

How to convey moods with colour

In the first of a series of articles on improving your use of lighting, **John Black** offers some tips on how to evoke moods with colour

IT GOES WITHOUT SAYING THAT

people react to colour in their surroundings. The importance of and impact that colour has on human moods and emotions have extended the study of colour-use to fields outside of the purely artistic. A quick Google search using the keywords 'colour' and 'mood' pulls hundreds of thousands of hits on topics ranging from colour psychology, colour's impact on home and office design, colour's impact on children's learning environments, and of course, colour's impact on human moods and emotions. For any lighting designer, the use of colour is one of the four main functions of a lighting design, whether for an architectural setting, theatrical production, concert tour or house of worship environment.

The application of colour in lighting is an affordable, easy way to enhance and support the desired mood and message wanting to be conveyed by your pastor and/or worship team. For the house of worship lighting designer or technician, a quick study of basic colour theory and techniques can, with little effort, play an integral role in a worshipper's experience during every moment of a service, starting from the moment he or she walks into the auditorium. In this article we will look at some basic colour theory principles, tools, and basic techniques to incorporate colour into your services and help you to convey the mood you want to achieve.

MEET THE AUTHOR

John Black serves as the theatre manager for Seoul Foreign School in Seoul, South Korea. Holding a degree in Theatre Design, he provides technical production support and design in three state-of-the-art performance venues on campus for over 40 major concerts and productions a year in the areas of sound, lighting, video and staging. John especially enjoys sharing his passion for entertainment technology with high school students each year through his student production team, Crusader Live! giving students the opportunity to learn and work with professional-level technologies in a demanding production environment.



John Black, theatre manager for Seoul Foreign School

Warm versus cool

To many beginner lighting designers and technicians, any discussion of the use of colour in lighting often begins with the description of specific colours – red, blue, straw, pink, etc. To understand the rationale behind the use of these specific colours for conveying moods, however, the designer needs to understand some of the basic, subconscious human

reactions to coloured light itself.

Lighting designers use the terms 'warm' and 'cool' to describe the psychological effect that certain colours have on human emotion. A coloured light that causes most people to feel a sense of relative warmth is described as a 'warm colour'. In contrast, a coloured light that causes most people to feel a sense of relative coolness is described as a 'cool colour'. When thinking about the visible light

spectrum, the warm colours are the reds, oranges, and yellows, while the cool colours are the greens, blues and violets.

One of the most basic examples of warm versus cool light can be seen in the colour temperature difference between an incandescent light source and a typical fluorescent light source. An incandescent light source typically gives off an orange-coloured light, which causes the feeling of warmth. In contrast, a typical fluorescent source gives off a bluish-green-coloured light, which causes the feeling of coolness.

In a practical example, how many movie theatres, playhouses, or department stores are lit primarily with fluorescent lights? These venues want their customers to feel warm, welcomed, and comfortable, and are lit in such a way as to convey these moods. By contrast, many medical facilities are lit with fluorescent light sources which, though giving a feeling of coolness, also give a sense of sterility and cleanness in combination with the colours chosen for wall finishes and decor. In most house of worship settings, the feelings of welcome and comfort are desired from the moment a worshipper walks into the auditorium. The easiest method of achieving this warmth is the careful selection of light sources to provide general light coverage of the auditorium itself.

As a general rule, begin a lighting design by thinking about and



Red and pink hues can convey love and intensity

describing the overall mood that is looking to be achieved in terms of creating a warmly lit environment or a coolly lit environment. This process will guide the lighting designer towards selecting appropriate colours to enhance and convey the desired mood.

The meaning and use of colour

Once the designer has decided whether they wish to achieve a warm or cool environment, the next step is to select the colour(s) that will convey that mood. Often this can be done simply through reflecting on one's own personal experience with a particular mood or feeling. For example, if you are trying to convey the mood of joy, think of what colour(s) embody a period of joy from your own prior experience. In a design discussion setting, it could be that individuals will express the same mood in different colours. Just as two people may look at the same piece of art and have very different interpretations of the work, the meaning of colour is very individualistic and influenced by constantly changing factors. There are some meanings of colours, however, that are commonly accepted, and the house of worship lighting designer can usually rely on

these common definitions when trying to convey a mood.

The range of warm colours typically conveys stronger moods and feelings. The colour red often conveys love, affection, excitement, and intensity. On the other hand, red can also convey hostility and aggressiveness. The colour orange conveys warmth, excitement, and happiness; but it can also convey being distressed or disturbed. The colour yellow conveys cheerfulness and joy, but, like red, can convey aggression and hostility.

In contrast, the range of cool colours typically conveys more peaceful moods



Mood lighting at Seoul Foreign School, where John Black is theatre manager

and feelings. The colour violet often conveys dignity, but it can also convey sadness and melancholy. The colour blue conveys coolness, pleasantness and tenderness, although blue also can also convey sadness. The colour

through coloured lighting is achieved through a simple back or top colour wash of the auditorium stage. In a theatrical environment, colour may be used from a front-lighting position for creating realistic lighting looks,



The colour blue can be used to convey tenderness

green often conveys leisure, security and freshness, but it can also convey illness.

