Notes for Lighting Designers

The Role

Working in concert with the director and the rest of the technical team, the lighting designer will create the visual ambience and setting for a production.

In practice you will be responsible for determining the type and positioning of the lanterns and other equipment required to create the desired visual effect(s), ensuring that everything is rigged appropriately (and safely) during the get-in, programming the required cues for the production during the technical rehearsal and ensuring that the lighting operator is familiar with the script and the requirements of running the lighting for each performance.

Designer Time-line

Rehearsal Period

Read the script. As early as possible, get a copy of the script from the director or the office and read it. Look for lighting cues and settings in the stage directions and any other suggestions about location or time of day.

Production meeting. The director or stage manager (SM) might arrange a formal production meeting. If not, make sure that you sit down with director and the set designer. The director may have very specific ideas about what they're looking for, if not, you may have more of a free hand in your design. Make sure that you draw out any expectations from the director though, e.g. will the setting be naturalistic or abstract? Are they expecting all of the lighting cues and effects in the stage directions? How will scene changes work, do they want blackouts, non-naturalistic lighting etc?

Discuss the intended set with the designer and consider challenges it will pose or specials it may require.

For certain types of show, also consider the costume designer. If it's a non-naturalistic production in which you're using strongly coloured light – make sure it's not the same colour as the costumes.

Draft Plan. After the production meeting, you should be able to draw up an initial plan.

Run Through(s). In the last couple of weeks of the rehearsal period, the cast will generally be running whole acts or the full play. The director or SM should be able to give you a timetable of intended run-throughs. Make sure that you go along to at least one to watch the play in its entirety to get a sense of cast positioning.

Refine Plan. If it's necessary after seeing the run-through. (It usually is.)

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The Get-in

Stock. The Tower has a standard rig of lanterns which should already be in place. Extra lanterns are store on the mezzanine at the rear of the stage together with accessories such as gels, cables, grelcos, gobos (and holders) and so on.

If you need practicals such as table lamps, wall lights etc., these are in the props stores (liaise with your SM to acquire these). If you can't locate the kit you need, or if you need special kit or accessories contact Laurence Tuerk (laurence.tuerk@talktalk.net) in the first instance - the Tower has a lot of items in various places and he knows where most of it is.

If we don't have what you need, you can hire in if absolutely necessary, but the budget for this must be discussed with the production team. You will then be responsible for arranging the delivery and return of all hired items.

Preparation. The SM is in charge of the get-in and should contact everyone in advance with the plan for the day. Typically LX will be allocated about an hour to themselves before the van and the set-building team arrive. This will allow you to make a start on rigging any areas that will be difficult or impossible to reach once the set has been built. If you need this time and it hasn't been allocated, make sure that you discuss this with the SM.

Rigging. The rigging of all lighting equipment is entirely the responsibility of the designer. Experienced operators will usually expect to be at the get-in and help with the rigging but do make sure that you know who will be available to assist you.

Focussing. Make sure that you arrange in advance with the Stage Manager, Director and Build Crew a period of dark-time once you have rigged the lanterns, to focus them. If rigging takes more or less time than expected, keep the rest of the team updated.

Programming. The Director and SM will decide how to arrange the Tech-Rehearsal / Cue-to-cue – you will have time to program your cues during the tech. but it will speed up the process if you pre-programme basic states or sub-masters where possible.

The Run.

By this point you should have handed everything over to your operator.
Relax.

The Strike

As with the get-in, the designer is responsible for the lighting strike. The lighting operator is generally expected to assist, unless they have made it clear that they're not available. Feel free to draft in cast members if necessary. As the standard rig should remain in place, it is normally only necessary to strike any special lanterns that you have used and to store these on the mezzanine.