

Topic 002

Emergence of Theatrical Light

Entertainment and or Theatrical lighting is used to E N H A N C E the scene. The lighting should pull all the aspects of the stage together. It is not just enough to illuminate the actors, set, costumes and props, the lighting should allow the whole piece to be embraced and supported. For example, parts of a set may need to be subdued, or certain props and costumes may need to be enhanced, and the actors must be seen in a proper relationship to their background and surroundings. Therefore, all objects that appear on the stage needs to be in balance and the light should focus in on the picture that needs to convey the sense and feeling to what the audience is viewing.

The lighting should NOT, distract or be non-supportive to a scene. Only unless that is the purpose the director wants to achieve.

(Photo above credited to: America's Next Top Model Photographer, Tyra Banks. Photo below Jeffrey Smith.)



Evolution of Lighting for the Stage



When theater did begin?

Ritual played a role in the development of drama in the days of early people

Ancient societies used ritual to embody their understanding of the human condition and of the world around them. Ritual had a religious purpose, and instructive purpose (teaching), it was also a form of entertainment. Common elements are found in ritual - music, dance and elaborate movement, mask and costume. 1200 bc in Greece, the "cult of Dionysus" practiced ritual celebrations of fertility, which over time altered and became spring rituals with theatre at the center of the celebration.

A key part of the rites of Dionysus was the dithyramb - performed by a chorus of 50 men dressed as satyr, playing flutes and drums, dancing and chanting (this was religion remember!) In 500 bc we see the beginnings of western theatre in Athens (2,000 years before Shakespeare!) With the spring festivals - drama competitions featuring plays of tragedy and comedy. Ancient Athenians created a theatre culture whose form, technique and language are used today. Plays written at that time are still regularly performed today. Thespis added an actor to interact with the chorus, and won the first drama competition in 534 bc, thus are actors to this day called "thespians".

Aeschylus is considered the earliest playwright & introduced the idea of an antagonist. Sophocles added the concept of a third actor to the play. Euripides and Aristophanes developed plays with more realism and dialogue. Major theatres were constructed at this time, notably at Delphi and the Acropolis. Competitions drew as many as 30,000 spectators. Plays were performed in the day time (no electric lights!) Actors wore masks - some say which helped to amplify the voice and show characters through exaggerated features. There were no costumes or sets, the focus was on the

chorus and later, the actors Only men acted Tragedy (literally goat song) told a story intended to teach religious lessons, and the right and wrong path in life Tragic protagonist is the one who refuses to accept fate, either out of weakness or strength Examples are: oedipus rex, agamemnon, orestes. Aristophanes wrote comedy - a type of lampoon of highbrow culture

Comedy relied on satire, topical issues of the day and made fun of celebrities (namely tragic writers) Classic comedy types were born of this time, such as the miser, the grouch, the arrogant, etc and relied on stories of mistaken identity, romances and situational humour

Why did theatre start?

There has been much debate about this question, and only theories as to how theatre started. Religious ceremonies and rituals (such as war ceremonies, etc.) Are among a few happenings that brought about theatre. People would dance to bring rain or whatever and pray to the deities. This later developed into people reenacting stories of their gods in front of each other. Another origin of theatre is the art of storytelling. People would tell stories and sometimes reenact them to pass on important information to the next generation such as stories of ancestors or stories to teach young ones important life lessons. The first actor that we know of is thespis from ancient athens. The greeks would sing ancient hymns, called dithrambs, to honor the god dionysus. Later, they would dress up in costumes and wear masks to tell stories while singing in chorus. Around the sixth century b.c., began the festivals of city dionysia (among other festivals) where they held competitions for music, poetry, dance, and singing. Among the most talented winners was thespis. Thespis was the first person we know of who astounded audiences by actually portraying the characters as he was reciting the poetry. Thus, he is known as the first actor, and we theatre people are referred to as "thespians."

The earliest recorded in theatrical events, etc... Was dated in 2,000 b.c; the ancient egyptians.. It was the story of the god osiris. It was performed annually at festivals through the ancient civilization.

Its right about evidence that theater can be found as far back as ancient egypt. Not only festivals, but as a form of entertainment for the pharoh and other royalty.

Theater as we know it can be traced back to ancient greece, and the works of sophacles and aristophicles. Most of which were performed on public stages.

Lighting Evolution

The evolution of lighting in theatre began during the times of Ancient Greece. The performances were outside in an open-air space, which the use of natural light was the primary source of illumination. (As you can see in the ruins of the Greek 'theatre in a circular setting' allows for only natural light). The production would take place during the day time so that the sun light can be used. Productions used the main theatre layout of 'theatre in the round' and plays were done at high noon when most everything was illuminated. Plays were done at certain times of the day, so the height and angle of the sun's natural light could enhance the scene. The Greeks also used large mirrors with the sun's light to alter the lighting for their plays. If they wanted to establish any type of moods then there would be an intermission until the 'time of day' and sun's angle would suit the need for the production.

It was when the Roman theatre developed with much insights from the Greeks, that they began to use torches and candles. This gave the Roman theatre players an opportunity to perform in the evenings as the use of torches illuminated their scenes. The 15th century introduced 'oil lamps' and created illumination for lighting the stages indoors. It was Sebastiano Serlio who then added 'colored liquid' to the oil lamps in 1545, introducing color and more variety to stage lighting. This is when the lighting became important to the genre of theatre. It is here where qualities of light, with distribution, intensity and color was being added to a live production.

FIRST type of DIMMING:

The 16th and 17th centuries introduced dimming of candles by using metal cylinders lowered onto the candles, invented by Nicola Sabbatini. This process was a manual process and took a lot of stagehands to make this possible. In these time periods stage hands were how all of the production's lighting -dimming, plus scenery and more transformed the production and created the drama or illusions of effects.

