



Layered lighting as backdrop for event

Creative use of lighting

Visuals set the mood in worship, and lighting frames the visuals. **John Black** shows that going beyond illumination, into the world of lighting design, is possible for HOWs large and small

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

LIGHTING IN HOUSES OF WORSHIP

is diverse. The lighting needs for some may be simply to provide basic visibility of a speaker, while other houses of worship strive to create and control specific and intentional atmospheres and experiences during services. Regardless of where your house of worship falls on the spectrum, there is no denying that lighting can and does have a significant role in people's response to an environment.

We're going to look at a couple of simple, creative uses of lighting. Sometimes creative decisions are in your face and instantly recognisable. More common in the house of worship setting creative decisions are subtle – felt, but not necessarily noticed so as

not to distract the worshipper.

We'll begin with a quick review of the basic purposes of lighting. Whether specifically discussed within these contexts or not, all lighting decisions will touch on one or more of these purposes. By reviewing them, they can give you a context for creative lighting applications.

Review: Purposes of lighting

While these are most often discussed in the context of theatrical lighting, the basic purposes of lighting hold true in most lighting circumstances. Some decisions may place more emphasis on certain purposes over others to

achieve particular effects, which is where the creativity in lighting design comes from. The basic purposes of lighting are selective focus/visibility, mood, composition, revelation of form, and reinforcement.

Selective focus/visibility refers to choices made to direct a spectator's attention to exactly where the designer wants them to look. In contrast, it also refers to choices made to direct a spectator's attention away from what the designer doesn't want them to see. For example, you may want people to focus on a drama being performed on one side of the stage while the opposite side is being reset for a speaker, lighting only the active portion of the stage so that the set change doesn't distract from the

drama being performed.

Mood refers to choices that are made to set the tone for the message of what is being presented or to evoke certain emotional responses. After all, lighting is very psychological and human emotions are often linked with colours, intensities and directions of



Uplighting on white fabric pillars for event backdrop

light. For example, if wanting to create a quiet, reflective atmosphere, the lighting designer would not choose to wash the stage or audience area in yellow-coloured light as that



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would create a completely different, unintended mood and atmosphere.

Composition refers to the use of light to create the overall stage picture. Many houses of worship utilise very little scenery or backdrops like what would be found in a theatrical setting. Lighting can be used to create the backdrop or stage picture that the designer wants people to see. An example would be the use of layering visible light beams from several trim heights and positions to create a sense of depth on an otherwise shallow stage. This technique requires the use of atmospheric haze and a black backdrop that 'disappears' behind the beams.

Revelation of form refers to lighting that is used to reveal the form of a performer or subject and help them stand out from the background. This is particularly emphasised in dance situations to accentuate the curves, muscle definition, and poses of the dancers. In non-dance situations, this is more often addressed with regards to lighting subjects from a variety of angles and how the light creates highlights or shadows on the subject in intentional ways. Revealing form by lighting subjects such that they are



Patterns can be used as an alternative backdrop

each other when making creative choices regardless of the size of your lighting rig. Let's take a look at four creative uses of lighting that you may be able to employ or build upon to suit your needs.

Coloured uplighting

If your facility has a shallow stage and perhaps you have a limited

the surface due to protrusions and cavities.

Patterns as backdrops

Another subtle creative lighting use that is also related to the backdrop to focus fixtures onto the back wall of the stage, adding patterns to project images onto the wall. Patterns could be abstract and used with colour to add texture to an otherwise flat surface. Alternatively, patterns could also be recognisable or realistic to support a particular season or message. For example, if desiring to create a Christmassy, wintry feel, the projection of snowflakes can help set the season. If performing a drama, a realistic pattern of architecture can set the location for the scene.

Varying house light intensity

Though often overlooked as it is not related to the presentation stage,

one particularly effective creative use of lighting is the very subtle, intentional use of varying the house lighting throughout a service. At its simplest, varying the intensity during certain portions of a service can guide and usher congregants through the worship experience. For example, your service may look like this:

- Pre-service - HL @ Full
- Welcome / Announcements - HL @ 75 per cent
- Prayer - HL @ 65 per cent
- Praise & Worship - HL @ 45 per cent
- Sermon - HL @ 75 per cent
- Slow fades between each portion can guide the worshiper through periods of internal reflectiveness and outward awareness in ways that he or she may not actually notice being encouraged by the lighting.

Shifting focus

The majority of lighting, in most situations, begins elevated above the stage or auditorium and focuses on the stage. This helps draw attention to the subjects or action on the stage. In a house of worship, it is often desirable to help people focus away from the stage and on their worship. Placing fixtures on the stage floor or in low positions and focusing them up and over the auditorium can shift the focus away from the stage and draw the worshiper in as an active participant as opposed to spectator.

Conclusion

These are just a few simple creative uses for lighting that you may be able to employ. Remember that whichever way your creativity takes you, in a house of worship the most important thing is to ensure that the lighting reinforces and supports the purpose for the service and doesn't steal the show.



Patterns on white back wall for event

drawn out from the background is important when lighting for video to avoid the subject having a flat, or two-dimensional, look on camera.

Finally, reinforcement refers to choices made to specifically support and communicate the story being told. Whether through use of colour or specific patterns used on surfaces, reinforcement is an element of the visual story. For example, when lighting a scene that takes place in a cold, damp cellar, the lighting designer wouldn't use bright colours and angles that eliminate all shadows and suggest a happy, warm location.

All these purposes interact with

lighting rig, a simple though effective use of lighting you could employ is adding fixtures along the floor of the back wall of the stage, creating beams of uplighting, and then adding colour (gels or fixtures capable of colour mixing) to establish mood. This is a common technique used to not only add a colour backdrop behind the action happening on the stage, but to provide depth to an otherwise flat surface. As the light gets higher, the beam will spread wider and fade out, creating a gradient on the surface. Coloured uplighting is especially nice if the wall is textured, creating highlights and shadows on



Gobos and projection on white walls for backdrop

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