Not only do specific colours convey particular meanings, but the direction from which the light is focused and hits its focus point also can influence peoples' subconscious reaction to what they are looking at. In most house of worship settings, mood

or reinforcing specific emotions or effects. In the house of worship environment, however, clear visibility of the pastor or person on stage is much more important. Additionally, with the increased use of video for image magnification (IMAG) or broadcasting of services, modelling the subject on the stage is very important to prevent flatness on camera. Creating a colour



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KnowHOW

wash from a back or top-lighting position helps define the subject on camera and creates a wash of light that will not compete with the front lighting.

So once the decision has been made to work with warm or cool colours, choose appropriate colours for the design that will support the desired mood. If at all possible, create stage washes from back or top-lighting positions for each colour you wish to use during your service. For most small houses of worship, warm-coloured house lighting combined with a basic colour stage wash is the

simplest way to convey moods during a service.

The tools

There are a number of methods and tools available to the house of worship lighting designer, whether in a small facility with few lighting fixtures or a large facility with many resources at hand. The chances are that your auditorium is equipped with a handful of conventional lighting fixtures of some type, whether fresnels, pars, lekos or some other standard incandescent light source, and therefore won't



An intense use of red lighting at Gateway Church

require the expense of purchasing additional fixtures to start off.

Incorporating colour into the design can most easily be achieved through the use of colour filters – or gels – which are low-cost and usually easy to purchase. Many lighting designers or facilities will already have a supply of commonly or frequently used sheets of gel for use as the need arises. In my facility, a stock of roughly 30 different colours is maintained, which cover a variety of warm and cool colours and several variations of each main colour. For most house of worship facilities, especially those that are smaller, a small stock of colour filters comprising warm and cool colours will be adequate for most situations. If you have a back- or top-wash of several fixtures already hung, then simply changing out the colour filters of those fixtures provides a quick method for conveying mood in your service.

There are some limitations to using colour filters, however, that need to be considered. If you are using colour filters with conventional lighting fixtures, a single fixture can only be used for a single colour during any given service. For example, if you use six fixtures for a colour wash, and want three colour washes, then you will need 12 lighting fixtures to be hung in the rig.



Contrasting reds and blues

Thankfully, there are some other tools that are accessible to houses of worship that increase flexibility when creating colour washes. These tools include colour scrollers, LED wash fixtures and automated lighting wash fixtures. Though an older technology, colour scrollers are relatively inexpensive and allow a single lighting fixture to be used for creating a number of colour washes by scrolling through a string of gels taped together (hence the name 'scroller'). The main disadvantage of a colour scroller, however, is that it offers the designer

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previous example, a colour wash of six LED fixtures would allow for a virtually infinite number of wash colours to be created.

Automated wash lighting fixtures can also be used for creating colour washes, though at a much higher cost when compared to non-automated LED washes. With these, almost any colour can be created (assuming you are using a fixture equipped with CMY colour mixing), and the user also gains the ability to move the focus of the fixture from the console.

Conveying the mood

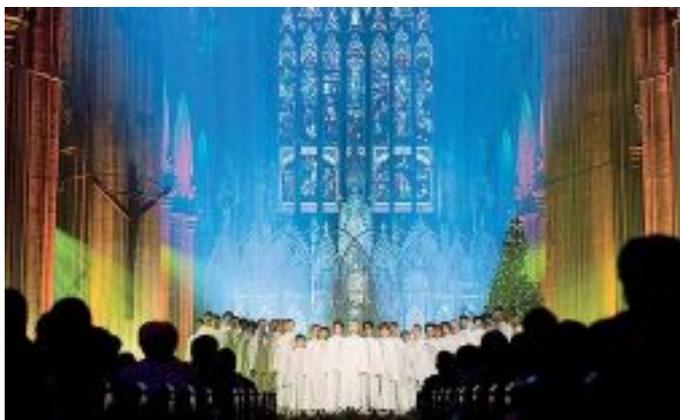
Regardless of the size of your venue, or the amount of money or resources you have available, conveying mood through the application of colour into your lighting design can be achieved simply and at minimal cost. More important than the tools, however, is that the designer considers the psychological implications of the colours he or she chooses to use. While creating a rock show-style service with dozens of lighting fixtures and colours may seem appealing and attract an 'audience', the mood and message that your pastor wishes to convey may be entirely missed. It could be that using a single colour and a couple of well-placed lighting



Purple can be used to convey a regal mood

fixtures will draw your worshippers into a deeper, more meaningful worship experience.

So when approaching a lighting design for your service, begin by defining the desired mood that you are wishing to convey. Is that mood achieved through the application of warm or cool colours? Once decided, select specific colours whose meaning and colour temperature supports the desired mood. Finally, apply those colours to the fixtures in your rig. In most circumstance, many people won't even notice the lighting decisions that have been made. But they will feel it.



The use of different, sometimes contrasting colours can help to evoke a powerful atmosphere

only a finite number of colours with which to work – usually up to 16.

In recent years, the price of incorporating LEDs into stage lighting fixtures has reduced and many houses of worship, theatres and concert tours now incorporate LED-driven lighting fixtures. In my facility, over the last three years, I have outfitted two of my stages with LED wash fixtures. The benefit of an LED wash is that almost any colour desired can be created by mixing the red, green and blue sources (as well as white or amber if a feature of the fixture). Building on the

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