresnel is a soft-edged spot lamp with more control over the ray's angles than a floodlight. Fresnels are used as an effective method of highlighting an acting area or providing a colour wash across the stage. It's useful when a soft edge is needed, or when the width of a light needs varying.



### PROFILE

A profile spot produces spots of light very clearly and this is the one that can focus the best and is the most flexible of all stage lights.



### FOLLOW SPOT

Simply, the follow spot is a narrow spotlight used to 'follow' or concentrate on performers on stage. Usually, the follow spot consists of a powerful mobile part set on top of a stand. A person will usually control it and move it to the agreed places.



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## FOCUSING

It's not enough to just hang the stage lights and turn them on. Lighting Design means more than that. Were anyone to do just that, the results would look very inconsistent, and more than likely fail to light the important parts of the stage. Each light used must be focused to point at the correct place, with the ray's required angle and focus. This is the work that takes most of the Lighting Designer's time. Often you will have to redo some of the lights several times until the Designer is happy. When done correctly, the lighting will have a significant effect on the entire production.

## WHAT IS A GOBO?

Gobos are pieces of perforated metal or metal etched on glass and they are placed into a gobo holder in front of a profile lamp to project a specific shape on the floor of the stage or on the cyclorama. They're very useful to create atmosphere or to give an idea of time or location to the audience.

The effects you can have from gobos are limited by the budget available to you, technical limitations, and your own creative limitations. Generally they can be used for:

Creating abstract patterns – conveying an idea or feeling on stage. You can have shapes like a heart, dove, cross, thunderbolt etc.

Clouds

Doors and windows. The shape and look of the window can suggest the period or country – e.g. Edwardian, French windows etc.

Foliage

Skyscrapers

Flags.

## WHAT ARE GELS?

Gels are thin, heat-resistant sheets of plastic and they are placed in a gel frame in front of a light such as a floodlight, profile or Fresnel. Gels are available in hundreds of colours. The Lighting Designer should be very aware of how colour can have an effect on the costume colours on stage, e.g. under red lights, red fabric looks colourless, or under blue lights, red fabric can look black! You'll need to experiment and work with the colours and costumes in order to ensure that the appearance on stage is correct.

## RESEARCH

You must remember that research is also very important to a Lighting Designer. You must research the period of the play. Libraries and the internet can be used to find examples of what life was like in that period. The play could be set in a time where people used oil lamps, for example, and you should consider how to create that sort of light.

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## HOW SHOULD YOU START A LIGHTING DESIGN?

Before thinking about using lighting equipment for a performance, the starting point every time will be the script or devised piece. This should be kept in mind at all times – the Lighting Designer designs for scenes, and what's done should support the piece. Lighting cannot be designed for a scene that the Lighting Designer knows nothing about.

The lighting design must also be discussed with other members of the group (in the theatre you would discuss with the Director). You must know what the actors intend doing during the scene. Perhaps they will want separate parts of the stage lit, or have lights from the side for a special scene or moment, or single floodlights to highlight special characters.

## FOCUSING

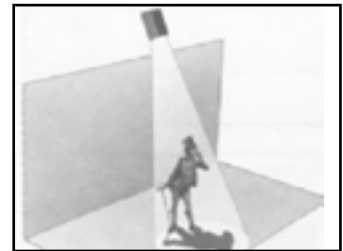
### From the front

This is the most natural and obvious angle for any lamp – above and in front of the performer at an angle of around 45°. If it's too close above the head, it will produce a lot of shadows under noses and mouths. If it's too far to the front then it will cast a long shadow behind the performer or objects, and possibly on unwanted areas on the stage or the set.



### From the back

This angle is used to give a form to a performer and/or object in order to single them out. Light from the back gives depth which makes the performer more three-dimensional. It will also help separate the performer from the set or background.



