



Scripting your service with lighting cues

John Black discovers the positive effects that a scripted service can have on the overall worship experience

REGARDLESS OF THE SIZE OF THE facility, the number of worshippers in attendance or the scale of your lighting system, most worship services are pre-planned, having one or more individuals decide on an order of events through the service. There may be elements that are decided on quite late, or there may be last-minute additions or deletions, but, for the most part, a service has a flow that is crafted to help guide the worship experience. As a result, lighting for worship services can very easily be scripted, which can have a number of positive effects on the overall experience as well as on the technical team operating the lighting system.

In this article, I'm going to discuss some of the ways that scripting a service with lighting cues can have a positive impact, as well as some steps and thought processes that I go through when planning and building lighting cues for my events.

Benefit 1: flow

Programming lighting cues is more than just creating a lighting look

on stage and storing it for later recall. Lighting cues can contain information for fade times, the linking of multiple cues, timings for individual parameters such as movement or colour, and more. Lighting cues contain all of the information that has been programmed into palettes, presets and effects, and then brings them together into a sequence with transitions that can be crafted to enhance the flow from one service element to another.

This is one of the benefits of using cues to execute lighting during a service. Think about how you would feel waking up in the morning, sitting up in bed in a pitch-dark room when suddenly your toddler flips on the light switch. It's an uncomfortable feeling. Changing lighting states abruptly during a worship service can be uncomfortable and distracting and cause worshippers to lose focus from the experience. Instead, lighting cues can be programmed to create flow from one element to another in a way that encourages and promotes

MEET THE AUTHOR

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John Black, theatre manager for Seoul Foreign School

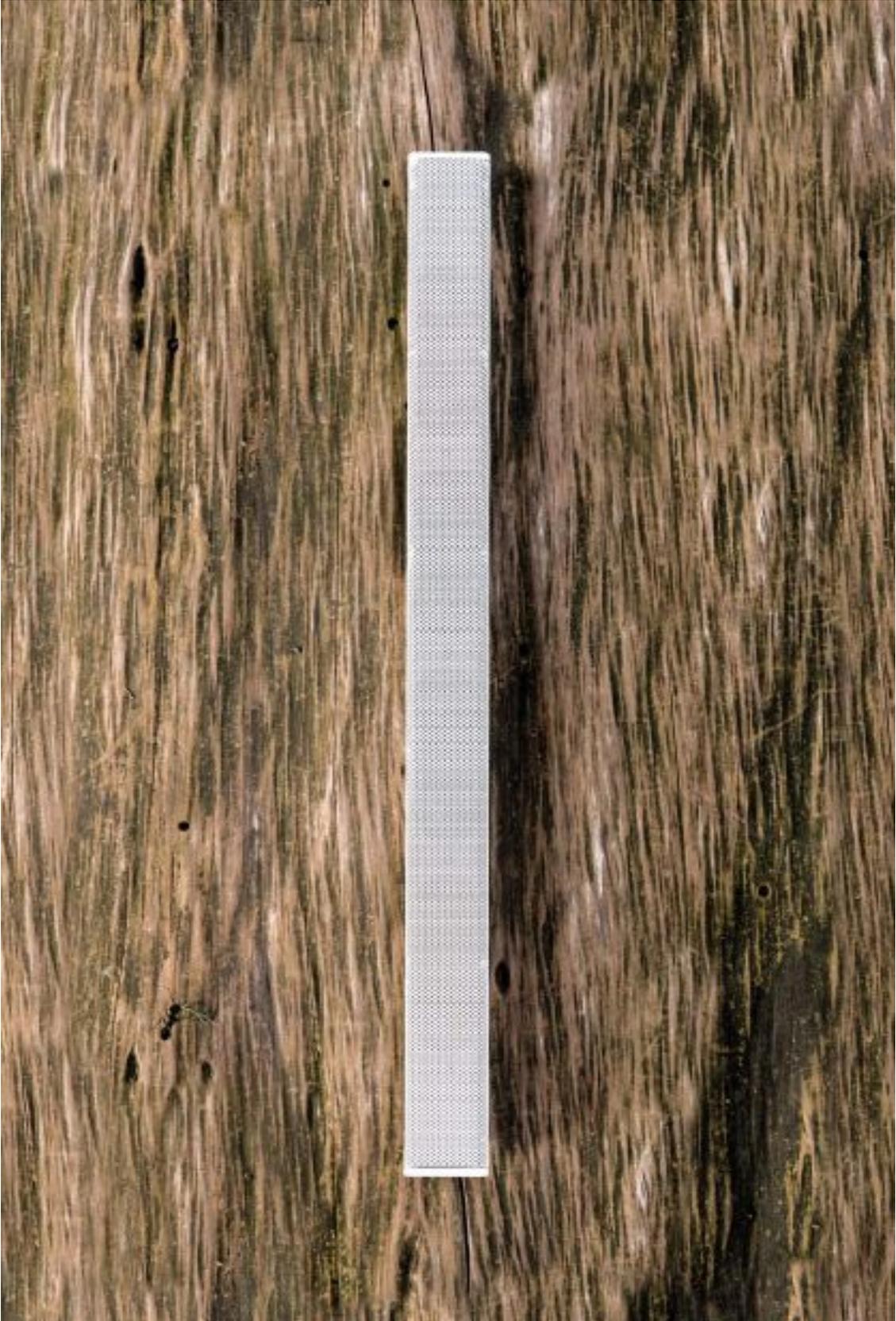
focus and the progression of the worship experience through the entire service.