Chandeliers with candles were used in several places on the stage for illumination, this distribution or placement of the candle light chandeliers allowed for more dramatic lighting and flexibility. Keep in mind this form of natural light (fire) was used as a main source of light. This also explains the cause of a lot of old theatre's that caught fire and burned down to the ground.

Stage lighting in the 17th and 18th Century:

Lighting became more important as it was given birth from natural sunlight in Greek theatre. In Roman theatre torches to oil lamps were used. This movement of torches and oil lamps transferred into the Middle Ages, the Renaissance age straight into the 17th & 18th century. It was in the middle of the 18th century when the kerosene lamp with a wick was the biggest improvement to the oil lamp. Coal gas was also beginning to be used for illumination to the stage.

19th century

The 19th century had the most development to stage lighting and the gas lights made more of an impact! The electric arc was also invented by Sir Humprey Davy a chemist in 1810. It was not until 1880 when a true electrical system was introduced by Edison. Although this took some time for stage lighting to use the electric light, this invention created a great development for the possibilities of stage lighting, dimming and controls units which came shortly in the 1900's.

Lighting Positions:

Lighting Positions consist of 5 main positions of lighting an object on stage. There is definitely more lighting positions. As an introduction to lighting, these 5 positions covers enough for informational purposes.

1) Front Light- The key and fill light is the primary lighting source in a scene. It represents the motivating light source for a specific area or scene on the stage. Front lighting involves a method of light referred to as McCandless Theory of lighting, this theory was developed by Mr. McCandless in order to properly light an object/actor by the means of light mimicing natural daylight. McCandless theory involves the light source projected from a front position at a 45 degree angle, one light should be warm (to mimic the sun's light, while the other light should be cool to mimic the sky). This depiction of lighting the performer using natural light and McCandless theory eliminates any possible shadows from the faces, which will cause proper lighting and not distract the audience so that they may focus on the dialogue and action of the character(s).

FYI FILM LIGHTING: In film lighting this form of front light is referred to as key and fill lighting. Fill light is used to help REDUCE and SOFTEN the shadows. The fill lights usually are

set at about 50% of the intensity of the key light. Different colors can also be used in the fill lights to help contribute to the mood of the scene.

2) Side Light - Side lighting is used to accent the side of the face, arms, mid-torso, legs down to the shin of the body. The movements of the performer are highlighted from a direct side light source. Full side lighting is composed of shin light (bottom), mid torso (middle) and neck to head lighting (top). The lights are mainly used to reveal form of the body, and are used to enhance the performer, especially dancers.

3) High Side light - this light is from an overhead and at an angle of 30-60 degree angle approximately. This form of lighting is to accentuate the top side of the head, neck, shoulders, arms and mid torso. High side light is used as an additional form to objects/actors. It is also used in dance lighting to help shape the form of the body from another perspective angle.

4) Back Light - is used to help the performer or object to be separated from the background and not blend in. Back light also shapes the performer and or object so it is individualized and reveals its natural form. Back lighting creates a depth which makes the performer become more three dimensional. This will also help pull the performer out from the scenery or backdrop.

5) Down Light - is used to sculpt the top of the head, shoulders and adds light to the form if it is extended or wide. Down light is great for washing an area on stage by the means of covering that area with light coming straight down from the top. Down light is mainly used to wash or flood an area on stage with light in a soft or harsh manner.

Examples:

Proscenium Stage: The Picture Frame



The proscenium arch evolved from the "proskenium" in Ancient Greek theatres, 17th-18th century. This was the space in front of the skene or backdrop where the actors performed. Stage floors were RAKED upward slightly from the front to back, in order to contribute to the perspective illusion, and also made the actors more visible to the audience who were at the front row seats which was on the flat floor level. This then changed to reflect the audiences seat to be raked instead and the addition of balcony seating was created to give the audience a fuller view of the stage and its performance.

Proscenium Stage: The proscenium stage may also be referred to as a "picture frame stage" the reason why is because the audience can only view the action on stage from one side. The advantage of this one side perspective is that it gives everyone in the audience a good view because the actors need only focus on one direction. The audience views the scene on stage from what resembles to be an opening of a picture frame. As the audience directly faces the stage which is raised up several feet above the front row of the audience level, they can view what is happening on stage. This one sided viewable section is known as the fourth wall in theatrical terms and especially in the term for the performers, the fourth wall is the opening of the proscenium. The actor when in character should never break their focus or break the fourth wall. Meaning a character on stage should never wave, smile etc... at an audience member during a scene or performance. This will break the illusion of what is being conveyed on stage. (photo above credited to: <http://glitterburn.livejournal.com/11874.html>, is more an influence of the Roman theatre adaptation from the Greek theatres of the 18th century)

Thrust Stage: Used for centuries from Greek to Roman Theatres!



The first thrust stage was used back in the 17th century. The ancient Greek theatre was set in the outdoors, using the natural light of the day and night to set the scene. Ancient Greek theatre and Roman theatres used thrust style stages as it allowed the audience to be seated mainly around the stage on all but one side of the stage. The ancient form of theatre mainly used the characters, dialogue and props to convey the message of the scene on stage. It was not until the development of the proscenium stage was more so scenic and set elements became more widely used.

On a thrust stage the audience can view from three sides. A proscenium stage can be transformed, with a project platform extended outwards towards the audience to create a thrust staging. Fashion shows use runways or a thrust stage style for the models to walk down the runway so that the clothing may be viewed in a more intimate and overall setting. There are limits to what can be done on a thrust stage, as you can not use certain elements that will block the view of the audience, this is very similar to theatre in the round. Certain set elements can not be used if it will obstruct the viewing of an important thing to the audience.