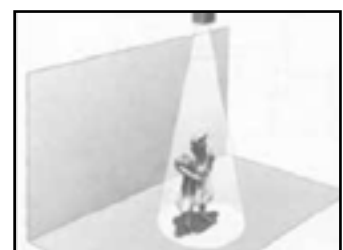
### From the side

Light from the side is used to emphasise the side of a face, arms, the body and legs. The performer's movements are highlighted by light straight from the side. Full lights from the side include leg lights (bottom), body lights (middle), and from the neck to the head (top).



### From above

Light shining downwards is used to make the head and shoulders obvious and clear. It adds light to a shape if it's wide or stretched. Usually, we use downward light to fill an area of the stage with light that's either gentle or harsh. It can be very effective if trying to create the effect of horror with light.



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## SPECIAL EFFECTS

A Lighting Designer can create a variety of believable special effects through the simple and creative use of lights. For example, strong yellow gels can create an illusion of sunshine while pale blue or silver colours can suggest moonlight.

Choose a script, read through it as a class and then, in pairs, design the lighting for the scene. You should consider what parts of the stage to light, the colours to use, and the atmosphere you wish to create. You should also consider how your choices reflect the intention of the scene.

## EXAMPLE OF A LIGHTING CUE SHEET

CUE NUMBER	ACT/SCENE	CUE POINT	PAGE	CUE DESCRIPTION
LX34	Act 1 Scene 4	The door on stage-right gets closed	18	Foyer lights fade to 30%
LX35	Act 1 Scene 4	Mike says 'It's time we left'	19	Lounge lights fade slowly and bedroom lights rise slowly
LX36	Act 1 Scene 4	The music stops	19	Stage lights fade to blackout and the audience lights rise
LX37	Act 1 Scene 4	The door on stage-right gets closed	18	Foyer lights fade to 30%



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## CERI JAMES

Ceri James was born in Newbridge, South Wales and he was trained in the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama, Cardiff. He works prolifically as a Lighting Designer, which includes working with lots of different theatres in Wales and beyond.

### According to Ceri James, what is the role of a Lighting Designer?

Obviously putting light onto the stage so that we can see the actors, but more than that it's important that we tell the story by using light and perhaps explaining what's going on, and emphasising what the actors are doing.

He notes that the role of a Lighting Designer is similar to that of the Editor in the world of television and film.

### A career in Lighting Design

Ceri's interest in lighting started in school and afterwards, even though he once considered becoming an accountant, he went to study at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama and discovered that there was a career available for someone like him who didn't want to perform on stage, but who had an interest in the world of theatre.

That's where he learned what equipment to use in order to light the stage. It's interesting that he notes that you can play around with lighting even if you only have two lamps. In that case, rather than lighting from the front, you could light from the sides and play around with shadows. That can often be effective.

### 'Y Tad' Lighting Designer

What were the steps in the process of lighting this production?

- read the script and respond with rough notes
- look at a model of the set and respond to that
- go back to the script again
- discuss with the Director – this discussion will happen throughout the process of lighting the production.

According to Ceri James, what's great about working on a production like 'Y Tad' is that it's a combination of people's work – not one person's work only.

With 'Y Tad', the set was challenging due to it being so bright, and yet that was also an advantage – as it was like a blank canvas to play on. The shape of the house and the shape of the tree behind the window were also challenging.

He has an interesting comment about the use of colour when lighting a production, e.g. in the scene where one character turns nasty towards Arwyn, who's living with dementia, Ceri used blue lights with a percentage of the light quite faded in order to show the emotion within the scene, rather than natural colour. He also used bright white lights as a sudden flash to denote when the scene was changing from that of a realistic event to inside Arwyn's muddled mind and then moving back to reality in the next scene. Therefore, the lighting gave a strong suggestion to the audience of when the scene was naturalistic and when we were in Arwyn's mind, conveying the dementia.



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Notice that he emphasises that the lighting should always happen without the audience realising and that certain light cues take over 5 minutes to move from one feeling to the next. It's therefore obvious that effective lighting can convey the emotion and feeling of the scene and the characters' mental situation.

