

Topic 057

Stage lighting design is probably as old as formalized theatre. The early Greeks built their theatres as open air spaces and orientated them in relation to the sun, so as to use natural light for stage lighting. They would present their plays at different times of day, to take advantage of the different types of natural lighting. This type of planning was in essence, early lighting design. The Theatre of Dionysus (Athens, about 330 BC) and the theatre at Epidaurus (finished about 340 BC) are examples of these early public theatre facilities.

Lighting for the theatre developed over the centuries, using both natural sources then artificial sources. The sun, candles, torches oil, gas, electric arc and lime lighting, all have had a place in early stage lighting. During the Renaissance period in Italy, many of the principals of modern lighting design, were firmly established.

Introduction to Lighting Methods

There is no one 'method' for lighting the stage - there are many. Or put another way, the first rule of stage lighting is...there aren't any. As long as the objectives of the lighting design and the lighting concept are met, the designer may use any appropriate DESIGN technique that he wishes. The professional lighting designer must however communicate his design to others, through the use of standard conventions.

Each production has very different lighting needs. Lighting for a production of 'Annie' vs a Martha Graham dance piece have totally different styles and requirements. The lighting student must not look for a 'system' or a 'method' that will work for all lighting needs. There isn't one. Instead the lighting designer must understand the needs of each particular production, carefully define them and then produce the lighting design accordingly. It is only by this approach that the lighting design will be most efficiently suited to the exact needs of the production. No two productions are ever the same and no two lighting designers ever work alike.

Evolution of Methods and Equipment

Most lighting methods have evolved from light source and fixture technology. Spotlight fixtures today provide the designer with narrow beam spreads of about 10-40 degrees. This was not always the case. Less than 100 years ago, most lighting consisted only of flood lighting, as the narrow spot did not exist. With the development of the spotlight (lime light, electric arc, then incandescent), lighting methods changed. It now became possible to precisely place and localize light, anywhere on stage. As equipment continues to develop, so will lighting methods. With the new generation of automated fixtures, new lighting looks never before seen - are now possible.