Benefit 2: consistency

Many houses of worship host a number of worship services throughout a week. Some services

may be of a different style or order, while others may be repeated to suit the time needs of various groups of worshippers. Using lighting cues builds consistency into the worship experience because the cues will play back exactly as they have been designed, programmed and rehearsed time and time again until a change is





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made. This means that programmed elements can be well-thought through and designed in the rehearsal phase and then executed as expected.

Using lighting cues can also achieve consistency in that, sometimes, volunteer technical team members will change from service to service. It is not always possible to involve all technical team members in the programming and/or rehearsal process for a service. By using lighting cues, an operator can come in and either follow a programme order or script, or execute a lighting cue when directed by a technical director, and the result will be as planned.



Cue lists on an ETC Ion console

Step 1: understand the service

Before beginning to plan the actual lighting cues, and certainly before sitting at the console to begin programming, the first step is to know what elements will be included in the service you are programming for. Is there a band playing a worship set? What song will they be leading? Is there a drama sketch? What order will the various service elements be happening in? These questions will inform you on the service 'road map'.

In addition to understanding the road map of the service, discussions are needed about the general moods or tones that are to be set throughout the service – the 'emotional journey'. Is the general feeling and mood of the service going to be uplifting? Is the pastor's message one of celebration? Is the service mood going to be more introspective? These questions will give you a lot of information as to how you can create those transitions along the service road map so as to help you support and reinforce the desired mood or tone of the service.

All of these questions can be asked and should be answered during any pre-service planning meeting that may be had by those involved in the service. This planning meeting is what I would call a pre-production meeting, and will be the launchpad for the next steps as you script the service.

Step 2: cue structuring

The next step that I go through is to plan out the cue structure that I will program. This will be different from person to person, and also based on the lighting console that you have in your particular facility. The consoles that I work with allow me to program a number of cue lists, as opposed to a single cue list. I like to separate the lighting cues from more complicated



Redemption to the Nations church cues its Elation lighting rig to create a wide range of effects (Image courtesy of intyde)

or involved service elements to allow for better organisation as well as quick restructuring if needs be.

For example, I would create a main cue list for the major service elements, such as pre-service, offering, baptism, message, etc. I would then create a separate cue list for each song led by the worship band, as well as a separate cue list for a drama sketch or other special service element. The main cue list would then link to and reference these other cue lists, or I would operate them on separate cue list master faders.

Why would I structure cues this way? If the worship band leader decides to change the order 10 minutes prior to the start of the service, it doesn't mean I have to add link cues into a single cue list to bounce back and forth between cues in the new order. I simply pull up and play back the appropriate cue list in the new order that the songs are being done in. Another reason is that if a worship leader decides to do a song again at the end of a service, instead of having to find the cue number that a particular song began on, I can just play back that song's cue list because it can be easily found.

Another reason that I like to program this way is that these cue lists can then be saved and reused in other services when a particular song or performance is desired. For example, if your church holds three services on a weekend of different styles, and of the five-song worship set at each service there are two songs being performed at all three services, you only have to program the lighting cues for those two songs once. That same cue list can then be recalled and played back at each service at the appropriate point without having to copy and paste those cues into three different lists. This saves a lot of programming time.

Step 3: programming cues

Once you understand the service you are programming for and you have a clear, organised structure to program, then you can begin to build your cues. You may, or may not, already have all of the looks built that you want to use. There are many programming styles and methods that you can take prior to actually recording your lighting cues. However, for the purpose of this article, when programming cues, pay particular attention to the transitions

from cue to cue. It doesn't matter if the transition exists within a single song or between two very different service elements. Think about, test and design the fade times and the visual way that one cue transitions into another. It can be a very simple crossfade or a multi-part fade that transitions different programmable elements at different rates over an extended period of time.

Many churches will plan technical rehearsals prior to services to allow for the technical teams to test their equipment and ensure that everything is set up correctly and performing as desired or expected. Use these rehearsal times to play back the lighting cues and determine if the effect of the transitions supports the mood or tone desired for the service.

Once you have finalised the flow, make sure that the cue list can be consistently executed with whoever makes up your technical team. Unexpected circumstances will come up, and it is important that you have structured the cue list in such a way that also allows the operator to be flexible and make changes easily, perhaps with little training.

There is no one right way to script lighting cues for a worship service. The organisational differences from one person to the next are as varied as the different ways that lighting for a service can be approached. The steps that I have provided are just my own way of organising and scripting an event using lighting cues. However, the goal should always be the same: enhance the worship experience and support the message that is being delivered through the service. They are a great tool built into computerised lighting consoles, and the organisational possibilities for their use are endless.



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