This isn't the first production that deals with dementia that Ceri has worked on – he was also the Lighting Designer for the production of 'Belonging'.

## ACTIVITY 1

The theme of the play 'Y Tad' is dementia. Discuss how you, as a Lighting Designer, would go about conveying that theme and the meaning of the play to the audience.

Discuss your ideas and make notes on the following:

- the use of colour, what colour and when?
- what parts of the stage to light and when?
- how to move from one scene to the next without a total blackout?
- how would you convey that the play is not in chronological order, i.e. that it jumps back and forth in order to reflect Arwyn's mental state?
- how would you convey the scenes of confusion in Arwyn's mind, such as the scenes where the Man / Woman are on stage?
- would you convey shadows on stage? Why?
- how would you convey the tree at the end of the play as a symbol of loneliness and that Arwyn has 'lost his leaves'?
- discuss which other live productions have influenced your decisions and ideas with regard to lighting.

## ACTIVITY 2

**'It appears that the whole village is crazy'.**

The play 'Un Nos Ola Leuad' is set in a quarrying village – somewhere similar to Bethesda in the 1920s. The play deals with poverty and men dying in the quarries or suffering horrible injuries, there are storylines about people going insane and being forced into the asylum. The landscape and the country surrounding the drama plays an important part, and it can be said that it's a character in the play. A character called 'the Man' is introduced, and really we are reliving the story of the Boy through the eyes of the Man, who's looking back on his life. The conclusion of the drama is incredibly powerful, as the Man walks into the lake and takes his own life.

Discuss how you, as a Lighting Designer, would convey those themes and the meaning of the play to the audience



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Make notes on the following:

- the use of colour to convey the theme of insanity.
- how important will the moon be and how could you convey that?
- how could you convey the idea that the Man is a narrator or chorus by using light?
- how could you convey that the story does not follow a chronological order, that it jumps back and forth in order to convey the mental condition of the Man?
- how would you move from one scene to the next without a total blackout?
- how would you convey the scenes inside the house, out in the country, and in the asylum?
- would you convey shadows on the set? Why?
- how would you convey the moon at the end of the play as a symbol of insanity and what colours would be important to suggest that the Man is walking into the lake? Would you use a gobo?
- also discuss which other live theatre productions have influenced your decisions and ideas with regard to lighting.

## ACTIVITY 3

The musical 'Sweeney Todd' is described as 'a musical thriller'. It's a dark story about revenge, power, social class, murder and cruelty even though scenes of love and black comedy are presented throughout. It's certainly a challenge for a Lighting Designer. Discuss how you, as a Lighting Designer, would convey these themes in the play in order to create the appropriate atmosphere.

Discuss your ideas and make notes on the following scenes:

- discuss the use of colour, which colours are important in the show?
- would it be possible to light different areas of the stage e.g. Mrs Lovett's shop, Todd's shop, the street? What colours? Use of gobos?
- what type of light and colour would you use during the song 'My Friends', where Todd sees the razor for the first time in fifteen years?
- how would you convey the street scene with Pirelli?
- how would you convey the giant stove and the suggestion of what happens in that part?
- how would you convey the asylum scene?
- how would you suggest moving smoothly from a scene about rape/violence to a comic scene?
- how would you convey the epilogue at the end of the show and the message of the play?
- also discuss which other live theatre productions have influenced your decisions and ideas with regard to lighting.



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## ACTIVITY 4

Look at another play that's a part of your A Level course and discuss how you, as a Lighting Designer, would convey the theme and meaning of that play to the audience.

Discuss your ideas and make notes on the following:

- the use of colour, what colours and when? What would the effect of these colours be?
- which parts of the stage to light and when?
- how would you move from one scene to the next without a total blackout?
- which scenes are important to the play and how could you emphasise this with sophisticated lighting?
- would you convey shadows on the set? Why?
- would you use gobos?
- also discuss which other live theatre performances have influenced your decisions and ideas with regard to lighting.

